

Neville Chamberlain and the Policy of Appeasement

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá Britskou zahraniční politikou appeasementu 20. a 30. let 20. století, ale především se zaměřuje na jejího nejznámějšího prosazovatele, Nevilla Chamberlaina. Cílem práce je popsat události a analyzovat příčiny, které vedly Nevilla Chamberlaina k prosazování politiky appeasementu. První kapitola obsahuje stručnou Chamberlainovu biografii. Druhá kapitola je o počátcích appeasementu po první světové válce. Třetí kapitola popisuje Britskou politiku appeasementu 30.let v souvislosti s nacistickým Německem a fašistickou Itálií. Čtvrtá kapitola je zaměřená na politiku appeasementu samotného Chamberlaina a důvody jeho jednání. Pátá kapitola popisuje události po Mnichovu, které přinutily Chamberlaina přehodnotit svou politiku. Následující kapitola zkoumá možné alternativy politiky appeasementu, a vysvětluje důvody, proč by tyto alternativy mohly nebo nemusely být lepším řešením. Poslední část popisuje, jak se názor historiků na Chamberlaina měnil v průběhu historie.

Klíčová slova: Neville Chamberlain, appeasement, britská zahraniční politika, válka, Hitler, Británie, Německo

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis deals with the British foreign policy of appeasement in the 1920s and 1930s but is mainly focused on its most famous proponent, Neville Chamberlain. The aim of the thesis is to describe the events and analyse the reasons that led Neville Chamberlain to pursue the policy of appeasement. The first chapter contains a brief biography of Chamberlain. The second chapter is about the origins of appeasement after the First World War. The third chapter describes the British policy of appeasement in the 1930s in connection with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. The fourth chapter is focused on the policy of appeasement of Chamberlain himself and the reasons for his actions. Chapter Five describes the post-Munich events that forced Chamberlain to revise his policy. The following chapter examines possible alternatives to the policy of appeasement and explains why these alternatives might or might not have been a better option. The final part describes how historians' opinion of Chamberlain has changed throughout history.

Keywords: Neville Chamberlain, appeasement, British foreign policy, war, Hitler, Britain, Germany

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

Appeasement is a controversial topic, and Neville Chamberlain remains a controversial figure. When talking about appeasement, many people imagine Neville Chamberlain. Although Chamberlain is its most famous representative, he is far from its architect. The history of this policy begins in the period when the Treaty of Versailles was signed and continues with Neville Chamberlain until the beginning of the Second World War. For a deeper understanding of this issue, the work is divided into two parts. Appeasement before Chamberlain and appeasement after Chamberlain became Prime Minister.

The first part focuses on the British policy of appeasement after the First World War before Chamberlain came to power. British appeasement began quite innocently when representatives of the British Government tried to relieve the Germans of the harsh conditions imposed on them by the Treaty of Versailles and thus restore their status as one of the leading powers, as they believed that Germany represented an essential part that was needed for a global economic recovery. Gradually, however, Germany began to be forgiven for more and more violations of the Treaty of Versailles. However, in this period, public opinion supported peace and rearmament. Therefore, there was not much the British Government would be willing to do. As long as it did not threaten their vital interests, the British were willing to turn a blind eye.

The second part is about the policy of appeasement pursued by Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain took this policy to much greater proportions. Appeasement is often perceived as a policy of weakness and cowardice as several concessions were made to aggressive powers with the hope that this would eventually avert war. However, this did not succeed, and the appeasement led by Neville Chamberlain is often considered the cause of the outbreak of war. Chamberlain's name is primarily associated with Munich and its betrayal of Czechoslovakia, but this work focuses on appeasement in a broader perspective. Chamberlain tried to appease not only Hitler but Mussolini as well. He believed that if he could get both of them on his side, it would prevent them from uniting with each other. However, they both interpreted these concessions as a sign that they could do whatever they wanted and no one would stop them. Chamberlain wanted to keep the peace at all costs, and he would even sacrifice the integrity of other nations. Why did he act the way he did, and could he have done something differently? These are the questions that this thesis will try to answer.

1 LIFE AND POLITICAL CAREER OF NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN

1.1 Early life and education

Neville Chamberlain was born on 18 March 1869 in Birmingham to a businessman Joseph Chamberlain and his second wife, Florence. His father was a mayor of Birmingham in the years 1873-1876, and in 1876 he was elected to Parliament. Joseph already had a daughter Beatrice and a son Austen from his first marriage. When Neville was six years old, his mother died after giving birth to her fifth child, who also died soon after. His wife's death left Joseph devastated. He began to pay more attention to politics, leaving his sister Clara to care for the children.¹ Aunt Clara later got married and left, so the eldest daughter Beatrice had to look after the house until Joseph Chamberlain got married again.²

Both Chamberlain brothers were to follow in their father's footsteps, one to pursue a political career, while the other would become the successor of the family business.³ Austen graduated from Cambridge University and when he was less than 29, he was elected to the House of Commons where he remained for forty-five years. After Joseph Chamberlain's resignation in 1903, Austen replaced him in politics and became a finance minister. Joseph Chamberlain sent Neville to study at Mason Science College (which later became Birmingham University), where he obtained an education in metallurgy, natural sciences, and engineering.⁴

1.2 Business

In 1890 Joseph Chamberlain sent Neville to Andros Island in the Bahamas and made him responsible for a newly established sisal (a plant from which high-quality rope can be made) plantation, which he believed would make a great fortune. However, sisal plants would not grow on Andros, and the business ended up being a failure resulting in a loss of £50,000. After spending six years in the Bahamas, Neville returned to Birmingham.⁵

In Birmingham, Chamberlain entered business. He was determined to work even harder to compensate for the failure in the Bahamas. With the help of his uncles, he was made a manager of a ship berths manufacturing company and got involved in other businesses as

¹ Nick Smart, *Neville Chamberlain* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-2.

² Harford Montgomery Hyde, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 9.

³ Larry William Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History* (New York: Norton, 1982), 15.

⁴ Jiří Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2009), 20-21.

⁵ Graham Macklin, *Chamberlain* (London: Haus Publishing, 2006), 12-13.

well. Under his supervision, the business prospered, and Chamberlain soon became a respected and influential industrialist in Birmingham. He also got involved in the city's public life. He helped raise both funds and profile of Birmingham University, became a magistrate, was active in the Chamber of Commerce, became a member of Birmingham General Hospital's management board and participated in many other public activities.⁶

1.3 Political career

1.3.1 Entry into politics

In 1900 and 1906, Neville Chamberlain made speeches on behalf of his father regarding the tariff reform, but he was no further interested in pursuing a political career. In 1911 when Chamberlain was 42, he married Anne Cole de Vere. The couple bought a house on Westbourne Road, Edgbaston, where they remained for the rest of their lives. Later Anne gave birth to two children – a daughter Dorothy and a son Frank. The same year, Chamberlain changed his mind and began his political career when he was elected to the Birmingham city council. Four years later, he became Lord Mayor and quickly gained popularity. He stood as a Liberal Unionist with an interest in town planning, improved transport, extension of the canal system and technical education.⁷

In 1916 Austen Chamberlain recommended Neville for the new position of Director-General of National Service. The position was offered to him by the new Prime Minister David Lloyd George, which Chamberlain accepted. Chamberlain was responsible for recruiting workers for essential war work. In August 1917, he resigned after a conflict with Lloyd George. It seemed to him that his office did not have enough power to bring the expected results. The conflict resulted in mutual hatred between these two men. Later that year, in December, Chamberlain received the news that his cousin Norman had died in the war in France. This left Chamberlain devastated, as he considered Norman one of his closest friends. Furthermore, he felt partially responsible for sending men to war. His cousin's pointless death only deepened Neville's hatred of war and motivated his determination never to allow the repetition of such war tragedies.⁸

⁶ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 14-15.

⁷ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 15-18.

⁸ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 24-26.

1.3.2 Parliament

Chamberlain decided to run for the House of Commons, and in 1918, he was elected to Parliament. In 1922, Conservative MPs voted at a meeting at the Carlton Club to fight against the Lloyd George coalition as a single party.⁹ At that time, Austen Chamberlain was the leader of the Conservative Party and a supporter of the Lloyd George coalition. When the Lloyd George's coalition collapsed, Austen resigned, Neville was appointed Postmaster-General by the new Prime Minister Bonar Law, and he was made a Minister of Health the following year. Law was later diagnosed with cancer, and Stanley Baldwin replaced him as Prime Minister and gave Chamberlain the position of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.¹⁰

Baldwin was defeated in the general election in 1923 by Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Party, but in 1924 regained his position following another general election. Chamberlain requested to return to his previous post as Minister of Health and suggested Churchill for the Exchequer. Austen Chamberlain was appointed Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. In 1924 Chamberlain proposed to the Cabinet 25 pieces of legislation which dealt with health and welfare issues, 21 of which became law before he left the Ministry in 1929. His popularity and personal success grew rapidly during this period.¹¹ Two of Chamberlain's most significant achievements were the reform of the local government and the Poor Law reform, which laid the foundations of the welfare state.¹²

The Labour Party won the general election in 1929, and Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister for the second time but resigned in 1931 because his government could not handle the worsening financial crisis. The king commissioned MacDonald to form the National Government, which was supposed to be a coalition of all the parties. Chamberlain held the Ministry of Health for three months, and after the general election, he was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer by MacDonald, who remained Prime Minister.¹³

The measures to stop the worsening crisis were successful. In 1932, the Tariff Reform Bill proposed by Chamberlain was passed. The bill called for a 10% tariff on imported items, excluding imports from the colonies and the Dominions.¹⁴ By 1934, his budget was able to restore most of the cuts in the pay of state employees and unemployment benefits of the economic crisis in 1931 and improve the unemployment rate. Apart from the issues of war

⁹ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 23.

¹⁰ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 25.

¹¹ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 25-26.

¹² Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 26.

¹³ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 29-31.

¹⁴ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 27.

debts and reparations, Chamberlain started to get involved in wide areas of Government activity, such as foreign policy and defence. In 1935 MacDonald resigned as Prime Minister and was replaced by Stanley Baldwin. After Baldwin retired in 1937, Chamberlain was chosen as his successor.¹⁵ Chamberlain's main actions as Prime Minister will be described in more detail in later chapters.

¹⁵ David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Arnold, 2001), 17-19.

2 ORIGINS OF APPEASEMENT

2.1 Definition of Appeasement

The Oxford Dictionary of Politics describes appeasement as a policy of concessions to the demands of enemy countries in order to maintain peace. It is considered a cowardly practice of sacrificing the territories of other countries in an attempt to maintain relatively good relations with the aggressor. It can be assumed that appeasement will never be successful for long because the aggressor keeps increasing his demands.

People in most countries, especially in Great Britain, believed that the punishments against the defeated powers of the First World War were too strict. The majority, therefore, believed that in order to stop another such war from occurring, the victorious powers should try to satisfy the demands of the defeated. This meant trying to cancel the war reparations, negotiating with the Germans about the permitted levels of armament and evacuating the occupied German territories.¹⁶

2.2 The Treaty of Versailles

After the war the League of Nations was established at the Versailles Conference. The members of the League agreed to maintain world peace, promote international cooperation, and not use war as a means for solving conflict.¹⁷ The main ideas for the League came from American President Woodrow Wilson, however, the American Senate voted against the US becoming a member so the country would isolate itself from European affairs. The League would promote a system of so-called collective security¹⁸, under which all the signatories agreed to act together against military aggression by any member.¹⁹

On 28 June 1919, The Treaty of Versailles was signed. It dictated very harsh conditions for Germany. The treaty took away from Germany its colonies and some of its parts, which were given to France, Belgium and Poland. Furthermore, the treaty reduced the German army to 100,000 men and completely prohibited its air force and the use of submarines. Germany was also obligated to pay reparations as a punishment for starting the war.²⁰

¹⁶ Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21-22

¹⁷ Edward Johnson, "League of Nations," in *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy*, ed. Gordon Martel (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2018), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118885154.dipl0368>.

¹⁸ McLean and McMillan, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, 304.

¹⁹ McLean and McMillan, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, 90.

²⁰ Peter Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 6.

In the 19th century, Great Britain pursued a policy of maintaining the balance of power in Europe. However, this balance was disturbed after the First World War, and the benefit turned mainly towards France. Germany was forced to accept very harsh terms of the Versailles treaty, and Russia was dealing with a civil war. Therefore, during 1919-1920, the British were looking for ways to modify the treaty in favour of Germany because they believed these terms were unfair. This period can be considered the beginning of the British policy of appeasement. Prime Minister Lloyd George presented a memorandum proposing to moderate the terms for Germany. However, France, for whom the reparations were beneficial, insisted on the harshest possible terms, and Lloyd George failed to enforce these proposals into the final treaty. The first to criticise the treaty was an economist John Maynard Keynes, who was one of the British financial representatives at the peace conference but resigned as a protest against the harsh conditions imposed on Germany. In his book called *'The Economic Consequences of the Peace'*, he criticises the Versailles system and especially the amount of reparations, which, according to him, Germany will not be able to pay, and it will eventually destroy its economy. He believed that the restoration of German economic stability was necessary for bringing Europe out of the post-war crisis. It was this book that led many British people to criticise the Treaty of Versailles.²¹

At the European conferences between 1920-1922, Lloyd George continued to try to reduce the impact of the Treaty of Versailles on Germany. He was also supported by several important ministers, including the future opponent of appeasement, Winston Churchill, who was convinced that the cooperation of France, Britain and Germany was key to the restoration of Europe. Lloyd George's last attempt to find a modified solution was the conference in Genoa, which again ended in failure. He did not achieve the desired results as the French insisted on the payment of reparations. Lloyd George's political position was weakened, and he was forced to resign in October 1922.²² Germany and Russia were also present at the conference, however, they had a suspicion that they were invited only to be turned against each other. According to A.J.P. Taylor, Russia was supposed to "claim reparations from Germany" to use them to pay its old debts, while Germany was to "join in exploiting Russia".²³ Instead, they agreed to collaborate with each other and signed the Treaty of Rapallo. Because of this unexpected agreement, nothing more was solved at the

²¹ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 33-36.

²² Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 36-37.

²³ A. J. P Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War: With a Preface for the American Reader and a New Introduction, Second Thoughts* (New York: Atheneum, 1983), 49.

Genoa conference, and it ended without success. The agreement allowed Germany to evade the economic and military restrictions of the Versailles treaty. The Germans could train their military on the Soviet territory, and in exchange, Russia was provided economic assistance by Germany.²⁴

2.3 The war reparations and the Pact of Locarno

As Germany failed to pay the reparations, French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr in 1923 to enforce the payment. The Germans responded with passive resistance (production and mining were stopped), which only contributed to the collapse of the currency, and soon surrendered as inflation kept growing. Under these circumstances, The French were convinced mainly by the British to agree to a new reparation payment plan – the Dawes plan proposed by American economist Charles Dawes in 1924. It was the first significant modification of the Versailles treaty.²⁵ The Dawes plan adjusted the sums paid for the reparations to more manageable levels. Additionally, the Germans received a loan from the USA to assist them with the reparation payments. The German economy rapidly improved, but it was dependent on foreign loans.²⁶

In 1924 a new conservative government was elected in Britain with Stanley Baldwin as Prime Minister and Austen Chamberlain as Foreign Secretary. The League of Nations introduced the so-called Geneva Protocol, which proposed the creation of the Permanent Court of International Justice, whose task would be to issue binding decisions concerning international conflicts and all the parties involved would be under the obligation to accept these decisions. The new British government did not support the Protocol as it was incompatible with British sovereignty and came up with their own initiative.²⁷ In 1925, Britain, Germany, Belgium, France and Italy signed the Locarno Treaties, which guaranteed the existing borders between Germany, Belgium and France and the demilitarisation of the Rhineland, but it did not guarantee the borders between Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Germany was also accepted into the League of Nations.²⁸ Another condition was that if the signatory countries attacked each other, the others were obligated

²⁴ Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War: With a Preface for the American Reader and a New Introduction, Second Thoughts*, 49.

²⁵ Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War: With a Preface for the American Reader and a New Introduction, Second Thoughts*, 43.

²⁶ Andrew J. Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 60-61.

²⁷ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 38-39.

²⁸ Steve Waugh and John Wright, *Weimar & Nazi Germany 1918-39* (London: Hodder Education, 2016), 22.

to provide military aid.²⁹ The Locarno Treaties and the recovery of Germany, with strong support in the form of the British policy of appeasement, were supposed to bring peace and restore the balance of powers in Europe and ensure that Britain would not have to enter another war.³⁰

The reparations would still be paid for the following years until a new plan emerged in 1930 as Germany was once again unable to meet the original payments – The Young Plan. During this time, the Great Depression came to Europe, and the Germans claimed that they would not be able to pay any longer.³¹ The reparations from Germany were also used to pay the French and British war debts to the USA, but with the ongoing financial crisis it became difficult to meet those payments. The moratorium proposed by President Hoover in 1931 suspended the payments on reparations and war debts for one year, however, they were later cancelled completely. The reparation payments were permanently suspended at the Lausanne Conference in 1932.³² Neville Chamberlain also was present at the conference, where he made a speech supporting the cancellation of reparations.³³

The demand for the destruction of the Treaty of Versailles and mainly reparations is what gained Hitler support of the German people and foreign sympathy. The British government believed that revising the treaty was Hitler's only purpose, therefore it was reasonable to them to try to satisfy his demands and make it more acceptable to Germany. Most Germans denied the fact that their country was responsible for the war and wished for the treaty to change. The collapse of the currency in 1923 was considered by many German economists to be a consequence of reparations. Even in their final stages in 1932, the reparations contributed to severe deflation in Germany. The British were angered by the actions of the French. They blamed the French for the collapse of the German economy because they insisted on upholding the treaty. They believed that Germany's economic recovery was essential to bring stability to Europe after the financial crisis. Many British

²⁹ Patrick G. Zander, "Rhineland Crisis (1936)," in *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy*, ed. Gordon Martel (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2018), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118885154.dipl0234>.

³⁰ Bruce S. Thornton, *The Wages of Appeasement: Ancient Athens, Munich, and Obama's America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2011), 84.

³¹ Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War: With a Preface for the American Reader and a New Introduction, Second Thoughts*, 43

³² Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War: With a Preface for the American Reader and a New Introduction, Second Thoughts*, 43-44.

³³ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 34.

citizens now sympathised with Germany and criticised the French. This public opinion contributed to the idea of ‘appeasement’.³⁴

2.4 The Geneva Disarmament Conference

Britain was also struggling with the financial crisis. During the crisis, the Labour government fell and was replaced by the National government. As a consequence of the economic crisis, the pound was devalued by 25%. In 1925, the Conservative government adopted the so-called gold standard, which tied the value of the pound to the price of gold. However, the British gold reserves were rapidly decreasing and therefore in 1931 the gold standard had to be abandoned.³⁵ Ensuring economic recovery became a priority for the new British Government. The British economy was dependent on world trade, but due to the financial crisis, the states focused primarily on themselves. Britain was forced to do the same and therefore focused on protecting the Empire. At a conference in Ottawa in July 1932, Britain and the Dominions signed an agreement on tariff reductions, which applied to exports and imports inside the Empire, but imposed high tariffs on other countries.³⁶

Since the end of the First World War, the whole conflict was blamed on an ‘arms race’ of global powers, therefore universal disarmament would be a way to prevent another war. After the economic crisis, Britain wanted to focus primarily on the recovery of its own country. Disarmament would allow for cutting military spending and using resources on social welfare programs.³⁷ Another key point was to abandon alliances and switch to a system of collective security. In February 1932, a conference began in Geneva, at which representatives of 61 states discussed disarmament. In July 1932, a proposal was made to limit air forces and heavy equipment and ban chemical weapons. Germany and the Soviet Union did not support this proposal. The German delegation then left the conference because they complained that they had not been treated equally. In December, France, Britain and Italy, therefore, decided to accept Germany’s demand for equality. For the French, this represented a fundamental revision of the Versailles system, which guaranteed them military superiority over Germany. This new provision now allowed Germany to arm to the same level.³⁸

³⁴ R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 12-16.

³⁵ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 42.

³⁶ Richard Overy and Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Road to War* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 82-83.

³⁷ Thornton, *The Wages of Appeasement: Ancient Athens, Munich, and Obama's America*, 86-87.

³⁸ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 46-47.

On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler became the German Chancellor. At the disarmament conference In March 1933, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald presented a proposal prepared by Foreign Minister John Simon and Anthony Eden, which determined specific numbers of troops and military equipment that each country should have. It would allow Germany to have an army of 200 000 men and complete equality in armaments five years later. This meant that instead of disarming, Germany would rearm.³⁹

In June 1933, the World Economic Conference was also held in London. The French proposed stabilizing the main currencies and reducing tariff barriers but without success. In order to increase the competitiveness of American goods on global markets, the new American government, with President Roosevelt, decided to devaluate the dollar by 30 percent. The Americans thereby made it clear that they would only focus on strengthening their own economy instead of finding a common global solution. As a result, the conference solved nothing. Neville Chamberlain, who was a chancellor of the exchequer at the time, was deeply disappointed. It was most likely this event and the isolationism of the USA that led Neville Chamberlain to believe that cooperation with the Americans could not be relied upon in the future.⁴⁰ In October 1933, there have again been some disagreements with the terms. Hitler complained that Germany had not been treated equally and found the terms humiliating. Germany withdrew from both the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations.⁴¹

³⁹ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 49.

⁴⁰ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 50.

⁴¹ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 17.

3 BRITISH POLICY OF APPEASEMENT IN THE 1930S

3.1 Situation after Hitler's ascension to power

Germany's withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations meant the collapse of collective security, and to the British and French, it represented the necessity of armament as a means of preserving peace. The Nazi's ascension to power in Germany also changed the British way of thinking regarding foreign policy. Until 1933, most people, including important political parties, agreed with the policy of appeasement and cooperation with Germany. In April 1933, the Labour Party began to turn away from this policy, despite the contrary opinion of their former leader, Prime Minister MacDonald, who agreed with further negotiations with the new German Government. At the same time, however, the Labour Party supported the continuation of disarmament. Other politicians that expressed criticism were Austen Chamberlain and Sir Robert Vansittart, who had previously supported the policy of appeasement. On the part of the conservatives, there arose opinions that rearmament was necessary as it would deter the potential enemy from attack.⁴²

After 1933 came the realization that Hitler posed a threat to European peace and stability. However, this was not the first event that triggered Britain's need for rearmament. In 1932 the Government abandoned the ten-year rule after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. The rule was based on the assumption that during the next ten years, there would be no war, therefore, the military spending could be cut down. It was adopted in 1919 and automatically extended since 1928. In October 1933, the Chiefs of Staff prepared a memorandum evaluating Britain's options in case of military conflict. Based on the memorandum, it was concluded that Britain could not afford a continental war with Germany as the British army only had two divisions available. In addition, Britain would not be able to be at war with Japan at the same time.⁴³

The Japanese invasion concerned Britain for two main reasons. It threatened the British Empire in the East as well as British economic interests and trade in East Asia. Next, the Chinese Government asked for help from the League of Nations, of which Britain was an important member.⁴⁴ The Japanese invasion also confirmed the incompetence of the League of Nations. It turned out that the League was unable to do anything since Japan was one of its members and could vote against any decision that would serve as a punishment. Britain

⁴² Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 53-55.

⁴³ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 56.

⁴⁴ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 36-37.

and France would not risk a conflict with Japan because of the insufficiency of their military power. The League even failed to impose sanctions due to a fear that it would anger the Japanese and provoke further aggression, and the members did not want to risk harming their own economic interests in East Asia. As a protest, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations.⁴⁵

In November 1933, a Defence Requirements Committee (DRC) was created to examine security threats and create plans for rearmament. In February 1934, the DRC created a report that suggested an increase in air force spending of £70,000,000 over the next five years. The report stated that Japan and Germany both posed a threat to Britain, but the greater danger from a long-term perspective was Germany. The Cabinet finally approved the so-called scheme A, meaning that the Royal Air Force (RAF) would be expanded to 75 squadrons by March 1939. Of the initially requested amount, the army received only a half – £19,000,000.⁴⁶ Neville Chamberlain also had a significant role in deciding the final amounts. It was he who proposed that the amount spent on the army be reduced by half and emphasized the importance of the increase on defence. His motive was to prevent the creation of a continental army similar as in the First World War and thus prevent the repetition of another massacre. He believed that a strong defence would discourage the potential aggressor from attacking Britain and prevent the breakout of a new war conflict.⁴⁷

On 20 February 1934, Anthony Eden, who was then a Lord Privy Seal, travelled to Berlin. On the second day of his visit, he had lunch with Hitler at the British Embassy. Eden was initially very impressed by Hitler. The talks were successful and thus opened up the possibility of further negotiations between Britain and Germany in the future. Afterwards, Eden travelled to Rome to meet Mussolini. This visit had quite the opposite effect on Eden, as Mussolini made a negative impression on him. Eden ended his journey in Paris, where on 1 March, he met with French Foreign Minister Barthou to discuss his proposal to guarantee the eastern German borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia. This initiative also led to the involvement of the Soviet Union, which joined the League of Nations in 1934. However, Barthou was murdered in October 1934, and the guarantee never took place.⁴⁸

Eden and other British politicians who later met Hitler were convinced he was sincere and wanted peace. They concluded that Versailles and the Allies were to blame for the events

⁴⁵ Thornton, *The Wages of Appeasement: Ancient Athens, Munich, and Obama's America*, 91-92.

⁴⁶ R. J. Q Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39* (Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 1993), 17.

⁴⁷ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 36-37.

⁴⁸ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 60-61.

in Germany and the rise of the Nazis, therefore 'appeasing' Germany by altering the Treaty was only reasonable. The British were shocked when Hitler had at least eighty-five of his rivals murdered during the Night of the Long Knives on 30 June 1934, and on 25 July, the Austrian Nazis attempted a coup by assassinating the Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss.⁴⁹

3.2 The Anglo-German Naval Treaty

In February 1935, France and Britain agreed to a new disarmament plan that promised Germany equality in armaments. In return, Germany would agree to restrictions on some weapons and the air force and would return to the League of Nations.⁵⁰ The Foreign Secretary John Simon arranged a meeting with Hitler to present this new plan. The meeting was postponed after the British Government published a White Paper on Defence in March 1935 as a response to German rearmament. The White Paper announced an increase in spending on defence, most importantly, the Navy and the air force. This did not please Hitler, who announced that Germany restored conscription and that they would increase their army to 500,000 men. The Germans were also rebuilding their air force. These were all violations of the Treaty of Versailles.⁵¹

On 7 April 1935, Mussolini organized a conference in Stresa, where the representatives of Britain, France, and Italy gathered. The 'Stresa front' powers agreed to maintain the current European territorial arrangement and resist any future attempts that would threaten it.⁵² However, this unity did not last long as France and Britain chose to follow different foreign strategies. France decided on a strategy of intimidation by signing a cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union. This treaty would last for five years and obliged both parties to assist each other in case any other state attacked them. Shortly after followed an alliance between Czechoslovakia and the USSR. Britain, on the other hand, refused the French strategy of intimidation and chose to continue the policy of appeasement and direct negotiations.⁵³

In June, German Ambassador Joachim von Ribbentrop came to London to discuss Hitler's proposal to sign an Anglo-German naval agreement. He proposed that Germany

⁴⁹ Tim Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2019), chap. 3,

<https://libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=87CB3B412F235DA06A0E77B91577336C>.

⁵⁰ Thornton, *The Wages of Appeasement: Ancient Athens, Munich, and Obama's America*, 96.

⁵¹ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 25-26.

⁵² Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War: With a Preface for the American Reader and a New Introduction, Second Thoughts*, 85.

⁵³ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 68.

would build a fleet up to 35% the size of the Royal Navy. Britain was willing to accept this proposal for several reasons. In December 1935, Japan announced that it would not renew the Washington Naval Treaty, which gave Britain clear military superiority. Britain was aware that it could not afford a naval race with Japan and Germany at the same time. The British also remembered that a similar arms race led to the first world war and were trying to avoid history repeating itself. An Anglo-German agreement would regulate German armaments to an acceptable level for the British. On 18 June 1935, the new Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare and Ribbentrop signed the Anglo-German Naval Treaty. Britain decided to act on its own and signed the treaty without consultation with Italy and France. The actions of the British annoyed the Stresa partners and significantly worsened the relationship between them. Winston Churchill strongly criticized the agreement because it broke all the naval restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles.⁵⁴

3.3 Italian invasion of Abyssinia

On 3 October 1935, Mussolini sent Italian troops, marching from Italian colonies in Italian Somaliland and Eritrea, to occupy the state of Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia). In 1896 the Italians were defeated at Adowa and wanted revenge for this humiliation. Mussolini saw the opportunity after an incident in December 1934 on the border between Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland where 30 Italians were killed.⁵⁵

Earlier in June, Samuel Hoare and Anthony Eden, together with Sir Vansittart, proposed to give Abyssinia part of the territory of British Somaliland with access to the sea and a port in exchange of the Abyssinian Ogaden province to Italy. Eden presented this idea to Mussolini in Roma on 24 June. For Mussolini, this was not enough because his goal was to conquer the whole of Abyssinia, therefore he rejected the proposal.⁵⁶

The newly elected National Government under Stanley Baldwin needed to consider the public opinion when dealing with the issue. According to a Peace Ballot published on 27 June, majority of the 11 million responders supported the League of Nations and sanctions to be imposed on an aggressor. The Government had to support the League in order not to anger their voters, even when Abyssinia was not one of Britain's vital interests.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 3.

⁵⁵ Andrew Holt, "'No More Hoares to Paris': British Foreign Policymaking and the Abyssinian Crisis, 1935," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 3 (2011): 1383, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001646>.

⁵⁶ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 25.

⁵⁷ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 25-27.

After the invasion in October, the League declared Italy as the aggressor and imposed sanctions. Yet these sanctions were limited because they did not embargo essential resources for war, such as oil, steel, and coal, and some of the League members did not support them. The British Government made sure that the sanctions were not too harsh as they feared it would anger Italy, which was an essential ally against potential German aggression.⁵⁸

The British attempted to appease Mussolini and came up with a secret plan to end the Italo-Abyssinian war and restore positive relations. In December 1935, the British and French Foreign Secretaries Samuel Hoare and Pierre Laval proposed the Hoare-Laval Pact, which would give Mussolini even more of the Abyssinian territory than was initially suggested in exchange for access to the sea for Abyssinia. However, on 10 December, the details got leaked in the French press, and the pact failed.⁵⁹ The pact met with strong criticism from the British voters who elected their new Government based on the promise that they would stand by the League. The pact undermined the principles of the League and gave the aggressor a free hand. Hoare was forced to take the blame and resigned from his post as a Foreign Secretary. In June 1936, he returned to the Cabinet to take a different post.⁶⁰

Anthony Eden became the new Foreign Secretary on 22 December. In February 1936, Eden proposed to impose an oil embargo on Italy which the Government approved. The French did not support it, and the proposal was never carried out. Italy eventually conquered Abyssinia in May 1936. Neville Chamberlain realized that the League failed to prevent the war and protect its member. He proposed to create an international police force that would protect collective security. He believed peace should be established on regional pacts, and each state should only enter pacts concerning their own interests. In June 1936, Chamberlain spoke in favour of the cancellation of sanctions imposed on Italy as they had already turned out to be ineffective and only prevented the restoration of positive relations. As a result, the sanctions were terminated on 17 June. Chamberlain's idea for the League's reform gained support from the Government, especially from Anthony Eden and Lord Halifax.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Joanna Thomas and Keely Rogers, *The Move to Global War - IB History Course Book: Oxford IB Diploma Program* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 203.

⁵⁹ Thomas and Rogers, *The Move to Global War - IB History Course Book: Oxford IB Diploma Program*, 204.

⁶⁰ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 29-31.

⁶¹ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 88-92.

3.4 The Rhineland crisis

The Rhineland was a demilitarised area located on the banks of the river Rhine. The Treaty of Versailles prohibited all German military fortifications or garrisons within 50 kilometres to the east of the river.⁶² The area was occupied by the troops of the Allied Powers until June 1930 to ensure that Germany followed this rule and to prevent any German aggression towards her neighbours.⁶³

Hitler violated both the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno treaty by sending troops into the Rhineland on 7 March 1936. Hitler saw the Abyssinian crisis as an opportunity to act. He assumed that France and Britain would again not take any effective action. Furthermore, Hitler was sure that Mussolini would not intervene because he was angered by the sanctions imposed on Italy by Britain and France during the Abyssinian invasion. Germany did not participate in the sanctions, and Mussolini was now more interested in establishing closer relations with Hitler. Another Hitler's pretext for remilitarising the Rhineland was the 'Treaty of Mutual Assistance' between France and Russia. He argued that it violated the agreement made at Locarno and that it threatened German security. At the same time, Hitler presented a group of proposals which he was willing to negotiate.⁶⁴

Hitler proposed negotiations regarding Germany's possible return to The League of Nations as well as non-aggression treaties with Belgium and France for 25 years. Germany would also consider non-aggression pacts with her eastern neighbours. They further suggested an air pact with Britain about limiting the air force. Hitler once again counted on the strategy that coming up with a set of proposals after violating treaties would get his opponents to focus on analysing these proposals instead of appropriately responding to the violation.⁶⁵

The negotiations with Germany were crucial for the British. They were obligated by the Treaty of Locarno to defend the Rhineland and assist the French if they decided to expel the Germans. Britain would therefore have to make a difficult decision between breaking their treaty obligations or going to war. The French Government realised they did not possess the necessary power to push the Germans out and decided to appeal to the League of Nations and discuss their next steps with their Locarno partners. Many Britons thought it would be

⁶² Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 58.

⁶³ Zander, "Rhineland Crisis (1936)", 1.

⁶⁴ Zander, "Rhineland Crisis (1936)", 4.

⁶⁵ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 93.

best to accept Hitler's proposals for negotiation. Eden shared the same view, stressing that Britain should advise the French from taking any military action against Germany.⁶⁶

On 10 March, Lord Halifax and Anthony Eden attended a meeting of the Locarno representatives. The French Foreign Minister Flandin and Belgian Prime Minister Zeeland tried to convince the British that military force should be used against Germany and suggested economic sanctions. Eden and a majority of the British Government were determined to avoid war, therefore they did not support this resolution and saw no point in imposing sanctions due to their inefficiency during the Abyssinian crisis. The Chiefs of Staff also reported that Britain's military power was insufficient to enter a conflict with Germany. Moreover, the Government was influenced by public opinion, which was against war and believed that Germany did not commit any serious violation because their actions took place inside its own borders. Additionally, the British, including Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, feared that if France and Russia worked together in suppressing the Germans, it would lead to the expansion of Communism in Germany. Flandin was convinced that Hitler was bluffing and that Britain and France together would succeed in stopping him. However, Chamberlain opposed this, arguing that the British Government could not afford such a risk based on an assumption. On 17 March, Russian Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov suggested that the powers unite against Germany. The British were against the formation of alliances because they believed that alliances had been one of the causes of the First World War.⁶⁷

Finally, the Locarno signatories drafted a 'Text of Proposals', which they sent to Germany. It would prohibit building fortifications within the Rhineland and tolerate German troops under the condition that they were stationed at least 20 kilometres from the border. Hitler rejected the proposals and suggested his own counterproposals. On 7 May, the British sent Hitler a questionnaire asking him to clarify more details, but he never received a response.⁶⁸ This event is often seen as the last opportunity to prevent Hitler's advance without the outbreak of war. Germany's military power was highly overestimated, and the French Army would easily be able to force the German troops out of the Rhineland.⁶⁹

After the Rhineland crisis, the British focused on the issue of defence. In January 1936, the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) was established to study the deficiencies in

⁶⁶ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 5.

⁶⁷ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 5.

⁶⁸ Zander, "Rhineland Crisis (1936)", 4-5

⁶⁹ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 5.

defence and propose new military requirements. By this time, Germany had already surpassed Britain in the number of their air force. In February, the Cabinet approved the so-called scheme F, which again emphasised the increase of the air force. According to this scheme, the British air force was to achieve parity with Germany by 1939. The Government also established a new Ministry for Coordination of Defence to which Thomas Inskip was appointed.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmířování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 97.

4 CHAMBERLAIN AND APPEASEMENT

Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister after Stanley Baldwin on 28 May 1937. Chamberlain condemned Baldwin's passive approach and was determined that as a Prime Minister, he would be more actively involved in the problems. Chamberlain believed that his strategy was the right one and that if any problem occurred, it was because of the incompetence of others and not his fault. He chose ministers who shared the same opinion as himself and worked in accordance with his policy. On the contrary, he looked for ways to get rid of anyone who opposed him. As a Prime Minister, Chamberlain made foreign affairs his priority as Europe now faced many dangers. Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland in March 1936, Japan attacked China, and the Spanish Civil War broke out in which Germans and Italians joined forces with Franco's Nationalists against the government of Spain. The relations with Mussolini were still influenced by the Abyssinian crisis in 1935.⁷¹

Chamberlain's main rival, Churchill, advocated costly rearmament as the most appropriate defence against Germany, which was in discord with Chamberlain's policy. Chamberlain realized the need for rearmament but wanted to keep the spending at a level that would not hurt the British economy. He was aware that going to war with Germany would be costly, therefore he pursued the policy of establishing good relations with Hitler and Mussolini to prevent it at all costs. Chamberlain chose Sir John Simon as his Chancellor of the Exchequer. Among Chamberlain's main advisers was Sir Horace Wilson, who was convinced of the correctness of the policy of appeasement.⁷² Chamberlain's new government included Samuel Hoare as a Home Secretary and kept Anthony Eden as a Foreign Secretary.⁷³ Lord Halifax became Lord President. For military posts, Chamberlain appointed Sir Thomas Inskip as Minister for Coordination of Defence and Alfred Duff Cooper as First Lord of the Admiralty.⁷⁴

Several factors influenced Chamberlain's foreign policy in the 1930s. He feared the expansion of Communism and believed that the Russian army was not strong enough to be relied on as potential ally. The Americans could not be counted on either because of the Neutrality Acts, which prohibited the USA from engaging in the war of foreign countries.

⁷¹ Adrian Phillips, *Fighting Churchill, Appeasing Hitler: Neville Chamberlain, Sir Horace Wilson, & Britain's Plight of Appeasement: 1937-1939* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2019), chap. 3, <https://libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=3DA162064F5F223C757125805AF1566E>.

⁷² Phillips, *Fighting Churchill, Appeasing Hitler: Neville Chamberlain, Sir Horace Wilson, & Britain's Plight of Appeasement: 1937-1939*, chap. 3.

⁷³ Phillips, *Fighting Churchill, Appeasing Hitler: Neville Chamberlain, Sir Horace Wilson, & Britain's Plight of Appeasement: 1937-1939*, chap. 4.

⁷⁴ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 113.

He believed that Mussolini would be a more reliable ally against Hitler, and that is why he was trying to come to terms with the Italians. In terms of foreign policy, Chamberlain wanted to make decisions mostly on his own and often did not listen to the advice of the Foreign Office. Another politician who disagreed with Chamberlain was Sir Robert Vansittart, who did not share the same views on appeasing Germany. Anthony Eden later joined Chamberlain's opponents.⁷⁵

4.1 Italian rapprochement

Chamberlain arranged a meeting with the Italian ambassador Grandi on 27 July 1937 and gave him a personal letter addressed to Mussolini asking him what could be done to improve relations. Mussolini responded positively to this letter, and Chamberlain and Grandi met again on 2 August. The goal of establishing friendly Anglo-Italian relations was to prevent an alliance between Italy and Germany.⁷⁶

The same month, British merchant ships were attacked by Italian submarines, which collaborated with Franco to block naval trade for the Republicans. Due to this problem, an international conference was summoned in Nyon. Although it was clear that Italy was behind this attack, it was attributed to piracy. Later in September 1937, Italy joined Germany and Japan and signed the Anti-Comintern Pact bringing these states even closer. Despite all these facts, Chamberlain did not want to give up his effort to bring rapprochement with Italy. It now became even more urgent to establish better relations.⁷⁷

Chamberlain was even willing to recognize the Italian Government in Abyssinia. He prepared a document summarizing the main topics for the Italian negotiations, which he consulted with Halifax on 6 September. He did not, however, mention this to Eden. After the summer holidays, the Cabinet met on 8 September to discuss further action towards Italy and, above all, the question of Abyssinia. Eden had a completely different opinion than Chamberlain. According to Eden, Italy was not reliable. Eden also did not like the fact that the issue of Abyssinia should be ignored in order to improve mutual relations. He also disagreed with Chamberlain that improving relations with Italy would allow Britain to reduce armament. The Cabinet sided with Eden, therefore Chamberlain's initiative ended with no result. On top of that, Italy withdrew from the League of Nations in November 1937.

⁷⁵ Andrew Boxer, *Appeasement* (London: Collins Educational, 1998), 32.

⁷⁶ Phillips, *Fighting Churchill, Appeasing Hitler: Neville Chamberlain, Sir Horace Wilson, & Britain's Plight of Appeasement: 1937-1939*, chap. 4.

⁷⁷ Phillips, *Fighting Churchill, Appeasing Hitler: Neville Chamberlain, Sir Horace Wilson, & Britain's Plight of Appeasement: 1937-1939*, chap. 4.

This however did not stop Chamberlain from believing that relations with Italy could be improved in the future.⁷⁸

4.2 Halifax's visit to Hitler

In 1937 Hermann Goering invited Lord Halifax to attend the International Hunting Exhibition in Berlin. Later in November, he also received an invitation for an 'unofficial' meeting with Hitler at his private residence in Berchtesgaden. Chamberlain saw this as an opportunity to establish direct contact with Hitler and begin the first stage of an 'active appeasement'.⁷⁹ The visit was criticized by Anthony Eden and Sir Vansittart, who was even suspected of having leaked the details to the press. On the contrary, the visit was supported by the new British Ambassador in Berlin, Nevile Henderson, who was strongly pro-German.⁸⁰

On 19 November, Halifax met with Hitler and began their talks. Halifax started the conversation by praising Hitler's achievements, especially his actions against communism. Next followed Hitler's criticism of the inefficiency of the democratic system, which allowed the British press and Parliament to attack Germany openly. Halifax then mentioned the possibility of future alterations of eastern European territories - specifically Danzig, Austria, and Czechoslovakia and that Britain would not intervene if these matters were settled peacefully without force. If it meant that a wider European settlement could be reached, Britain would also be willing to give Germany one of the British colonies.⁸¹

After the meeting, Halifax wrote a memorandum concluding that Hitler had no interest in war and wanted to establish friendly relations with Britain and that the only thing that he wanted to be settled was the question of colonies. When he returned to Britain, he reacted to Hitler's complaint about the press. Halifax spoke to some newspaper editors and tried to manipulate the media into not publishing anything insulting towards the Germans. Chamberlain was pleased with the outcome because it achieved to create a positive atmosphere which would allow further negotiations with Germany and eventually reach an agreement.⁸²

The December discussion of the Cabinet about a memorandum prepared by The Chiefs of Staff regarding the comparison of British military strength with other nations further

⁷⁸ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 121-124.

⁷⁹ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 71-72.

⁸⁰ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 9.

⁸¹ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 9.

⁸² Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 9.

convinced Chamberlain of the correctness of his actions. The memorandum concluded that if Britain, together with France and Belgium fought in a war as allies, their victory in the coming year would not be certain. In addition, Britain could not afford a war on three fronts at the same time (against Germany, Italy, and Japan). The report emphasized the importance of trying to reduce the number of enemies through political means and, on the contrary, gain as many allies as possible. Chamberlain was also aware that the high costs of rearmament threatened the recovery of the British economy. He knew that rearmament was necessary, but it was not enough to ensure Britain's security.⁸³

At the end of 1937, there was also a change at the Foreign Office. Sir Vansittart was moved from his position as undersecretary at the Foreign Office to a Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the Government. Sir Alexander Cadogan took his old place. Vansittart had disputes with both Chamberlain and Eden. He openly expressed his disagreement with Chamberlain's policy and was anti-German.⁸⁴ It bothered Eden that Vansittart wanted to make decisions regarding foreign policy mostly on his own, and they also disagreed on which path Britain should pursue. According to Vansittart, Italy was more important to establish good relations with. Eden, on the contrary, disliked Mussolini and was more open towards negotiations with Germany. This Vansittart's 'promotion' was supposed to deprive him of certain authority he had at the Foreign Office so that he would not further get in the way of pro-German politics.⁸⁵

4.3 Eden's resignation

On 11 January 1938, the US President Roosevelt proposed a plan to organize an international economic conference as an attempt to calm the ongoing conflicts in the world. The proposal was to reach a disarmament agreement in exchange for equal distribution of the world's natural resources between nations, including Italy and Germany. To make it possible, he needed British support and asked the Government to respond within five days.⁸⁶ During this time, Eden was on holiday in France. Afraid that it would ruin his plans to appease Italy and Germany, Chamberlain sent a response refusing the proposal without consultation with the Foreign Secretary. He thought that the Americas were not reliable and found the talks with Italy and Germany more beneficial.⁸⁷

⁸³ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 73-74.

⁸⁴ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 74.

⁸⁵ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 144.

⁸⁶ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 10.

⁸⁷ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 10.

Roosevelt decided to give Chamberlain more time in case he changed his mind, however, he disagreed with recognizing the Italian Government in Abyssinia as it would have a negative impact on the Japanese aggression. Eden returned from vacation on 15 January and, without Chamberlain's knowledge, sent a telegram to the USA asking not to take the prime minister's response as final. On 16 January, Chamberlain wrote a letter to his relative stating that a collaboration with the USA would be possible only after a settlement with Italy and Germany was reached. After the Government discussed Roosevelt's initiative several times, Chamberlain concluded that it would be better not to accept it. On 24 January, he also discussed his proposals regarding the German colonial question, which he believed would improve the current situation. Eden criticized Chamberlain's proposals for colonial concessions and doubted the Prime Minister's belief that a settlement with Germany could be reached in the future. On 16 February, the Government discussed increasing the defence budget at Inskip's initiative. An amount of 1.65 billion pounds was approved, which, however, according to the Government, must not be increased during the next two years, as a higher amount would ruin the economy of the country.⁸⁸

Afraid that Eden would ruin his plans, Chamberlain used two backchannels for communication with Italy. First was Sir Joseph Ball, who was offered to exchange information at the Italian Embassy, which allowed Chamberlain to communicate without the knowledge of the Foreign Office. Second was his brother's widow Ivy Chamberlain who was in Rome at the time. Chamberlain instructed her to read a personal letter for Mussolini to Italian Foreign Minister Ciano, saying that Chamberlain was ready to begin conversations with Italy. The message was approved by Mussolini. When Eden found out about this, he was furious that Chamberlain circumvented the Foreign office and wrote him a letter. Chamberlain apologized and promised that it would not happen again.⁸⁹

To the urgency for Italian talks contributed the meeting between Hitler and Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg on 16 February, to whom Hitler threatened the invasion of Austria if he did not appoint two Austrian Nazis into the Austrian Government. Both the Italians and British realized the thread and that it became urgent to start the conversations as soon as possible. Chamberlain believed that an agreement with Mussolini would prevent Hitler from the Anschluss of Austria.⁹⁰ On 17 February, Eden agreed to start the conversations, but only if Mussolini withdrew the Italian troops from Spain. On 18 February,

⁸⁸ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 147-151.

⁸⁹ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 10.

⁹⁰ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 10.

the Italian Ambassador Grandi came to London to talk with the Prime Minister and Eden. Chamberlain and Eden disagreed on some points, and the talks escalated into an argument between them.⁹¹

On 19 February, the Cabinet met to discuss the Italian question. Most of the MPs sided with Chamberlain and agreed to continue negotiations with Italy. Eden was disappointed and decided that it was useless to stay in a government that shared different views than him concerning foreign policy, and on 20 February, he resigned. The next day, Winston Churchill also expressed his disagreement with Chamberlain's foreign policy.⁹² Eden was replaced by Lord Halifax, who was a strong supporter of appeasement.⁹³

4.4 Anschluss of Austria

In February 1936, Hitler made changes inside his government. Two of his generals were forced to resign as a result of the scandals in which they were involved. Bouverie mentions that Hitler dissolved The War Ministry and replaced it with a 'Supreme Command of the Armed Forces'. Afterwards, he made himself Supreme Commander and replaced his current Foreign Minister with Ribbentrop. Hitler was preparing for the Anschluss of Austria. He was now convinced that Britain would not do anything if Germany invaded Austria, as he understood from the meeting with Lord Halifax.⁹⁴

As previously mentioned, Hitler met with the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg on 16 February 1938, forcing him to appoint Nazis into the Government. It was evident that the Nazis wanted to control the whole Government. Schuschnigg tried to prevent it, and on 9 March, he announced a plebiscite regarding the question of Austrian independence. The plebiscite came as a surprise to Hitler, who came with an ultimatum as a response: cancel the plebiscite by 11 March, or the German army will invade Austria. On 11 March in the morning, the border between Germany and Austria had been closed, and German troops began moving. Hitler received the consent of Mussolini, who insisted on Austria's independence in the past, now allowed Hitler to do as he pleased so he would owe Mussolini a favour in the future. Schuschnigg understood that nobody was coming to help Austria and passed the Chancellorship to Seyss-Inquart. German troops immediately marched into the country.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 153-154.

⁹² Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 154-156

⁹³ Boxer, *Appeasement*, 33.

⁹⁴ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 11.

⁹⁵ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 82-83.

At the beginning of 1938, Chamberlain's main initiative was to offer Germany a colony. He believed that giving Germany a colony in central Africa would potentially lead to a broader agreement. As these things were happening in Austria, Sir Nevile Henderson received instructions to arrange a meeting as soon as possible and discuss this plan with Hitler. When talking to Halifax, Henderson expressed that Australian independence should not be made a requirement for Anglo-German agreement as it might discourage the Germans. On 3 March, Henderson finally met with Hitler.⁹⁶ Hitler argued that a third party should not get involved in matters concerning the German-speaking population in other countries, just as Germany does not intervene in British matters. When asked about colonies, Hitler replied that it was of no importance at the moment. He was more concerned about Germans inside Austria and Czechoslovakia. Henderson assured the Cabinet that there was nothing to worry about from Germany if the Germans living outside of Germany were not discriminated against.⁹⁷

On 10 March, a farewell party was organized for Ribbentrop. Before the event he informed Hitler that if Austria was invaded by Germans, he should probably expect no action from the British. The following morning a series of telegrams came to Britain warning about the movement of German troops near the Austrian border and the danger of Anschluss. Chamberlain and Halifax called Ribbentrop and urged him to try and make Hitler change his mind. Ribbentrop argued that he knew of no such thing. On 12 March, the Anschluss of Austria began. Hitler was met by cheering crowds and no resistance.⁹⁸

The British concluded that nothing could have been done to prevent the Anschluss because it was bound to happen sooner or later. They were outraged by the methods the Germans used but did not consider it a threat to British interests. It turned out that the Austrian citizens welcomed the invaders with no resistance, which created the feeling that Hitler's action was justified. Winston Churchill made a speech expressing his concerns addressed at British foreign policy. He warned that the annexation significantly increased Germany's power and that Hitler would not stop at Austria. According to Churchill, Britain must create a military alliance with France, make a pledge to protect Czechoslovakia and immediately increase rearmament.⁹⁹ Chamberlain and the majority of the Cabinet, however

⁹⁶ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 11.

⁹⁷ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 162.

⁹⁸ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 11.

⁹⁹ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 11.

insisted on following the present policy and believed that continued engagement with Italy and Germany would lead to peace.¹⁰⁰

4.5 The Czechoslovakia crisis

Following the Anschluss, a suspicion arose that Hitler would turn his attention towards the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia inhabited by approximately 3 million Germans. After the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian empire, this territory was given to the new state of Czechoslovakia under the Treaty of Versailles. The Germans felt discriminated against by the Czechs and established the Sudeten Germany Party (SDP), with Konrad Henlein as a leader advocating for an independent government for the area. Hitler was interested in the Sudetenland for several reasons, mainly because Czechoslovakia was the product of Versailles which he wished to destroy. Other reasons were strategic because the alliances that Czechoslovakia had with France and the USSR posed a threat to Germany. Also, the German-Czech border was crucial for controlling central Europe.¹⁰¹

On 16 March, Chamberlain asked the Chiefs of Staff to examine Britain's options in case Germany launched an attack on Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, on 18 March, he called a meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee to discuss a memorandum proposing three options of dealing with the Czechoslovak issue. The first option, as previously mentioned by Winston Churchill, was to form an alliance with France, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and perhaps other nations to discourage Germany from attacking. The second option was to guarantee France to provide assistance in case she went to war for Czechoslovakia.¹⁰² France had a treaty of mutual defence from 1925 with Czechoslovakia, which however only applied if France were the first one to act.¹⁰³ The third option was to refuse any engagement concerning Czechoslovakia and suggest to the affected parties to try to negotiate the best possible terms with Germany.¹⁰⁴ Thomas Inskip argued that Czechoslovakia was "an unstable unit in Central Europe," and he saw no reason for Britain to engage in preserving it. Chamberlain at the time thought that Hitler was not interested in seizing the whole country but only the parts with the German population. He also believed that Germany preferred to accomplish it peacefully instead of using violence.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Thornton, *The Wages of Appeasement: Ancient Athens, Munich, and Obama's America*, 107.

¹⁰¹ Boxer, *Appeasement*, 33-34.

¹⁰² Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 87.

¹⁰³ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 154.

¹⁰⁴ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 87.

¹⁰⁵ David Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 174.

In March 1938, the British Army still had a lot of deficiencies. The maximum that could be dispatched to the Continent in case of war were two inadequately equipped divisions and one mobile division. Cadogan believed that in this state, the country was not ready for war and that Britain would suffer defeat at that time.¹⁰⁶ After considering the options, Neville Chamberlain concluded that providing military aid to the Czechs would lead to a war with Germany, therefore he refused this solution. Halifax agreed with the Prime Minister's decision and supported the third option. Furthermore, the British assumed that Germany would be joined by her Anti-Comintern Pact allies – Italy and Japan. On 21 March came the answer from the Chiefs of Staff. According to them, Britain should not create any guarantee or form an alliance. A conclusion was made that nothing could be done to prevent Hitler from taking Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁷

On 22 March, the Cabinet adopted the third solution and agreed that they should advise Czechoslovakian Government to negotiate with the Sudeten Germans and convince the French to help them obtain a settlement. The Government further agreed to intensify their efforts to reach an agreement with Italy. On 24 March, Chamberlain informed the House of Commons of the main points of his policy. First, the Government would speed up the rearmament, especially of the air defence. Next, he stated that Britain would not guarantee to provide military assistance if France chose to defend Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁸ The Government also believed that Czechoslovakia was not one of British interest and therefore it was not possible to give any guarantees to a country that does not directly concern Britain. At the same time, however, the Government issued a warning to Germany not to consider it as an announcement that Britain would not engage if war broke out.¹⁰⁹

Despite the Inskip Report from February and John Simon's warning about the disaster it would be for the economy, with the unfolding danger, the Cabinet agreed that defence spending needs to be increased again. Focusing mainly on the air force and defence against the bombers. Simon argued that Britain could not afford to increase the budget for defence any more than the Inskip Report suggested. On the other hand, Air Minister Lord Swinton believed that the Government should increase the budget and introduce compulsory labour in order to gain superiority over Germany in terms of military power. This so-called Scheme L was accepted on 27 April 1938. It reduced the number of bombers and increased the

¹⁰⁶ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 12.

¹⁰⁷ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 88.

¹⁰⁸ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 89.

¹⁰⁹ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 171-172.

number of fighters. Chamberlain approved this scheme with the exception of compulsory labour. Lord Swinton persisted on compulsory labour, therefore Chamberlain decided to remove him from the Air Ministry and substituted him with Sir Kingsley Wood.¹¹⁰

During April, the British Government sought to establish better relations with Italy. Britain's effort finally succeeded on 16 April 1938, when the Anglo-Italian Agreement was signed. Hitler's visit to Italy was planned for early May. The British hoped that Mussolini would have a more positive influence on Hitler if the relations between Britain and Italy were improved before the visit. Under the terms of the agreement, Britain pledged to recognize the Italian Government in Abyssinia, and Italy agreed to reduce the number of Italian troops in Spain.¹¹¹

On 28 April, the new French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier and Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet came to London for discussions about the current situation in Europe. Daladier believed that Britain and France should unite in guaranteeing the independence of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain, however, did not believe that Hitler intended to occupy Czechoslovakia and rejected this suggested procedure. The French failed to convince the British Government, and the delegations thus agreed that putting pressure on the Czechoslovak Government to achieve a settlement with the Sudeten Germans would be preferable.¹¹²

Earlier on March 1938 Hitler called Henlein to his Chancellery and instructed him to keep making unacceptable demands that can never be met by the Prague Government. Hitler intended to provoke an incident that would be a pretext for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In April, Henlein announced a series of demands in the city of Karlsbad. He demanded complete autonomy in the Sudeten areas. The Government in Prague found these demands unacceptable and rejected them.¹¹³ Already in 1935, Henlein met Vansittart during his visit to London and made a good impression on him. When Henlein came to London in May, he deceived the British officials that he had no direct orders from Berlin and that his only interest was to reach a settlement with the Czechoslovakian Government. Sir Robert Vansittart called him "a wise and reasonable man". As a result, the British Government

¹¹⁰ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 85-87.

¹¹¹ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 175.

¹¹² Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 176-177.

¹¹³ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 12.

considered Henlein moderate and reasonable, whereas the Czechoslovak president Beneš appeared to be the one causing problems.¹¹⁴

The British Ambassador in Berlin Sir Neville Henderson supported this view. He thought that addressing German complaints was the only way to preserve peace in Europe. Basil Newton, who was a British Minister in Prague, shared Henderson's views and argued that Czechoslovakia would most likely perish anyway due to its ethnic mix, therefore Britain should not risk war to defend it.¹¹⁵ On 12 May, Chamberlain had an informal lunch with several journalists and stated that he would prefer the Sudetenland to be annexed to Germany. In his opinion, none of the powers would go to war because of Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁶

4.5.1 The May crisis

The so-called May Crisis began on 19 May 1938 and lasted for four days. After the Karlsbad Demands were presented, the atmosphere in Czechoslovakia became tense. Henlein cancelled negotiations with the Czech Government, and the elections were to be held on 22 May. It was believed that Hitler would invade on this day. An incident occurred when two Sudeten Germans resisted the Czech police and were shot and killed.¹¹⁷

On 19 May, a message was passed from Prague to the British Ambassador in Berlin, Henderson, who reported to the Foreign Office that the British Consul in Dresden informed him about the concentration of German troops near the Czech border. The French Ambassador in Berlin received similar information. On 20 May, Henderson confronted State Secretary Weizsäcker and asked him about these claims. Weizsäcker denied having any knowledge of anything and described the rumours as false. He then assured Henderson that he would ask German General Keitel to confirm this information. Keitel also denied everything, and Henderson released his statement to the press. The British Ambassador in Prague, Basil Newton, was also informed about this by the Czechs and sent a telegram to London. In another telegram, Newton suggested that Germany's plan could be to intimidate and provoke the Czechs. There have also been reports of German planes flying over Czechoslovak territory. Later that day in the evening, the Czechs ordered partial mobilization.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 147-148.

¹¹⁵ Boxer, *Appeasement*, 34-35.

¹¹⁶ Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II*, 175.

¹¹⁷ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 95.

¹¹⁸ Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II*, 179-180.

On 21 May, Henderson met with the German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop. Ribbentrop was furious that the information Henderson received from Keitel got leaked to the press. He stated that he would ensure that Henderson was no longer provided with any military-related information.¹¹⁹ The Foreign Minister then talked about the two Sudeten Germans who were shot by the police and told Henderson that if such provocations continued, then Germany would destroy Czechoslovakia.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, more telegrams arrived from Czechoslovakia. The Czech government believed the rumours and warned that there was a high possibility of a German attack. Lord Halifax instructed Henderson to speak to Ribbentrop again and pass him a warning that if the French chose to fulfil their obligations and defend Czechoslovakia, the British Government could not guarantee that they would not join them as well.¹²¹

The crisis was over by 22 May when it became clear that there was no unusual activity around the Czech border. The British accused the Czech Government that they created a false alarm and were unnecessarily forced to give the Germans a warning. For Hitler it was humiliating. Most of the world press assumed that Germany became intimidated by the Anglo-French warnings and therefore did not take action. The May Crisis only strengthened his determination to destroy Czechoslovakia. On 28 May, Hitler met with his Generals and ordered all military preparations to be accelerated and the construction of the West Wall fortifications to be finished by 2 October. Even after the May Crisis, Hitler did not think that France or Britain would get involved.¹²²

The British were horrified at the fact that they were close to another war and became even more resolved to push the Czechoslovak Government into meeting the demands of the Sudeten Germans. In France, Sir Eric Phipps requested the Foreign Minister Bonnet to do the same. Bonnet agreed to put pressure on the Czechs and warned them that France would not fulfil her obligations if the Czechs failed to cooperate. Despite the statements made to Germany, Halifax warned the French that they should not take their actions during the May Crisis as an assurance from Britain to support Czechoslovakia.¹²³

4.5.2 The Runciman mission

On 18 July, Hitler sent Captain Fritz Wiedemann on a secret visit to London. He met Lord Halifax and Sir Alexander Cadogan and proposed that Hermann Göring might come to

¹¹⁹ Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II*, 180-181.

¹²⁰ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 12.

¹²¹ Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II*, 181.

¹²² Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II*, 183-185.

¹²³ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 12.

London to discuss mutual relations between Britain and Germany. Halifax was delighted, but he would prefer if the Czech issue could be resolved first. Wiedemann assured them that the German government had no intentions of using force as long as no incidents occurred, for instance, the killing of Sudeten Germans. The optimism soon disappeared as negotiations between the Sudeten Germans and Czechs turned out to be unsuccessful, and rumours began to spread that Germany was planning to invade Czechoslovakia in August. That was not a risk the government was ready to accept.¹²⁴ On 26 July, Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons that he would send a mediator to try and resolve the Sudeten issue. The Cabinet chose Lord Runciman for the task.¹²⁵

Lord Runciman arrived in Prague on 3 August together with Frank Ashton-Gwatkin as his assistant and four other officials. The next day after his arrival, Runciman met with President Beneš and his Foreign Minister Kamil Krofta, together with the SdP delegation. However, negotiations between the Sudeten officials and the Czechoslovak Government did not produce any results and were suspended again on 17 August. Halifax advised Runciman that in case his mission failed, he should propose announcing a plebiscite or solving the problem at an international conference. What Runciman did not know was that the SdP were instructed by Hitler to decline any possible settlement and to keep increasing their demands. Beneš proposed his third settlement plan, which the SdP declined on 30 August. His last 'fourth plan' from 7 September basically met all Sudeten German requirements. Surprised, the SdP used the ongoing Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg, which started on 6 September, as an excuse that they would continue further negotiations after Hitler's speech.¹²⁶

The British Government now knew that Runciman would not succeed. On 25 August Ashton-Gwatkin returned to London, where he suggested that Henlein could serve as a mediator between Hitler and the British Government with the purpose of improving Anglo-German relations. At first, Halifax suggested that it should rather be Runciman himself to meet Hitler. Runciman declined, therefore the Government decided to accept the first option. At the beginning of September, Henlein travelled to meet Hitler and passed him Runciman's message that if the Czech Government and the Sudeten Germans did not reach an agreement by 15 September, he would come up with his own different solution.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Bouverie, *Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill, and the Road to War*, chap. 14.

¹²⁵ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 151.

¹²⁶ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 186-188.

¹²⁷ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 188-189.

4.5.3 Berchtesgaden and Godesberg

On 30 August 1938, the Cabinet was summoned for an emergency meeting because rumours of German military preparations for an attack on Czechoslovakia began to spread. The Cabinet needed to decide whether or not to send another warning, which some believed had discouraged Germany from attacking Czechoslovakia in May. Chamberlain and Halifax were both against this idea. Halifax argued that nothing could be done to save Czechoslovakia, and Chamberlain added that Britain's military was weak. Also, Chamberlain did not want to lead the country into a war, which would be inevitable if Britain helped Czechoslovakia. The Cabinet therefore chose not to send another warning.¹²⁸

Chamberlain had already devised a secret plan to visit Hitler personally, which he only told Halifax and Henderson at that time. The plan would be called 'Plan Z'. On 10 September, Chamberlain met with the Inner Cabinet, consisting in addition to the Prime Minister of Halifax, Simon, Hoare, Wilson, Cadogan and Vansittart, to present them with his plan. They received a message from Henderson in Nuremberg advising them not to send a new warning because it would only anger Hitler. Therefore, it was agreed that Chamberlain should move forward with Plan Z.¹²⁹

After Hitler's speech at Nuremberg, the Sudeten Germans started riots in Czechoslovakia. There have been some deaths and incidents which led the Czechoslovak Government to declare martial law. Chamberlain saw this as the right time to take action, and on 13 September, he sent a personal message to Hitler asking him to meet in person to discuss a peaceful solution. The next day he informed the entire Cabinet of Plan Z. Hitler, he believed, would call for a plebiscite to be held in the Sudetenland. After the plebiscite, Britain, France and Germany might guarantee the new borders of Czechoslovakia. There were some objections to this plan, but nobody particularly opposed it. At 3:30 p.m. came a response from Hitler, who agreed with the meeting.¹³⁰

On 15 September, Chamberlain left for Germany, accompanied by Horace Wilson and William Strang. Chamberlain was greeted by crowds of cheering Germans on his arrival. The British delegation then met Hitler at his residence in Berchtesgaden. After tea, Chamberlain and Hitler proceeded to speak alone, with the presence of Hitler's interpreter Schmidt. The Foreign Secretary Ribbentrop was mad because he was excluded from the talks. The talks lasted for 3 hours. Hitler began complaining about the Treaty of Versailles

¹²⁸ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 136-138

¹²⁹ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 138-139

¹³⁰ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 140-141.

and the League of Nations. He then criticized the British press for often writing negative articles about Germany. After Hitler's rant about the injustice experienced by the Germans living in Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain replied that he had nothing against the Sudetenland being annexed into the Reich if it happened peacefully. Hitler then assured him that he had no interest in the rest of the country. However, something needed to be done about the murders of the Sudeten Germans by the Czechs, and he would be willing to go to war to stop it. At this, Chamberlain became irritated and felt like he was wasting his time. Hitler then calmed down and stated that the talks could continue only if the British Government agreed on the right of self-determination of the Sudeten people. Chamberlain said he needed to consult the Cabinet and the French first before giving an answer. Hitler promised Chamberlain that he would not take any military action against Czechoslovakia before their next meeting.¹³¹

When Chamberlain returned to London on 16 September, he discussed the situation with the Inner Cabinet. He told them about Hitler's demands and saw no reason for Britain to go to war over denying the Sudeten Germans the right to self-determination. With these points, he addressed the full Cabinet the following morning and expressed that he believed that Hitler had no intentions outside the Sudetenland. On 18 September, Daladier and Bonnet flew to London to discuss the options regarding Czechoslovakia. After a few objections, the French eventually agreed to the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany under the condition that Britain and France guaranteed the new Czechoslovak borders. The next day the plan was presented to the Czech Government with the warning that if they refused to accept it, the French would not come to help if Germany attacked. After refusing the plan at first, the Czechs were forced to accept it on 21 September.¹³²

Chamberlain was satisfied and thought that everything was going according to his plans. In a letter to his sister, he wrote, "I hear from a German source that I am the most popular man in Germany! "He came to save us from a war".¹³³ On 22 September, Chamberlain again flew to Germany to meet Hitler at Godesberg. This time he brought his own interpreter Ivone Kirkpatrick because Ribbentrop did not allow him to make a copy of the meeting's record last time. Chamberlain reported to Hitler that the British, French and Czech governments all

¹³¹ Nicholas Milton, *Neville Chamberlain's Legacy Hitler, Munich and the Path to War* (Yorkshire, Philadelphia: Pen and Sword books, 2019), chap. 12, <https://libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=B45587D314554DA4A004CB59F37B5B77>

¹³² Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 163-167.

¹³³ Milton, *Neville Chamberlain's Legacy Hitler, Munich and the Path to War*, chap. 13.

agreed to accept his demands from the last meeting. Hitler, however, replied that he could no longer agree with this solution. As a pretext, he used the growing Czech attacks on the Sudeten Germans.¹³⁴ He argued that the claims of Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia must be met before a peace agreement could be reached. The British Cabinet told Chamberlain the day before to stop the negotiations immediately if Hitler demanded such conditions. Chamberlain did not do that and instead he asked Hitler to create a document clearly stating these terms, later known as the 'Godesberg memorandum'.¹³⁵ The Czechs, along with their troops, state authorities, and police, must immediately leave the Sudetenland and be replaced with the German army. The Czechs would not be allowed to take their property for which they would get no compensation.¹³⁶

The next day, further discussions took place between the British and German representatives. On the map, the Germans marked the areas that were to be transferred to Germany and the areas where a plebiscite would take place. The Czechs would be given two days to evacuate starting on 26 September. Chamberlain was certain that the Czech government would reject these proposals. During the meeting, news came that the Czech government had started mobilization, which gave Hitler another pretext. The only thing that ultimately came out of the negotiations was that Hitler postponed the evacuation date to 1 October. At the end of the meeting, Hitler expressed gratitude to Chamberlain, thanking him for his efforts. He expressed his desire for closer collaboration with Britain and that the Sudeten question was the final European demand which had to be resolved. Hitler also promised that he would not take any military action before the negotiations were finished. He gave Chamberlain hope that further problems could be solved in the future after the Czech problem had been dealt with.¹³⁷

On 24 September, Chamberlain returned to London. He first consulted the Inner Cabinet about the ongoing situation and then the entire Cabinet. Chamberlain was convinced that Hitler respected him; therefore, he would not deceive him and would keep his word. He also talked about the British military insufficiency in air defence. He concluded that Britain needed more time for military preparation. Therefore, it was essential to delay the war and, in the best case, prevent its outbreak altogether. The Cabinet meeting continued the next day. Chamberlain was opposed by Duff Cooper, who did not think that Hitler could be trusted

¹³⁴ Milton, *Neville Chamberlain's Legacy Hitler, Munich and the Path to War*, chap. 13.

¹³⁵ Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis, and the Coming of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 104.

¹³⁶ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 148-149.

¹³⁷ Milton, *Neville Chamberlain's Legacy Hitler, Munich and the Path to War*, chap. 13.

and proposed general mobilization. This opinion was also supported by some MPs. Lord Halifax, who did not agree to pressure the Czech government to accept Hitler's terms, now stood against Chamberlain for the first time. He then added that if France decided to defend Czechoslovakia, Britain should do the same. But Chamberlain was not willing to drag Britain into war.¹³⁸

The French Government decided to refuse the Godesberg memorandum that day, and the Czechs later issued the same statement. On 26 September, Bonnet and Daladier flew to London for discussions. Chamberlain tried to persuade the French to change their mind by mentioning the military weakness of both the French and the Czechs. However, he did not succeed, and the meeting ended with no result. Important politicians such as Hore-Belisha, Hailsham, Oliver Stanley, together with some others, joined Duff Cooper in disapproving of Chamberlain's course of action. Chamberlain was aware of his Cabinet's different moods and therefore proposed sending a letter to Berlin through Sir Horace Wilson, asking Hitler to moderate his terms. If Hitler refused, Wilson was to give Hitler a warning that in case of an attack on Czechoslovakia, Britain would join France in a war against Germany.¹³⁹

On 26 September, Wilson met with Hitler. Hesitant at first, he gave the warning only the next day. Hitler argued that he did not care whether war broke out and gave the Czech government a deadline of 2 p.m. the following day to fulfil his demands. Following the news, the British ordered partial mobilization as war now seemed inevitable. Britain started to prepare for war. The people were provided with gas masks, and trenches were dug in parks.¹⁴⁰ In a radio broadcast on 27 September, Chamberlain described it as "horrible, fantastic, incredible ... that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing".¹⁴¹ This quote from Chamberlain proves that he could really not care what happened to Czechoslovakia, because it did not concern British interests. He was willing to sacrifice the integrity of Czechoslovakia and accept Hitler's demands if it meant avoiding war.

4.5.4 Munich

Chamberlain was not ready to accept that Britain might be going to war. He wrote a letter to Hitler suggesting that he would come to Berlin to reach a solution regarding the transfer of the Sudetenland together with representatives of Czechoslovakia, Italy, and France. Through

¹³⁸ Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War*, 101-103.

¹³⁹ Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War*, 104-106.

¹⁴⁰ Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War*, 106-107.

¹⁴¹ Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War*, 107.

the British Ambassador in Rome, Lord Perth, Chamberlain passed another letter to Mussolini asking him to try and convince Hitler to postpone mobilization and to agree with the conference. Mussolini did as asked, and Hitler postponed the mobilization by one day. On 28 September, the Cabinet gathered to discuss the European situation. During the discussion came a note from Hitler inviting Chamberlain, Daladier, and Mussolini to meet in Munich. Cheers filled the room as war might be avoided.¹⁴²

On 29 September, Chamberlain flew to Germany to meet Hitler, Mussolini, and Daladier at the conference in Munich. With him, he took Wilson and Lord Dunglass. Even before the start of the meeting, the Germans handed Mussolini the modified demands from Godesberg and told him to present them as his own. The new demands extended the period of German occupation, which would last from 1 October until 10 October. A commission of representatives of Britain, Germany, France, and Czechoslovakia would be responsible for defining the frontiers of the ceded territories, and the same commission would supervise the future plebiscites. The citizens were to be granted the right to decide whether they wanted to stay or leave. This never happened, and there were no plebiscites.¹⁴³ An amendment to the agreement stated that Britain and France would guarantee the new Czech frontiers against unprovoked aggression. Germany and Italy have promised to do the same once the issue of the Polish and Hungarian minorities has been resolved. The Munich agreement has finally been signed on 30 September before 2 a.m. Chamberlain and Daladier later reported the results to the Czech representative Mastný as Czechs had not been invited to the conference.¹⁴⁴

The next day, Chamberlain arranged a private meeting with Hitler in his apartment. For Chamberlain, this was the most important moment of his career. Hitler and Chamberlain signed a document that was prepared by the Prime Minister and Halifax in advance. By signing the document, these two agreed that their countries would never again go to war with each other and that they would work together to “assure the peace of Europe”.¹⁴⁵ The Czech Government had no other choice than to accept their faith. In addition, later on 2 October,

¹⁴² Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 178-179.

¹⁴³ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 179-180.

¹⁴⁴ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 233-234.

¹⁴⁵ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, 180.

Poland took from them the district of Teschen, and as a result, the Czech President Beneš resigned.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 128.

5 THE AFTERMATH OF MUNICH

When Chamberlain returned to London on 30 September, he was greeted by cheering crowds. The Prime Minister gave a short speech while waving the document that he and Hitler both signed. He then received an invitation to appear on the balcony of Buckingham Palace together with the King and Queen. Chamberlain continued to his residence at Downing Street to address another huge crowd telling them that this was “the peace for our time”.¹⁴⁷ In the following days after Munich, Chamberlain received thousands of letters and many gifts from all over the world. There have been a number of positive articles about him in the press and praise from significant political figures. More than 200 MPs approved of Munich. Only Duff Cooper resigned to express his disagreement and with him one secretary in the British Embassy in Berlin. Lord Stanhope succeeded Duff Cooper at the Admiralty.¹⁴⁸ The Labour opposition disapproved of Munich and argued that it gave Hitler too much power over the continent. Winston Churchill expressed strong criticism and believed that Hitler would not stop at Czechoslovakia. However, in the end, together with other conservatives, including Eden and Amery, abstained from voting against the government. Chamberlain, having the support from both his government and the public opinion, genuinely believed that he brought peace to Europe and saved it from war.¹⁴⁹

More MPs now argued that the current situation required rearmament to be accelerated. However, Chamberlain did not agree with this, as he thought that war was unlikely in the near future. Inskip informed the Cabinet that the army and air force still could not compete with the Germans. An increase in army divisions from two to a total of 15 divisions capable of fighting in a continental war was called for. Scheme M, which would significantly strengthen the air force (primarily fighter aircraft), was proposed and later was approved by the Cabinet on 7 November after minor adjustments. The request for the army was denied. Chamberlain did not really want to exceed the budget because he still believed that appeasement was possible.¹⁵⁰

Another issue that needed to be dealt with was guaranteeing the borders of the remaining Czechoslovakia, which has not been given yet. Britain was not willing to give any guarantee if the other Munich signatories did not participate. The Italians and Germans found a way around it when on 2 November, they ceded to Hungary another part of Czechoslovak

¹⁴⁷ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 236-237.

¹⁴⁸ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 128.

¹⁴⁹ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 243-246.

¹⁵⁰ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 129-131.

territory after certain complaints from the Hungarians. As a result, no guarantee was ever given.¹⁵¹

The mood in Britain started to change after the event known as the Night of shattered glass (Kristallnacht) on 9 November 1938. The assassination of the Third Secretary of the German Embassy in Paris by a Polish Jew resulted in a series of attacks against the German Jews. People around the world were outraged. Chamberlain was irritated not particularly because of the Jews but because the events threatened his prospects of improving terms with Germany. During this period, the criticism aimed at Chamberlain's policy grew. He was losing support from more of his colleagues (including Halifax) as well as the public, and the British press openly criticized him.¹⁵² In addition, there came a report from the British Embassy in Berlin that in a private conversation with the press, Hitler expressed that he no longer found the friendship with Britain important.¹⁵³

Earlier on 2 November, the Anglo-Italian agreement came into force at the suggestion of Italy because Italians started to withdraw their troops from Spain. The opposition and a few conservatives objected to this move, but Chamberlain still had the support of the majority. Chamberlain saw this as a "further step forward in the policy of appeasement".¹⁵⁴ On 11 January 1939, Chamberlain went to Italy together with Halifax and met with Mussolini, but the talks achieved nothing. They hoped that they would persuade Mussolini to influence Hitler against aggression. Mussolini, however, spoke in support of Hitler and defended his reasons for increasing rearmament. On top of that, Ciano reported the content of the Anglo-Italian talks to the Germans. On 27 February, the British government recognized Franco as the rightful leader of Spain. Chamberlain believed that Spain was no longer a threat and was willing to start making friendly relations with Franco as well.¹⁵⁵ Mussolini also convinced Chamberlain that disarmament would be possible in the future. After returning to Britain, Chamberlain was satisfied and considered the visit a success.¹⁵⁶

In December, news arrived in Britain that Germany was preparing to attack the Netherlands. The review was entrusted to the Foreign Policy Committee (FCP), which made a conclusion on 23 January that Holland belonged to Britain's vital interest and that the Americans and the Dominions should be informed about what was happening. The Chiefs

¹⁵¹ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 132-133.

¹⁵² Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 171-173.

¹⁵³ Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War*, 147.

¹⁵⁴ William R. Rock, *Neville Chamberlain* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 131.

¹⁵⁵ Hyde, *Neville Chamberlain*, 131-135.

¹⁵⁶ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 134.

of Staff advised that Britain should get involved in the Low Countries despite the lack of military preparedness.¹⁵⁷ Ivone Kirkpatrick also notified the Government that Hitler was planning an attack on London. Britain was forced to reconsider its previous policy. The FCP identified an invasion of the Netherlands as a reason for Britain's entry into the war and proposed to give the Netherlands a secret guarantee. On 25 January, Chamberlain agreed that Britain would have to intervene if Holland was attacked. Halifax also appealed for the start of staff talks together with Holland, Belgium and France about strategy for a potential war. However, due to the Prime Minister's disapproval, only the Anglo-French talks took place towards the end of March. Chamberlain gave a public guarantee to France that if it were attacked by Germany, Britain would come to help.¹⁵⁸ The rumours turned out to be false by February, but it had a significant effect on British politics. In response to the Holland scare, the British government was forced to increase the army's budget. Already in December, Hore-Belisha demanded to increase the field force that would be dispatched to Europe in case of war. This proposal was supported by Halifax, and Chamberlain and Simon again opposed it. Eventually, an increase from two divisions to ten was approved.¹⁵⁹ The required Ministry of Supply was established later on 20 April.¹⁶⁰

5.1 The end of Czechoslovakia

Hitler and Mussolini did not intend to honour the promise to guarantee the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia. Hitler was determined to destroy it. In October 1938, a Slovak representative met with Hermann Goring, expressing that he wanted a plebiscite to be held to gain the independence of Slovakia. In March, the new Czech president Hácha tried to stop it by removing the governments of Slovakia and Ruthenia. Hitler called Slovak Prime Minister Tiso to Berlin and told him to declare independence, or his country would be invaded by Poland and Hungary. As a result, Slovakia became independent on 14 March 1939. The following day the Czech President Hácha and Foreign Minister Chvalkovský came to Hitler to try and save the remaining Czechoslovakia. They failed and were forced by Hitler to convert Czechoslovakia into a German protectorate.¹⁶¹

The British people were shocked after this happened. They were willing to excuse Hitler's actions when they involved the areas where the majority of the population were

¹⁵⁷ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 135.

¹⁵⁸ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 274-276.

¹⁵⁹ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 136-137.

¹⁶⁰ Rock, *Neville Chamberlain*, 181.

¹⁶¹ Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War*, 148-149.

German, but now they feared that he was aiming to control the entire Europe. People now started to realize that he needed to be stopped.¹⁶² On 15 March, a debate was held in the House of Commons, at which Chamberlain spoke about how the Government should respond. He argued that with Slovakia's independence, the guarantee promised to Czechoslovakia became invalid since the original state to which it applied ceased to exist.¹⁶³ The House of Commons was outraged by Chamberlain's statement. He received a wave of criticism from the opposition, but now also from more Conservatives. They urged the Prime Minister to abandon the policy of appeasement and introduce a stronger approach towards Hitler with the help of other nations. John Simon argued that there was still no other option and that Britain should not promise any commitments. The others, however, did not agree. The public opinion and the British press also called for a change of foreign policy and abandoning appeasement. Some of the people even wanted Chamberlain to resign. With the increasing criticism and his position threatened, Chamberlain was forced to reconsider his policy, even if he did not want to at first.¹⁶⁴ On Halifax's advice, Chamberlain, in his speech on 15 March in Birmingham, condemned Hitler's actions, however, he called it a violation of the Munich Agreement, which he continued to defend. He warned Hitler that Britain would be forced to stop him if he continued with similar aggressive actions. He still believed in appeasement but hoped that similar warnings would intimidate Hitler and give way for further negotiations.¹⁶⁵

5.2 Guarantee to Poland and the outbreak of war

Another problem occurred when the Rumanian Ambassador came to London on 17 March and warned Halifax that Hitler gave Rumania an economic ultimatum and that German occupation was about to happen soon. These claims were later proven as false, but it made Britain consider what to be done if the occupation really happened.¹⁶⁶

On 19 March, the USSR proposed a conference at which delegates from Britain, France, Poland, Romania and Turkey would gather. As previously mentioned, Chamberlain did not trust the Russians and refused this proposal. Instead, the British Government proposed a different initiative on 20 March – a formal declaration of collective action in case of a

¹⁶² Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War*, 149.

¹⁶³ Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History*, 175.

¹⁶⁴ Rock, *Neville Chamberlain*, 172-174.

¹⁶⁵ Hyde, *Neville Chamberlain*, 136-137.

¹⁶⁶ Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War*, 149-150.

German attack between Britain, France, Poland and the USSR. This was blocked by Poland which refused any association with the Russians.¹⁶⁷

From Poland, the Germans demanded the return of Danzig to Germany. The Poles refused this request several times. Hitler, therefore, began to plan the so-called Operation White, according to which the preparations for the attack on Poland were to begin.¹⁶⁸ Fear that Poland was likely to be attacked next led the British Government to sign a guarantee with Poland on 30 March promising to provide aid if it were attacked, which was later joined by the French as well. On 7 April happened another alarming event when Italy invaded Albania. This resulted in Britain and France offering guarantees to Greece and Romania on 13 April and the introduction of conscription in Britain towards the end of the month. On 28 April, Hitler revoked the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Non-Aggression Pact between Poland and Germany. On the 22nd of the next month, the Italians signed the Pact of Steel with Germany, pledging to assist the Germans in case of war.¹⁶⁹

Russia's help was also important for the British Government. Despite Chamberlain's distrust towards Russia, he was pressured to accept that Russian involvement was necessary. On 14 April, communications began between Britain, France and Russia, which aimed to create an alliance to prevent German aggression. Britain suggested to the Russians that in case of an attack on their neighbour states, they should provide these states with military assistance. The Soviet Union proposed its own demands, according to which Britain, France and Russia would form an alliance to defend Poland and Rumania, and these three countries would start military discussions.¹⁷⁰ Getting Russia on Britain's side was necessary due to fears that it might instead form an alliance with Germany. On 6 May, the British Government sent a reply to Moscow rejecting this alliance and insisted on their original demands. They only agreed to start political discussions. The Soviet Union, however, did not want to issue any unilateral declarations, and on 14 May, the Russians suggested the alliance again. Under this agreement, all parties involved would also pledge to come to each other's aid in the war against Germany. A commitment which the British were unwilling to accept. Chamberlain was strongly against it, as he feared the formation of enemy blocs, which, according to him, would make negotiations with other totalitarian powers impossible. However, after the

¹⁶⁷ Hyde, *Neville Chamberlain*, 137.

¹⁶⁸ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 143-144.

¹⁶⁹ Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War*, 151.

¹⁷⁰ Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War*, 152-153.

creation of The Pact of Steel between Germany and Italy, the Government reconsidered its position and, on 23 May, decided to accept the offer to start negotiations about an alliance.¹⁷¹

William Strang was therefore sent on a mission to Moscow on 12 June, but he was only an official with little authority. The fact that Chamberlain decided not to send an important minister only indicates that he placed little importance on negotiations with Russia.¹⁷² The conversations lasted until August, but the two sides could not agree and constantly modified their demands. The talks did not lead anywhere, and therefore the Soviet side demanded to start full military discussions. On 12 August, the talks were reopened, but the British again sent an official who did not have sufficient authority to sign any specific agreement, and the talks soon broke up.¹⁷³ The reason for the failure is primarily that neither Poland nor Rumania would allow the Soviet troops to enter their territory, which the Soviets insisted on. Stalin also feared that Britain and France would abandon him and let him fight Hitler on his own. That is why he rather chose to sign a pact with Germany agreeing to non-aggression on 23 August.¹⁷⁴

After signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact and denouncing the Non-Aggression Pact with Poland, Hitler was now preparing for an invasion. He was convinced that after Britain and France had done nothing to stop him from taking Czechoslovakia, they would let him have his way again. He informed his generals to begin the attack on 26 August. However, Hitler later postponed the date of the invasion as a result of two events.¹⁷⁵ On 22 August, Chamberlain sent a letter to Hitler assuring him that Britain would honour its commitments to Poland, even if it meant war. 24, the cabinet also informed about the same opinion. This led the British to replace the informal guarantee with an Anglo-Polish Treaty of mutual assistance on 25 August. Hitler reacted by summoning Henderson and passing him an offer for the British. If the British agreed to let him take Danzig, he would sign a non-aggression pact with Britain, guarantee the British Empire and agree to reduce the German armament in the future. In the following days, there were some efforts to arrange talks between Poland and Germany, but nobody was willing to accept Hitler's demands.¹⁷⁶ Another reason why

¹⁷¹ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 311-315.

¹⁷² Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 317.

¹⁷³ Overy and Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, 76.

¹⁷⁴ Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (Padstow: Yale University Press, 2008), 30-31.

¹⁷⁵ Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War*, 157-158.

¹⁷⁶ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 152.

Hitler postponed the attack was the visit of the Italian Ambassador on 25 August, who informed him that Italy was not prepared to go to war.¹⁷⁷

Hitler decided not to wait any longer, and on 1 September, the German troops invaded Poland. On the same day, the British sent a warning that all German forces must be withdrawn from Poland, otherwise, Britain would have to go to war. Chamberlain, however, did not act immediately and waited until 3 September to give an official declaration of war. The delay gave an impression that Chamberlain was not credible, and he was pressured in the Commons not to delay any longer, or it could lead to a collapse of his Government.¹⁷⁸ That day, Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons: “everything I have worked for, everything I have hoped for, everything I have believed in during my public life, has crashed into ruins”.¹⁷⁹ Appeasement had failed and Britain was at war.

¹⁷⁷ Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War*, 159.

¹⁷⁸ Rock, *Neville Chamberlain*, 190-191.

¹⁷⁹ Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, 154.

6 ALTERNATIVES TO APPEASEMENT

6.1 Isolationism and Pacifism

There have been a few alternatives to appeasement that the British Government could have adopted. Some critics argue that one of them could have been the policy of complete isolationism and pacifism, according to which Britain should not have engaged in any European affairs. However, there were very few supporters of this option in the 1930s. This policy is often considered ineffective. Sir Robert Vansittart argued that this would only accelerate the coming of war. Some historians claim that if this policy had been implemented at the time, Germany would probably have focused its attention on Russia rather than on Britain and France after occupying Czechoslovakia. This is however speculative.¹⁸⁰

Although Chamberlain's policy included elements of both isolationism and pacifism, given the events that occurred in the 1930s, it was impossible for Britain not to engage and ignore the situation completely. Britain would not be able to isolate itself for long because the public opinion called for some sort of action, and it would result in Britain not having any allies if the war eventually came. It is probable that this alternative would not prevent war at all. If Britain isolated itself from European affairs, it would only strengthen fascism, and it would lead to war on the continent. In 1938, Hitler claimed that he was determined to destroy Czechoslovakia and Chamberlain's intervention only postponed the attack. It is also not likely that France on its own would be able to defeat Germany if it chose to defend Czechoslovakia.¹⁸¹

On the other hand, it is possible that after defeating France, Hitler would want to form an alliance with Britain. This would only work if Britain allowed Hitler a free hand inside the continent. But Britain and Chamberlain were striving for a balance of power, therefore this was not a likely option. Another speculation is that after defeating France, Hitler would in the future attack Britain as well. On top of that, any part of the British Empire could possibly be threatened by the fascist powers, which would eventually require Britain to engage. It is therefore hard to say whether or not this alternative would be more beneficial for Britain.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Andrew David Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 14-16.

¹⁸¹ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 36-37.

¹⁸² Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 37-39.

6.2 The League of Nations

As another alternative to appeasement, Chamberlain could have supported the League of Nations and collective security. Many critics claim that this would deter the fascist powers and prevent war. As already mentioned in previous chapters, Chamberlain gradually abandoned this option. The League of Nations had a huge support from the public and various MPs, therefore turning away from it led to significant criticism of Chamberlain and his Government.¹⁸³

Churchill criticized the Government for not making sufficient use of the League's tools when they decided against imposing stricter sanctions on Italy during the Abyssinian Crisis in 1935. Another factor that resulted in the failure of the League was the reaction to the Rhineland crisis in 1936. It is assumed that if the British Government had taken a strict course with the help of the League, war could have been prevented. The collective action could have strengthened the League and encouraged Russia and later perhaps the Americans to engage. Some supporters of Chamberlain, such as Halifax and Simon, argued that collective security was impossible. Vansittart believed that the power of the League was limited, given that leading powers such as America, Germany, Italy, and Japan were not its members. Even its most prominent supporters, such as Anthony Eden, gradually began to turn away from the League.¹⁸⁴ Instead of collective security, Chamberlain switched to a system of regional pacts. This system resembled the traditional alliances that were supposed to be replaced by the League.¹⁸⁵

The main problem of the League was that it became impossible to maintain long-term peace, as some important powers were not its members. The members of the League also failed to work together, as every state had different priorities and focused primarily on themselves, and the British did not want to carry the League on their own. In conclusion, it is questionable whether the League of Nations could have prevented war if more emphasis had been placed on it. This could work if all the members worked together on a global scale instead of focusing on their own national interests and if nations such as the USA were a part of it. However, the only thing that would probably come out of it would be sanctions, which proved to be ineffective in the case of Italy. It is not certain that it would have any effect on Germany and stop Hitler at Rhineland.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 83-84.

¹⁸⁴ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 84-87.

¹⁸⁵ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 114-115.

¹⁸⁶ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 116-118.

6.3 Alliances

Several of Chamberlain's opponents and critics suggested that alliances would have been an effective alternative to appeasement. The main supporter of this alternative was Winston Churchill, who advocated for the idea of a 'Grand Alliance' that could potentially deter Hitler from aggression or make it easier for the allied powers to win the war. Chamberlain eventually adopted this course, but only a few months before the start of the war. In 1939 Britain signed guarantees with Poland, Romania, Greece and Turkey. During this period, there was also an effort to conclude an alliance with Russia, but the talks later collapsed, as Chamberlain and the British government did not put much importance on it. Due to the British reluctance, the Russians later concluded an agreement with Germany.¹⁸⁷

Already in 1936, the British and French missed the opportunity to work together and expel the Germans from the Rhineland. In 1938 Chamberlain also rejected the Roosevelt Initiative because during that time, the USA was an isolationist nation. It was highly anticipated by Churchill and Eden, who considered collaboration with the Americans as one of the main aspects of preserving peace. Duff Cooper also argued that if Roosevelt's Initiative had been accepted, it could have prevented war. If the British and the French had not failed to guarantee Czechoslovakia, Hitler might not have started an invasion. The most important of the mentioned above was the Grand Alliance of Britain, France and the Soviet Union. However, many believed the Russian army was weak during that time. Chamberlain's distrust towards Russia was supported by Lord Strang and Samuel Hoare, who claimed that the Russians kept on increasing their demands and did not have any real intention to reach an agreement with the British. On top of that, the Poles would not allow Russian troops to cross their territory because they feared that the Soviets would extend their control in Europe. Chamberlain feared that as well.¹⁸⁸

The opinions on this matter significantly differ. Some believe that Chamberlain's reluctance was justified, while others argue that his dislike for the Soviets was the main reason why the British failed to secure an alternative that could have effectively stopped Hitler. Alliances, in general, are considered to be the most effective alternative to appeasement. The main reason why Chamberlain did not pursue alliances sooner is because he believed that alliances were one of the causes of the last war.¹⁸⁹ Even in this case, it is not

¹⁸⁷ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 119-120.

¹⁸⁸ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 120-122.

¹⁸⁹ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 124-126.

clear whether alliances would have been able to avert the war. Hitler had a clear goal he wanted to achieve, and he was not easily deterred from it. Hitler believed that none of the powers, including the USA, would be willing to fight. The collaboration with the Americans or an alliance between Britain, France and Russia might only have worked if the nations involved showed Hitler that they were serious. But it is also important to take into account that Hitler later declared war on the USA and attacked Russia.¹⁹⁰

6.4 Rearmament

Many opponents of Chamberlain criticized the Government for not putting enough effort into Britain's rearmament, which is another possible alternative to appeasement. Chamberlain realized the need for rearmament too late. Alfred Duff Cooper criticized Chamberlain that during his time as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he made sure to limit the budget for armaments, and as a Prime Minister, he failed to see the threat that Hitler posed and blindly believed his words. Winston Churchill warned the Government several times about Nazism and urged for the increase of armaments. Britain could have prepared better for the possible war. Anthony Eden shared Churchill's view and often opposed the Liberals and Labourites, who were radically against rearmament.¹⁹¹

Others, such as Samuel Hoare and Hore-Belisha, defended the reasons for the limited rearmament. They argue that the public would not agree with the introduction of conscription and labour during a time of peace. There are two different opinions on the impact of armaments on the economy. Some believe that war production is a good way to boost the economy, while others claim that it would negatively affect Britain's economic recovery after the Great Depression. Chamberlain's policy derived from the latter. It was more important for Chamberlain to put more resources into the development of the country than excessive spending on rearmament. One of the reasons for pursuing the policy of appeasement was that he believed that some sort of agreement about armament could be reached with Hitler in the future.¹⁹²

Although Germany was generally known to be rearming rapidly, the rearmament in Britain had very few supporters. The opinion shifted towards intensive rearmament to prepare for war after Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia. Even before this event, however, Chamberlain received warnings that rearmament needed to be sped up because Germany had

¹⁹⁰ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 158-160.

¹⁹¹ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 161-163.

¹⁹² Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 163-165.

significantly surpassed Britain in this regard. Apart from the economic impact, Chamberlain believed that huge rearmament would only lead to another arms race as it was during the First World War. Another of the reasons why Britain was not sufficiently armed is that the Ten Year Rule, which limited the budget for armament based on the assumption that during the next ten years, there would be no war, was only abandoned in 1932.¹⁹³

From all these factors, it can be deduced that if Britain tried to match Germany in armaments, it would perhaps have decreased the number of losses on the British side, however, it is possible that the war would have broken out much earlier and would have been inevitable. Some historians claim that the armament approved by Chamberlain was good enough for Britain to defend itself from Germany and that he saved the economy from collapse. The increased rearmament could have made Hitler postpone his attacks, but it would not have deterred him from it. Both Russia and the USA had plenty of war equipment, and Hitler went to war with them anyway. There is a possibility that this alternative would not have been beneficial for the British.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 192-194.

¹⁹⁴ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany*, 194-195.

7 NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN'S REPUTATION

Neville Chamberlain's reputation has largely been defined by Munich and his actions during the last three years leading up to war. His previous progressive social reform policies are often ignored and considered irrelevant. Had Chamberlain not been a Prime Minister, he would be remembered as a successful politician. Instead, he is remembered for his policy that tried to prevent war but failed horribly. Chamberlain's reputation has been perceived differently throughout history.¹⁹⁵

Already in 1940 came the biggest criticism in the form of a book called '*Guilty Men*' by a trio of journalists together known as 'Cato'. The book was published shortly after the defeat at Dunkirk and blamed Chamberlain for the British unpreparedness and lack of equipment. The book also criticized Chamberlain's inability to see the need for rapid rearmament and his naivety. This book deeply damaged Chamberlain's reputation. Even after all that, however, Chamberlain still claimed that he did not regret anything and would not admit that he was wrong.¹⁹⁶

In 1941, Chamberlain's widow commissioned historian Keith Feiling to study Chamberlain's diaries and personal letters and write a piece that would repair his reputation. Five years later, he published a book called '*The Life of Neville Chamberlain*', in which he tried to explain Chamberlain's reasons for his actions during his Premiership. Some historians claim that Feiling's biography is not objective, as it omits some facts and tries to portray Chamberlain in a better light. Another reason why the work is not objective is that Feiling was denied access to Cabinet documents. The attempt to revise Chamberlain's reputation met with an obstacle when in 1948, Winston Churchill published his own memoirs '*The Gathering Storm*'. Due to this work, Churchill gained more popularity, and the negative perception of Chamberlain remained.¹⁹⁷

Works defending Chamberlain's policy began to appear in the 1960s. In 1961 A. J. P. Taylor published '*The Origins of The Second World War*', in which he portrayed Chamberlain and his colleagues as reasonable men and justified their choices in pursuing the policy of appeasement. In 1966 Martin Gilbert published a study that investigates the origins of appeasement and refutes the idea that appeasement was purely Chamberlain's invention. In 1969 Cabinet records became public, and two of the first publications based on these

¹⁹⁵ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 95-96.

¹⁹⁶ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 97-99.

¹⁹⁷ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 101-104.

documents by Ian Colvin and Keith Middlemas rather returned to criticism similar to the post-war period.¹⁹⁸

More fundamental revisionist works that challenged Churchill's perspective did not come until the mid-1980s. John Charmley's *'Chamberlain and the Lost Peace'* published in 1989, defends the policy of appeasement as the only possible path to peace and tries to shift the criticism towards Churchill. This approach met with criticism for diminishing Chamberlain and denying accountability for his actions. The idea that appeasement was the only option was challenged by R.A.C Parker, who in his work *'Chamberlain and Appeasement'* describes alternatives to appeasement that the British Government could have taken. Parker also argues that if Churchill had been the Prime Minister instead of Chamberlain, the war might not have happened at all.¹⁹⁹

In 1992, another biography of Chamberlain was published by Peter Neville. In his work, he does not evaluate Chamberlain's policy as one big failure but also focuses on his successful political career before he became Prime Minister. This approach became typical of the post-revisionist period. One of the most recent Chamberlain biographies was published in 2006 by the historian Robert. C. Self, which offers a complex analysis of Chamberlain's personality, his personal life and reasons for appeasement in a broader historical context.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 433-437.

¹⁹⁹ Macklin, *Chamberlain*, 104-107.

²⁰⁰ Ellinger, *Neville Chamberlain: Od usmiřování k válce: Britská Zahraniční Politika, 1937-1940*, 446-447.

CONCLUSION

The beginnings of the British policy of appeasement can be traced to the period after the First World War when the Treaty of Versailles was signed. This treaty was set up in favour of the victorious powers and marked Germany as the culprit of the First World War. Under the treaty, Germany was forced to pay a large sum of war reparations, give up its colonies and greatly reduce its military power. However, there was an opinion in Britain that these conditions were too harsh for Germany and that if they continued, Germany would never be able to recover economically. The British sought the balance of powers in Europe because they believed that German economic recovery was essential for bringing the whole of Europe out of the post-war crisis. Right after Versailles, Lloyd George tried to modify the Versailles Treaty so that it would be more acceptable to Germany as well. It can therefore be said that Lloyd George was the first appeaser.

The first concessions from the British came in the form of the Anglo-German Naval treaty, which basically allowed Germany to partially rearm. They saw it as a form of limitation of armaments that would keep Germany from rearming above the allowed level. Armament limitations were very popular in Britain during that time. During a financial crisis, Britain simply could not afford another arms race. On top of that, the horrors of the First World War still laid in the subconscious of many Britons, who attributed the arms race as another cause of the war.

The British placed their hope for world peace in the League of Nations, which was supposed to operate on a system of collective security and replace the enemy alliances, which many considered one of the reasons for the outbreak of war. The League later proved ineffective, as the most it could do was impose sanctions on the aggressive powers, which did not have much effect either, as was later shown during the Italian occupation of Abyssinia and the Remilitarization of the Rhineland. In both cases, the British refused to impose sanctions on Italy and Germany, fearing it would provoke them to further aggression. Even though at that time Chamberlain was not yet Prime Minister, he also disapproved of sanctions because he believed that it could disrupt the chance for future improvement of mutual relations. In the 1930s, the world was also dealing with the Great Depression, and instead of collective action, many states focused primarily on their own national interests.

When Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister, he chose to continue the policy of appeasement of his predecessors. Like most Britons, he too was affected by the horrors of the Great War and based his policy on the belief that such a disaster must never happen

again. However, the developing international situation required rearmament. Before Chamberlain became a Prime Minister, his priority was social welfare. War would be costly, therefore, he made sure to keep the budget for rearmament at a limited level. He looked for a way out by appeasing Hitler and Mussolini, which he saw as the best way to preserve peace. It is also a fact that Britain was not sufficiently prepared militarily for war. Britain could not afford to fight Italy and Germany at the same time. Chamberlain was aware of that, therefore, he tried to appease both of the dictators and tried to prevent these two from working together. But as it turned out later, he did not succeed in this either.

Chamberlain constantly ignored the warnings that were coming at him from his colleagues, such as Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden and got rid of anyone who did not share his views. Instead, he allowed Hitler to expand his power in Europe when the British did not react in any way to the Anschluss of Austria. Hitler's actions were excused because Austria was a German-speaking country, and the citizens seemed not to resist. A similar situation occurred at Munich. Denying the Sudeten Germans the right to self-determination was not an adequate reason for bringing Britain into war. In Chamberlain's eyes, Hitler's actions were justified. After returned from Munich, he was satisfied with himself and blindly trusted Hitler that it was his last territorial demand. Only after the Germans invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia he realized that something needed to be done. His mistake was that he realized it too late.

The sixth chapter analyses the alternatives described by Andrew David Stedman in his book *'Alternatives to Appeasement'*. Clearly, Chamberlain could have chosen a different option, such as complete isolationism, supporting the League of Nations, forming alliances or accelerating rearmament. The most promising of these alternatives was the 'Grand Alliance' between Britain, France and Russia, as proposed by Winston Churchill. There has been an attempt at negotiations, but these failed as well due to Chamberlain's lack of effort, distrust and fear of Communism. Hitler once postponed the invasion and attacked Czechoslovakia after signing the Nazi-Soviet Pack. Maybe that would not have happened if the British alliance with the Soviets succeeded. However, considering all the alternatives mentioned in this thesis, there is a possibility that none of them would have stopped Hitler. He wanted control over the entire continent. These alternatives might have slowed him down, but whether he could have been stopped completely is questionable.

Even historians are not unanimous in their opinion about Chamberlain and appeasement. Some criticize his policy, and others try to justify it. He received the most criticism in the period after the Second World War, but over time, works appeared that were less critical.

After the Cabinet records and Chamberlain's personal documents became public, historians began to attempt a much deeper analysis of Chamberlain's personality and his reasons for pursuing the policy of appeasement. Chamberlain remains a controversial figure who made many mistakes and is surrounded by a lot of negativity. While it is true that he could have done things differently, it cannot be clearly deduced whether he acted correctly or not at that time. Perhaps, appeasement could have worked if the German Chancellor had been someone else and not a fanatic like Hitler. At the time, he did what he thought was right with the intention of preserving peace.

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