

The Fox and the Lion

by

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“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”

– SUN TZU
The Art of War

“A prince being thus obliged to know well how to act as a beast must imitate the fox and the lion, for the lion cannot protect himself from snares, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize snares, and a lion to frighten wolves. Those that wish to be only lions do not understand this.”

– NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI
The Prince

Contents

Preface	i
Introduction	1
i. The Tragedy of Godesberg	3
ii. The Mystery of Hitler's Intent	9
I. 25 September 1938: A Tense Gathering	16
i. Getting Nowhere	18
ii. Bridging the Gap	25
iii. The Limitations of Alternative Policies	28
iv. Incorporating Both Complexions	32
II. 26 September 1938: Berlin	36
i. A Fractured West	38
ii. The Ambivalent Impetus of Wilson's Mission	42
iii. Into the Abyss	47
iv. The Poise of German Ambiguity	52
v. Britain's Own Ravenous Edge	55
III. 27 September 1938: The Shadow of War	62
i. Mounting Pressure	64
ii. Staying the Course	71
iii. Weighing Options	76
iv. The Value of Composure	83
IV. 28 September 1938: A Deceptive Relief	87
i. Helter Skelter	88
ii. A Temporary Resolve	93
Conclusion	100
Annotated Bibliography	106
Notes	112
Sources	120

Preface

Neville Chamberlain's mind remained sharp until the end; his physical condition only degraded markedly in his final days as the stomach cancer advanced. The staggeringly rapid demise of his twenty-five year political career and the swiftness by which its nadir followed its zenith would be concluded with an abrupt resignation and equally sudden death. On 14 October 1940, five months and four days since his resignation as Prime Minister, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth were chauffeured from Windsor Castle to Chamberlain's residence; they would bid farewell to the loyal and respected subject for the last time. By now, the acceleratory speed at which the Minister's health was declining had reached a tipping point – this was clear to the public, known by the Crown's Parliamentary subjects, and painfully evident to Chamberlain.

Aside from the conciliatory missives of condolences written by unfamiliar friends and all too familiar foes, prompted out of professional courtesy rather than personal affection, Chamberlain requested that a select few of his closest companions and political confidants visit him as he felt his days were running scarce. He revealed a rather intimate account of his condition to his close friend Joseph Ball – Director of the New Conservative Research Department:

“All food is loathsome to me and drink the same. I have given up smoking altogether and port no longer has any attraction for me... I am never free from this feeling of sickness except when I am... asleep. In its worst form it is accompanied by a most intense depression and general inability to do anything.”¹

Signs of an impending quietus were all the more discernible by Lord Halifax and Sir Horace Wilson’s visit a few weeks later. After their final meeting with Chamberlain on 7 November, Halifax lamented the melancholy nature of their mutually disillusioned spirits. Wilson, Chamberlain’s closest advisor and subject with whom he shared a similar emotional propinquity, was conjointly left woebegone. Agonized most by the spiteful vindictiveness of the chastising Churchillians, the two were deeply depressed to see their dear companion and former superior broken by “ill-fate and the withdrawal of his guiding hand and orderly mind.”² As Chamberlain once described, the three of them had “enjoyed the sort of unparalleled intimacy only possible among truly kindred spirits.”³ They had lost the battle for diplomacy together; now, Wilson and Halifax would soon be alone in defeat amongst a quickly dying breed of former appeasers.

Neville Chamberlain passed away in his sleep on the morning of 9 November 1940. For many, it was, in a sense, a relief; he had been suffering in many ways for much time. As Parliamentary Private Secretary Henry Channon* admits:

“Though I loved him, I am glad: the shafts of malice had hurt him, and probably killed him. Now the reaction, already begun, will have added impetus, and his place in history will be more secure. He had nothing more to live for; all his hopes had gone.”⁴

Chamberlain’s successor and staunch political antagonist, Winston Churchill, was surprisingly kind in his sentiments – or at least he was for a brief while. After a few days of formal, outward mourning, on 12 November, relishing in a half-hearted despair,

* Henry Channon commonly went by the name Chips Channon.

Churchill entered Parliament to address the House of Commons much as he had done countless times throughout the course of the still incipient war in Europe; only in this instance, it was not to inform, inspire, or instruct his fellow subjects regarding the Allied campaign. It was to give Chamberlain's eulogy. Embracing a tone of condescension poorly masked by transparent humility, Churchill had known what it was to be the victor of a long-standing strife within the bully-pulpit of Britain's international affairs:

*"It fell to Neville Chamberlain in one of the supreme crises of the world to be contradicted by events, to be disappointed in his hopes, and to be deceived and cheated by a wicked man. But what were these hopes in which he was disappointed? What were these wishes in which he was frustrated? What was that faith that was abused? They were surely among the most noble and benevolent instincts of the human heart – the love of peace, the toil for peace, the strife for peace, the pursuit of peace, even at great peril, and certainly to the utter disdain of popularity or clamour... I do not propose to give an appreciation of Neville Chamberlain's life and character, but there were certain qualities always admired in these Islands which he possessed in an altogether exceptional degree. He had a physical and moral toughness of fibre which enabled him all through his varied career to endure misfortune and disappointment without being unduly discouraged or wearied... He had a firmness of spirit which was not often elated by success, seldom downcast by failure, and never swayed by panic. When, contrary to all his hopes, beliefs and exertions, the war came upon him, and when, as he himself said, all that he had worked for was shattered, there was no man more resolved to pursue the unsought quarrel to the death. The same qualities which made him one of the last to enter the war made him one of the last who would quit it before the full victory of a righteous cause was won."*⁵

Notwithstanding the stark undertone of naiveté Churchill intends to cast upon his predecessor, he is correct in admitting that for Chamberlain, peace trumped all else. Through the lens of history, the Munich Agreement will always be understood as the closest Britain came to securing such a quixotic objective while at the same time, the furthest from such an end; its sentencing remains highly contingent upon each man's adjudication of the European stage in late September 1938. For Chamberlain, this peace settlement did not just come close to reaching his life-long goal, but exemplified it for

just less than twelve months. Transitively, for Churchill, it was a “disaster of the first magnitude;” predestined never to enjoy a long-standing existence.⁶

With the death of Chamberlain, his successor ushered in an era of his own. The strategy of appeasement was demonized by Churchill after it was explicitly condemned on 1 September 1939 by Germany’s invasion of Poland, Britain’s declaration of war, and the ensuing carnage that reigned over Europe for the following six years. Perhaps, given the harsh predispositions both Chamberlain and Churchill held toward each other by the latter’s succession to Prime Minister, a shift in Parliamentary attitude was unavoidable. Yet, bemoaning the inevitability of this abrupt metamorphosis in British political topography remains altogether monotonous and even more unconstructive in understanding the transmutation and adoption of such juxtaposed political philosophies; it is merely a precipitation of a much more complicated and convoluted cause: Churchill and Chamberlain’s personal and professional disdain toward one another.

The Munich Agreement has been regarded as the most infamous European peace agreement in modern history. It resides at the zenith of ‘should nots’ in the realm of political theory and shuns the strategy of appeasement from virtually all contemporary foreign policy doctrines. This tried and not-so-true tactic of appeasement garnered much attention from historians and political theorists immediately upon its collapse. Naturally, the relationship between Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill, unified in allegiance to the Crown but divided in the means by which to serve it, captivated scholars and has enjoyed much of the spotlight of the pre-World War II era.

As it stood, the strategy of appeasement which Chamberlain so tirelessly pursued and Churchill so unrelentingly scorned was not proclaimed at the onset of Chamberlain’s succession to Prime Minister in 1937 nor was its continuity unwavering throughout his

tenure. Rather, the tendency toward appeasement, a much more accurate prefix than ‘policy’ or ‘doctrine,’ was a prevailing disposition that germinated into the face of Chamberlain’s political reign over the many months preceding the Munich Agreement. Although many historians chart the progress of appeasement as an element which uninterruptedly accelerated to its apex with Hitler’s consent to an international conference on 28 September 1938, the days which directly preceded the infamous agreement were not as conciliatory or as one sided as many historians deem.[†] What is more, apart from the countless expositions each man’s honor has had the pleasure of enjoying and the agony of enduring, a single appeal for understanding both men within the same framework has yet to be fostered.

The fox and the lion remains a divisive personification both intrinsically and extrinsically. Starkly contrasting each other in temperament, seeing that the former depicts Chamberlain as a sly yet vulnerable character while the latter portrays Churchill as fierce though rash brute, each bestial representation remains suspended in the midst of a polemic fostered by historical hindsight. Of course, the dichotomy of the fox and the lion has an origin predating the twentieth century. Italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli once attested that every great leader must wield both the slyness of a fox and the fierceness of a lion. The dualistic nature of such a man would know when to avoid traps and when to scare off wolves.⁷ Yet, when the spirit of each proverbial beast wholly possesses the soul of one man, the two contrasting individuals are quick to identify their counterpart – and what was once an inward cogitation of a reciprocal tranquility becomes an outward manifestation of the same sort. Furthermore, just as both elements

[†] These historians in reference include but are not limited to: Margaret George, William Manchester, Niall Ferguson, Michael Foot, Frank Owen, John Ramsden, and Peter Howard.

are required for a balanced leader, so too were both of these men critical to British foreign policy from 25 to 28 September 1938.

Ever since 1940, with the release of a book entitled Guilty Men,[‡] it has been academia's mission to exonerate one Prime Minister at the expense of the other.⁸ As a result, approximately three-quarters of a century has generated a plethora of histories predicated on a false construct. It is wholly unwarranted to pit Chamberlain and Churchill against each other in reputation; especially in the context of the Munich Agreement. The aim of this work is to reposition the four days preceding the Munich Agreement in a new light. It is my intent to demonstrate why the traditional framework of these two men has illegitimately depicted them as antithetical forces within British foreign policy-making by unveiling the dual-nature of Britain's communication with Germany from 25 to 28 September – a strategy which characterized itself in both Churchill's wartime mentality and Chamberlain's pacific inclinations. To fully recognize the validity of such an exposition, it will be necessary to explain why such a strategy, permitted by Britain's ambivalence and merited by the policy's potential, was embraced while also explaining how the proclivities of each proverbial beast coalesced with its counterpart.

On the preliminary, it is necessary to portray just how unclear the European stage appeared to Britain during the days preceding the Munich Agreement in order to contextualize the reasoning for taking up such a policy. After German Chancellor Adolf

‡ Written under the pseudonym Cato, this work published in 1940 by Michael Foot (Labour Party sympathizer), Frank Owen (Liberal Party sympathizer), and Peter Howard (Conservative Party sympathizer) condemns the pro-appeasers in Parliament. The alleged guilty men of this work include: Neville Chamberlain, Sir John Simon, Sir Samuel Hoare, Ramsay MacDonald, Stanley Baldwin, Lord Halifax, Sir Kingsley Wood, Ernest Brown, David Margesson, Sir Horace Wilson, Sir Thomas Inskip, Leslie Burgin, Earl Stanhope, W. S. Morrison, and Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith.

Hitler issued his Godesberg Memorandum to Chamberlain, effectively rejecting his own Berchtesgaden Ultimatum to which the Czechs agreed, the trustworthy Führer that Chamberlain once envisioned was now a precarious enigma. The seemingly menial addendum for which Hitler would risk a catastrophic war was hardly a sign of a diplomatic man; yet, in light of his previous years of amicability toward the British, Chamberlain could not be certain as to what the Führer was after.

Foreign perplexity spread beyond Hitler's intent as well. Though it could be assumed that Italy would stand behind Germany in case a war broke out, it was uncertain whether they could be counted on by the British to help talk Hitler out of instigating one – if that is what he was planning. Moreover, the British were painfully aware of their own lamentable military capabilities in relation to the growing war machine that was the Third Reich. The French offered little to no help on this front and the Czechs were altogether useless. If Hitler did aim to incite war, would the Western powers be better off fighting in their current state or would six to twelve months of rapid armament increase their likelihood of survival? This was a tricky question for the British. Though they would surely increase their ground capabilities in such time, many were not sure if it was worth the trade-off of heightened German-Japanese naval forces; after all, the sea was the only advantage the West had. To lose that would be to lose everything.

Moreover, there remained significant counter-perceptions regarding the practicality of maintaining the Sudeten. To be sure, the preservation of Sudeten citizens as a Czechoslovakian people would be desired if it could be accomplished; however, such a feat appeared impossible to most. Despite Churchill's clamor to pursue this effort, his overenthusiastic desire to do so proved disturbingly reminiscent of his fanatical advocacy for launching an assault at Gallipoli in 1915. Not quick to forget such

a disaster, the British Government was not overly compelled to opt for war any more than it enjoyed the thought of further appeasing Germany.

In any case, the fragile economic condition in which the British and the French found themselves proved to be another obstacle on which the former conundrum remained contingent. It was very likely that rapid rearmament would trigger a double dip depression. If so, any hope of surviving a prolonged war with Germany would be slim. Moreover, where did the United States stand? America had just signed a neutrality act in light of Hitler's aggression toward Czechoslovakia; would staving off a war mean more time for the British to cajole the U.S. into supporting Western Europe against the Germans or would this legislation remain firm in its proclamation? It was hard to say – all of these questions were impossible to answer. Britain's domestic ambivalence, furthered by the nation's hieroglyphic militaristic and economic conditions – not to mention its split proclivities for even trying to salvage the Sudeten – afforded Chamberlain and his Cabinet the opportunity to employ the two-pronged policy which was so critical to repositioning the responsibility of Europe's fate onto Germany instead of themselves.

Essentially, Britain's policy was wholly reflective of Germany's; it mirrored the opacity which Hitler used as a tool to force the onus of war onto the West, if one were to ensue, and position himself as a benevolent leader in case a settlement was reached. As a result, the very burden of Europe's fate, which the Chancellor had intended to put on the West with his convoluted rhetoric and indecipherable actions, was refracted back onto himself through Britain's equally obscure visage: demanding peace while simultaneously assuring resistance if no such resolve could be met. Upon the Czech's refusal to comply with Hitler's Godesberg Memorandum on the morning of 25

September 1938, four days would ensue wherein British foreign policy would become suspended in a unique limbo between the temperaments of the fox and the lion. It was not solely predicated on appeasement as it had been in months past nor was it a product of appeasement as it would be after Munich. Instead, it incorporated a Churchillian mentality – a wartime mentality. This is not to say that Chamberlain did not relentlessly pursue appeasement or that Churchill did not constantly advocate for war; it is to say, rather, that the policies which were generated over these four days were an amalgamation of the two penchants: compounding each effort toward appeasement with the threat of substantial opposition if resisted or ignored. In essence, Britain put it to Germany: if Hitler wanted peace, then the British would appease him, but under the firm condition that it would be the last settlement he would get from the West; if Hitler wanted war, then the British made it plain that he would have it.

Still, whatever Hitler would choose, it remained that he would not get his way. No longer could Hitler's illustrious magnetism and bold charismatic words shield him from his own tactless folly and disrespect for international peace treaties. Laden by Britain's resolve and the pressure of accountability, Germany found itself reframed in the world's mind as a continental aggressor. All hope for a localized war would be cut off. Though the United States proved unwilling to commit to an allegiance with France or Britain in 1937, the detested thought of German expansion beyond the Sudetenland and into the whole of Czechoslovakia by assault may have rallied American support in light of Hitler's newly demonized characterization. Similarly, if an accord were reached, any hope at further territorial annexations later down the road would be met with universal opposition. Germany was not the aggressor until the onus of war was shifted upon them by way of a mirroring Western austerity afforded by a double-edged foreign policy.

Indeed, the burden of making a choice was the dagger Britain aimed at the heart of Berlin.

Herein lies a serious implication: not only were the days which preceded the most infamous appeasement in modern history infused with a Western wartime mentality to a degree unparalleled since 1914, but the Munich Agreement was nothing more than Hitler's decision not to go to war. Additionally, its collapse was nothing more than Hitler's attempt at a postponed territorial expansion whereupon he was met with opposition spanning across multiple continents. With this, the attempt to vindicate one Prime Minister with the condemnation of the other becomes a rather hollow endeavor. The necessity of each man's perception in the interim of British foreign policy over the four days preceding the Munich Agreement transcends the shackles of a reputational hierarchy and more accurately depicts the impetus for Western political operations during this trying time.

It is not enough to say this. There remains substantial context, in which the former assertions are embedded, which must be detailed to aptly sustain these contentious claims. To begin, a meticulous account of 25, 26, 27, and 28 September 1938, including an intimate introduction of Chamberlain's meeting with Hitler at Godesberg on the 22nd, is needed to fully comprehend the gravity of what faced Europe at this time as well as the immense complexity with which it was burdened. The diverging perceptions of Chamberlain and Churchill must be explored deeply to locate their origin and determine their validity. If it is true that we do not see things as *they* are, but, rather, as *we* are, then a reconstruction of each man's empirical rational is critical to

understand the reasons for their opposing views.[§] There is subjectivity embedded in any historical account; yet, it becomes a more fragile element when examining the influences upon a man's cognition – especially one residing three-quarters of a century in the past. Being said, this work does not intend to circumvent this interpretive facet of reasoning entirely; drawing heavily from personal diaries,^{**} correspondences between colleagues and loved ones,^{††} and the subjects' previous experiences,^{‡‡} it will prioritize causal factors which most realistically shaped each individual's political thought and action from Godesberg to Munich.

With an exegesis of these contextual features, it will be demonstrated that the zero-sum game which the reputes of both Chamberlain and Churchill have been forced into is illegitimate. Neither man can nor should reside above the other in historical hindsight. It is the great fault of many to mistake beauty for truth. The truth, in this case, does not tell a tale of a valiant man who came to Britain's rescue after his cowardly

§ This concept is in reference to *Anais Nin's* famous quote, "We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are."

** Such personal memoirs include, but are not limited to: *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters* and *Memoires of the Second World War*.

†† Such missives and conversations include, but are not limited to: "The Hossbach Memorandum," November 10, 1937; Neville Chamberlain, speech to the House of Commons, March 24, 1938; Hitler's Instructions to Henlein, March 28, 1938; "Halifax to Nevile Henderson in Berlin, May 21, 1938; "Halifax to Phipps in Paris, May 22, 1938; "Hitler's directive for "Operation Green," May 30, 1938; "Halifax to Newton in Prague, July 18, 1938; Nevile Henderson to Halifax, August 22, 1938; Neville Chamberlain, radio broadcast, 9/27/38; The Munich Accords; House of Commons by Harold Nicholson; Hodgson writing about Chamberlain in 1938; Winston Churchill, Speech to the House of Commons; Minutes of conversations between Hitler and Chamberlain at Berchtesgaden, September 15, 1938 (notes by Chamberlain and Schmidt); Record of Anglo-French Conversations held at No. 10 Downing Street, September 18, 1938; Notes of a conversation between Hitler and Chamberlain at Godesberg, September 22, 1938; Phipps to Halifax, September 24 and 25, 1938; Note from the Czechoslovak Minister to Viscount Halifax, September 25, 1938; Record of Anglo-French conversations held at No. 10 Downing Street, September 25 and 26, 1938; Notes of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Herr Hitler, September 30, 1938.

‡‡ This will incorporate a wide range of topics: namely, Chamberlain's time as a statesman and Lord Mayor of Birmingham as well as Churchill's involvement in WWI – focusing on his role in the operations of Gallipoli.

predecessor tucked his tail and bent to the will of a tyrannical monster. Instead, it is one wherein all are rational actors and whose perspectives must all be understood.

Introduction

The preceding weeks had been a blur; like the months before it, September 1938 had fused with the foregoing months of late by way of comprehensive foreign opacity. Since Neville Chamberlain's rise to Prime Minister on 28 May 1937, and even before that, the European continent – namely, Britain's place and responsibilities within it – had begun to denature into a most unfamiliar political theater. After a suspicious interlude of false stability afforded by the Treaty of Versailles in 1918, resurgence in political movements, which began with Italy's Abyssinian Affair in 1935 and was furthered by the Spanish Civil War in 1936, quickly grew into an epidemic that would infect Germany and the Far East.* Soon, Generalissimo Franco's Spanish coup d'état would take the guise of multiple political ideologies – to Benito Mussolini of Italy and Adolf Hitler of Germany, it meant the rise of fascism; to Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union, it meant a general shift in Western political status-quo; to Keisuke Okada of Japan, it meant a weakness in European dominance and the potential for global power to shift Eastward. Subsequently, an ideologically divided Eurasia was at stake.¹

* The latter could be said to have started brewing on its own ever since Japan's invasion of Manchuria and Shanghai in 1931.

Though continental involvement in the Spanish Civil War had been circumvented,[†] German Chancellor Adolf Hitler – partly inspired by Italy’s hostile growth in Ethiopia – sought to implement an expansionary policy of his own in the heart of Central Europe under the cloak of the ongoing Spanish commotion.² After occupying the Rhineland in 1936, a blatant violation of the Locarno Treaty of 1925, Hitler was met with little resistance from the West.³ Two years later, the German Chancellor, against the wishes of Mussolini,[‡] would successfully brow beat Austrian leader Kurt von Schuschnigg into relinquishing control of his nation to the Third Reich. With only a brief struggle from Schuschnigg – in the absence of any military force or alliance capable of opposing the growing German war machine – Schuschnigg quickly abandoned all hope of independence. By 12 March 1938, the *Anschluss* was accepted in Britain and France as a consummated fact.

By now, all of this appeared small in the rear-view’s offing. It was 22 September 1938; the Rhineland and Austria had both belonged to Germany for some months now with little ado from the British – much less the French. However, Western passivity would not last long. With Hitler’s attention shifted to the Sudeten district of Czechoslovakia – wherein 3.8 million once-Germanic citizens were sequestered from their fatherland in 1918 for the purpose of introducing another dimension of European

† At the outset of Spain’s internal conflict, French Prime Minister, Léon Blum, received a direct request for military aid from José Giral on 20 July 1936 in an attempt to suppress a domestic insurgence of Fascism which threatened the very young Popular Front government in Spain. Though Blum felt an overwhelming desire to help a sister government of France, his official decision, reached within three weeks of Spain’s request for military aid, was to forge a pact of non-intervention amongst the great powers in Europe. Though not fully obeyed by Italy and Germany, this quasi-pact served as the harbinger of temporary peace.

‡ Mussolini was very disturbed by the *Anschluss* but gave way and was thanked profusely by Hitler. The *Anschluss* was not in Italy’s vital interests; if anything Mussolini thought it could instigate a war which they would be unprepared to fight. Fortunately for Italy, no such war ensued immediately thereafter.

stability qua German bisection – Chamberlain soon found himself playing the much detested role of mediator between two stubborn leaders.

Upon being met with steep demands from the German Chancellor at his secluded mountain retreat in Berchtesgaden, Chamberlain had finally convinced the President of Czechoslovakia Edvard Beneš to transfer all *Sudetendeutsch* districts to Germany.⁴ It was a sigh of relief. The intensifying Sudeten problem was becoming all too suffocating in principle for what it was worth concretely – especially for Britain. After an ephemeral era of post-bellum composure, His Majesty's Government soon found itself entangled in a continental web of foreign political pacts and menacing ideological inclinations. As it stood, German intimidation toward Czechoslovakia, vis-à-vis the Sudetenland, increased pressure on France to bolster the latter's opposition against the Third Reich under its Locarno obligations to Prague. To complicate matters further, Britain – under the Treaty of Versailles – would be obligated to stand by France, its closest ally, while Italy would feel bound by political creed to back Germany. Essentially, the only element linking Britain with Czechoslovakia was their mutual ally: France. Even then, neither country saw Czechoslovakia as vitally important – much less the fraction of it that had been under German control just two decades prior. With Czechoslovakia shaping up to be much more of a liability than an asset, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain remained devoid of any pressing desire to re-enter another continental war on its behalf.

THE TRAGEDY OF GODESBERG

In accordance with his quest for peace, Chamberlain had successfully yielded an effective compromise between the Czechs and the Germans after a week of political

pressure on Prague. Eager to boast his accomplishments to the German Chancellor at their scheduled reconvening in Germany, the Prime Minister left Heston Aerodrome at 10:45 A.M. on the day of 22 September for the resort town of Bad Godesberg – adjacent to Cologne.⁵ Before taking off, he addressed the press at the tarmac:

*“A peaceful solution of the Czechoslovakia problem is an essential preliminary to a better understanding between the British and German peoples and that, in turn, is the indispensable foundation of European peace. European peace is what I am aiming at, and I hope this journey may open the way to get it.”*⁶

Accompanying Chamberlain on this venture was his close confidant and trusted diplomat Sir Horace Wilson. The two had grown close after the resignation of Wilson’s former commander and Chamberlain’s predecessor, Stanley Baldwin. Retaining a close post to the Premiership, Wilson would become an integral part of British foreign policy over the ensuing days; his loyalty to Stanley Baldwin and to the appeasement policies which the former Prime Minister undertook verified Wilson as a trustworthy ambassador of a similar intuition in the eyes of Chamberlain. Convoying the two consonant statesmen was a consortium of ministers including the Head of the Central Department William Strang, the Head of the Legal Department Sir William Malkin,[§] and two Parliamentary Secretaries.⁷ The team touched down in Cologne at 12:30 P.M. where they were greeted by British ambassador Nevile Henderson and British Foreign Policy Expert on German Affairs Ivone Kirkpatrick.⁸ On behalf of the Germans, those receiving the newly arrived British squad included Foreign Minister of Germany Joachim von Ribbentrop, *Staatssekretär* (“State Secretary”) Ernst von Weizsäcker, and German Ambassador to London Herbert von Dirksen.⁹ From the landing strip, Chamberlain and

§ The representation of the legal department at this meeting is a certain indication of Chamberlain’s desire – and in fact expectation – to hash out the logistics of the Czech-signed Berchtesgaden Ultimatum he had in hand.

his entourage were driven to their temporary quarters in two jet-black 540k Mercedes-Benz automobiles equipped with Nazi standards and swastika decals.¹⁰ After wading through thick crowds of over-zealous civilians, the parade of vehicles arrived at the grandiose Hotel Petersberg on a hilltop just across the Rhine from Godesberg.

Their lodgings were spectacular. Two floors had been reserved exclusively for Chamberlain and his colleagues.¹¹ The cluster of balconies enjoyed the finest views in Germany – they overlooked the flora-covered mountains and tumbling fields that were cut in two by the winding Rhine River. After inspecting the rooms themselves, the German Foreign Ministry had “ordered a complete change in the furnishing and telephoned for a suite of Louis Quinze furniture from Munich. Hydrangeas were imported, and the marble dining hall, which [looked] like a tiled bathroom, [was] flooded with flowers.”¹² Hitler knew Petersberg quite well – he frequented the hotel’s bucolic terrace for weekend getaways countless times and enjoyed a lengthy stay every autumn for the preceding decade.¹³ The extravagant ambiance which was intended to impress his British guests proved to be a foremost home field advantage.

The Führer himself arrived that morning from Berlin by train. Hundreds had come to catch a glimpse of the Chancellor in his short walk from the Godesberg station to his vehicle.¹⁴ CBS radio reporter William Shirer – who had traveled from Prague to cover the meeting – noted that Hitler was in a highly anxious state. The “black patches under his eyes” accompanied by a “peculiar tic” of the shoulder insinuated that Hitler was “on the edge of a nervous breakdown;” though, for now, it remained a mystery as to why.¹⁵ Transversely, and expectedly, Chamberlain showed to be in rather blithe spirits since his departure from Heston. Still content after a light lunch at Petersberg, Chamberlain was escorted by car to an anticipating ferry on the Godesberg bank of the

river.¹⁶ Thousands of onlookers surrounded the Rhine's riparian. Upon his arrival to the Dreesen,** Shirer observed that the Prime Minister "looked the image of an owl" – as he usually did – and "was smiling and apparently highly pleased in his vain way with some manufactured applause by a company of S.S. guards."¹⁷

An anticipatory milieu flooded the banquet lobby as the two leaders arrived seconds apart. They shook hands, exchanged greetings, and quickly escaped the crowd to the first floor room where the talks were scheduled to take place.¹⁸ The Dreesen conference room, like the floors of their hotel, had also been cleared of all sojourners for the occasion.¹⁹ The accommodations, however, were unimpressive compared to those at Petersberg. The chamber was small in size, homely in upkeep, and haphazardly decked with Nazi banners. At the center of the room, with little furniture on the periphery, sat twenty chairs surrounding a long wooden table blanketed with a sea-green tablecloth.²⁰

As the congregation of ministers entered the room, they divided themselves into two groups on opposing sides of the table – the Germans at the far end and the British backing the door. After everyone was settled and proper documents prepared, Hitler stared dully into Chamberlain's eyes – waiting for, and expecting him, to initiate the dialogue. The Prime Minister began with a lengthy opening statement which he was ever so keen on delivering in its entirety. He proceeded to detail the difficulties he faced after Berchtesgaden – namely, unpleasant discussions with the Czechs – whereupon he intended to leave Hitler and his colleagues in suspense as it pertained to Beneš' answer to the Memorandum. Finally, after a dry and unnecessarily prolonged contextualization,

** A room named after Herr Fritz Dreesen – often called the 'Führer of the German hotel industry,' he was an early member of the Nazi Party and had plotted with Hitler the 'Night of Long Knives' – a scheme resulting in the murder of Ernst Röhm in Munich on 30 June 1934.

Chamberlain revealed that President Beneš willfully chose to accept the Führer's terms given hence to him at Berchtesgaden.²¹

Chamberlain sat back in his chair and waited patiently while Paul Schmidt, Hitler's personal interpreter, translated the news to the Chancellor. After he finished speaking, an uncomfortable silence ensued... something was wrong.²² To Wilson's horror and Chamberlain's chagrin, Hitler gazed down at the table in a dry manner and uttered, "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Chamberlain, but this is not possible anymore. I can no longer discuss these matters. This solution, after the developments of the last few days, is no longer practicable."²³ The Chancellor pushed back his chair, crossed his legs and waited for the Prime Minister's retort. The two British representatives shot upright in their chairs flushed red with anger.²⁴ The Führer's distressed look finally made sense to Chamberlain and Wilson – no matter what answer they brought back on behalf of the Czechs, it was predestined to be inadequate. After being too bewildered to speak for a lengthy period of time, Chamberlain merely inquired as to why this was the case. For one, Hitler expounded, he was unable to consider any Czech agreement until his demands in Hungary and Poland^{††} were met.²⁵ Second, instead of only annexing Germanic districts, Germany now required the Sudetenland in its entirety – certain lands by racial creed and others by plebiscite.^{26‡‡} If the Czechs were unwilling to cede to this condition by 1 October, he continued, then Germany would be forced to mobilize

†† Here, Hitler is expanding his demands for Germanic saturated villages located in Poland and Hungary. This demand goes largely unmentioned throughout the proceeding days and is not resolved or acknowledged by the British or the French at the Munich Agreement.

‡‡ The plebiscite Hitler demanded was greatly slanted in German favor. He suggested the utilization of the 1918 census so that the Germans who had emigrated since 1918 would still be allowed to vote on the matter while all those Czechoslovakian peoples who had since been plotted there would not have a say.

military units to their mutual border with the intent of taking the aforementioned territory by assault.²⁷

The tone of Hitler's obstinate remarks mimicked that of a child's pout; he had spurned his gains at Berchtesgaden and unveiled new terms that were even more outrageous than before. After three hours of confusion and annoyance, the meeting adjourned. The only consolation that Hitler offered, if it could be called such a thing, was that he would not take any action without first holding another meeting between their two countries.²⁸ Notwithstanding this shallow assurance, the 1 October deadline was still in effect; it was clear to the Prime Minister that the Czech conundrum was far from resolved.

While Chamberlain was dealing with Hitler at Godesberg, a meeting of quite dissimilar subjects packed themselves into Winston Churchill's flat at Morpeth Mansions.²⁹ Having recently returned from a Downing Street debriefing of Chamberlain's docketed settlement tactics for the Godesberg meeting in progress, Churchill fittingly took his place amongst the rest of his colleagues, already present at his estate, beside the fire in his usual inglenook with a cigar and glass of whisky-soda.³⁰ He babbled on in a rather thrumming nature about Chamberlain and his predictions of the Godesberg outcome. To his immediate credit and later, dismay, Churchill expressed his confidence in the Prime Minister's quest to Germany. He assured his colleagues that Chamberlain would make a strong case to Hitler for resolution and if the Führer refused, Britain would have war with Germany. His fellow Parliamentarians were not so easily swayed into anticipating Chamberlain's success or the hard stance he would take upon his failure.³¹ As the evening waned, the mood amidst the flat grew maudlin. They had received no word from Godesberg and, consequently, harbored growing doubts

regarding the potential outcomes Churchill had promised. In just a few hours, they would receive a dispatch from Germany signifying Chamberlain's inability to reach an agreement with Hitler. Over the ensuing two days, Parliament would experience little commotion. Whether awestruck by Hitler's bombshell or disillusioned by Chamberlain's retreat, everyone's eyes seemed to gravitate toward Edvard Beneš; the Sudeten codicil was a subpoena for war – it was up to the Czechs whether or not they would yield to Germany and relinquish the Sudeten in its entirety, the price of peace, or split now and incite the most horrific carnage the world had yet to know.

THE MYSTERY OF HITLER'S INTENT

Hitler had reneged on his Berchtesgaden Ultimatum, spit in the face of British diplomacy, and forsaken the compliance of a weak Czech state in one fell swoop. For the first time, the “commonest little dog”^{§§} Chamberlain had come to know over the preceding months exposed a secret, ravenous edge. Still, was the Führer so adept at concealing this edge that it had taken a second ultimatum within a third territorial appeasement for Chamberlain to discover it? Or rather, did the onus lie with Chamberlain who, despite rallying outcries from Churchill and other ostracized politicians, saw only what he wanted to see in Hitler? Though historians have long debated over this dyad, their battle for vindicating one Prime Minister over the other has resided on a paradoxical pretense which preempts any hope at a coherent answer.

As it stands, the mere existence of these associated questions is wholly contingent on whether the Chancellor's villainous bearing resided in him for years, whether it was an incipient comportment, or whether it even existed at all. What's

§§ Chamberlain frequently referred to Hitler as “the commonest little dog” he had ever met.

puzzling is that historians have jumped into the previous questions without establishing a common answer to this one. As a result, two camps of historians have situated a debate on uncommon ground; one faction holding that Churchill was perceptive of what should have been obvious to Chamberlain and the other faction contesting that Chamberlain had no cause to see what was not there. The truth is that Hitler's intention at Godesberg could not be gleaned; not at that moment and not even with the benefit of hindsight.

After a year or so of exuding a courteous vibrancy toward the British Crown, Hitler successfully coaxed Chamberlain into an unsuspecting acquiescence. The German Chancellor had always complied with British foreign policy in the past – which was quite flexible given Britain's detached Eastern proclivities; but now, with Britain corralled into the scene by way of potential French intervention, it seemed that the reciprocal Anglo-German consideration Chamberlain once discerned was, in reality, a one sided farce.

Prior to his second assemblage with the German Chancellor, the possibility of an altercation proved unthinkable to Chamberlain and was treated as such; after all, why would Hitler reject the Czechs' reluctant acceptance to the very terms he proposed just a week prior at Berchtesgaden? The only viable answer to this rhetorical presupposition was marginalized by the British Cabinet. Indeed, very little attention was paid to Churchill and his cronies who were convinced ever since the *Anschluss* that Hitler's apparent dominion over Chamberlain's malleable policies would not be left untested by further indulgences. With the latter perception prevailing, at least in effect, Chamberlain sulked in confusion while Churchill squirmed in the back benches at his own government's inability or, perhaps refusal, to recognize what he understood to be a blatant act of defiance.

What apology could possibly be made for Chamberlain regarding not only his bamboozled relations with Hitler at Godesberg, but his neutral attitude toward him thereafter? Cato's Guilty Men suggests an explanation: the Prime Minister was blind to Hitler's mania for European dominance while Churchill was cunningly perspicacious of it.³² This painfully shallow justification is as unrewarding as it is misguided. It is guilty of presuming Hitler's long-residing malevolence and falsely casts an aura of incompetence over Chamberlain while offering no real elucidation of Churchill's divergent perception beyond an imaginary schism of interpersonal intelligence. With this, extravagant complexities – such as military capabilities, economic influences, diplomatic uncertainties, and the quandary of European peace – have been compacted into a single glib rejoinder intent on staging a Churchillian perception of this long-standing enigma.

However strange Chamberlain's trust in Hitler seemed to Churchill or erroneous it may remain to the characteristic contemporary historian, his conviction was not without good foundation. To explain matters, Chamberlain understood the Third Reich as a continuation of the preceding German regimes; the distinction between the Nazi party and the Weimar Republic – namely, the political axioms of Otto von Bismarck which the latter regime bolstered – was simply unwarranted in his mind. Correlating the two, Chamberlain superimposed the British-friendly policies of Bismarck unto the Third Reich: to wit, the Kaiser's hope to avoid war through preserving an Anglo-German status quo via colonial acquisition. Correspondingly, Chamberlain accepted Hitler as an advocate for German greatness rather than a lunatic hell-bent on European dominance.³³

This view, and Chamberlain with it, has wrongfully received heavy backlash in the academic community. Historians of appeasement such as Niall Ferguson and Margaret George snarl at any correlation made between Hitler and Bismarckian policy.³⁴

The former distinguishes, “Hitler did not want a greater Germany” as the Weimar Republic did, “he wanted the greatest possible Germany.”³⁵ Beyond the alliterate properties of this witty yet hollow remark, Ferguson offers no differentiator with regard to Hitler’s expansionary aspirations compared with those of Bismarck; if anything the former is simply an aggrandizement of the latter and Ferguson is conflating nationalist ambitions with tyrannical obsessions.

Ferguson’s chapter *Defending the Indefensible* in his work, War of the World, briefly admits and quickly dismisses the two regimes’ shared desire to annex Austria, their identical fear of eliciting a coalitional opposition, and their similar animosity toward the Soviet Union.³⁶ If it is true that the Weimar Republic sought to carve out an Eastern European sphere of influence at the expense of the Soviets – a claim which German historian Fritz Fischer^{***} makes and Ferguson cedes – then how stubborn it must be to deny the correlation between such a statement and Hitler’s desire to “annihilate what he saw as the principal threats to [Germany’s] existence, namely the Jews and Soviet Communism.”³⁷ Further, what counterargument could be offered as it pertains to the Third Reich’s annexation of Austria? Surely such an identical benchmark should not be categorized as a step in an altogether separate, wicked agenda – such a prerogative would be ludicrous. In light of these common interests, perhaps it is not so absurd to understand why Chamberlain viewed these two regimes as a cohesive Germanic political system disjointed by nothing more than a turbulent period of domestic politics.

*** The *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing* describes Fischer: “Arguably the most important German historian of the 20th century, Fritz Fischer affected a radical reappraisal not only of the politics of imperial Germany prior to and during World War I, but also of the other world powers. He also postulated a continuity of imperialist aggression on the part of Germany from the Kaiser’s time to the Third Reich. His first post-World War II book, *Griff nacht der Weltmacht* (1961; *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*, 1967), created an unprecedented and acrimonious debate among, first, German colleagues, and then internationally within the entire discipline of modern European diplomatic and political history.”

To offer an exposition of Churchill's perspective and Ferguson's defense of it, while Bismarck did attempt to avoid war with Britain, it appears, at least by 22 September 1938, Hitler was trying to provoke one. What else could be made of the Chancellor's harshened terms at Godesberg wherein little *real* value would be gained? To Churchill, the correlations between the Third Reich and the Weimar republic were coincidental at most – in any case, they simply did not matter. This is precisely where the perceptions of the two subjects split regarding Hitler's nature: Churchill identified Hitler as unique because he envisaged him as a war monger while Chamberlain did not identify Hitler as a war monger because he did not envisage him as unique.

Their inverted reasoning unveils much, but the ambiguity with regard to whose judgment was superior still lingers in light of Hitler's amicable regard for British policy over the preceding half-decade. From November 1933, Hitler sought a naval agreement with Britain and secured one in June 1935 – overriding the wishes of his Foreign Ministry and the German Navy. How perplexing such a pursuit would seem had the Führer intended to war with Britain just three years later – or even sooner. Intricately enough, the unsuspecting fidelity into which Hitler coaxed Chamberlain over the preceding months was ensconced in a larger cocoon of Anglo-friendly policy years in the making.

More importantly, though less intuitively, why should Germany want war with Britain even if victory seemed obtainable? German Chief of the Army General Staff Franz Halder elucidates, "The reason is that if we crush Britain's military power, the British Empire will collapse. That is of no use to Germany... but would benefit only Japan, America, and others."³⁸ With this view, firstly merited by an unwanted upsurge of America and other quasi-superpowers and secondly by the "racial affinity" Hitler

recognized between the Germans and the English, the Chancellor's "almost touching solicitude for the welfare of the British Empire" appeared to be anything but disingenuous.³⁹

The rancor which accumulated between Britain and Germany in the later years of the 1930s may have been a result of recent frustration with the British Government or, rather, a long-planned scheme of deception. No one can be certain; though, if the former conjecture is true and had Parliament not been split on its policy of appeasement, Hitler's germinating anxiety toward the West may have remained dormant enough to circumvent a war entirely. Perhaps it was Hitler's ill-faith in Chamberlain's ability to control the growing insurgence of anti-appeasers within Parliament that forced him to elicit further aggression preemptively while Britain was still economically and militarily debilitated. Notwithstanding, Ockham's razor does tend to abet the latter, premeditated scenario. Whatever one may speculate, each man had his reasons for seeing what he did in Hitler, and each man would hold true to his own perception – that was until 22 September 1938.

Godesberg changed everything for Chamberlain. Whether the steepened Sudeten demands were Hitler's attempt at instigating a war with Britain, or merely a desperate effort to squeeze the remaining droplets of appeasement from Chamberlain's humanitarianism, or both, he could not be certain. Whatever Hitler was to the Prime Minister in the past, he was no longer; until war ensued or a settlement was reached, Chamberlain could not know what Hitler's intent was – and even then, all prior inclinations would remain a mystery. The uncertainty with which Chamberlain had now been infused provoked him to reconsider the validity of Churchill's depiction of Hitler and adopt a policy which was not contingent upon either man's outlook, but instead, a

policy of a bi-axiomatic nature which played to both prospects; forcing the Führer to decide which face he would reveal to the world.

Britain pointed at Hitler a double edged sword; the Chancellor could no longer guise himself as an innocent, rational actor forced into a war by Edvard Beneš or, in case of a settlement, a virtuous leader who resided above the crudeness of his enemy. Instead, with pressure of a decision reallocated back onto Germany by way of a similar Western opacity, Hitler would emerge as an irrational brute who had to be coddled into an agreement like a bratty child or, more menacingly, a man who deliberately chose to delve the world into carnage. The war he would fight would not be the one he wanted to fight – if he wanted to fight one. Similarly, the Sudeten would not be relinquished as easily or as beneficial to his public image and German domestic morale as he might have hoped – if he desired a nonviolent accord. Britain would reposition Germany in the spotlight henceforth; there would be no further appeasement beyond the Sudeten and the Chancellor would not get the lands he desired in Hungary and Poland which he expressed at Godesberg. Indeed, British foreign policy over the four days preceding the Munich Agreement may not have been as yielding as history has conventionally suggested.

I

25 September 1938: A Tense Gathering

It had been four agonizing days since Chamberlain returned to London with the grim news of Hitler's Godesberg Memorandum. While the British waited for Beneš and his Cabinet to brew over their new terms, a maudlin ambience of betrayal dampened the spirits of Parliament's upper rung. After seventy-two hours of debate amongst President Beneš, his presidential predecessor Jan Masaryk, and other essential Czech politicians, Prague agreed to reject the Memorandum. Whether the gauntlet was thrown by Hitler for doubling down on his bid for the Sudetenland; by Beneš for refusing the former such a luxury; by Chamberlain who remained inclined to feed the German war machine an additional 3.8 million Sudeten-'Germans'; or by the sheer ill-fate of clashing self-interests and fatal misunderstandings, it stood that the lynchpin which had heretofore kept the cogs of war from turning was now dislodged.

Three days wasted in Czech deliberation, Chamberlain held a gathering with French Premier Édouard Daladier and French Minister of Foreign Affairs George Bonnet with matching intentions to hash out a firm strategy regarding Germany.¹ Though they both desired a cohesive plan, with Hitler's 1 October threat so near, Chamberlain hoped to foster both a tactical plan and a diplomatic approach while

Daladier thought only to brace for the impact of war. With Chamberlain reluctant to discuss military logistics before diplomatic ones and Daladier disinclined to entertain the idea of another outreach to Germany until he fortified his own defenses, the majority of the meeting was far from productive.

William Manchester, historian of appeasement and author of The Last Lion: Alone, 1932-1940, contends that Chamberlain's reluctance to focus unilaterally on war preparations with Bonnet and Daladier stemmed from his complete denial of what doom seemed to inevitably await both Britain and France.² This deduction is reasonable, but false. Chamberlain's discontent with France's wartime disposition did not result from neglecting the German threat, in fact, just the opposite: it was precisely his keen concern of it which fueled his ambition to work with the little time he had left to concoct a diplomatic strategy before he was forced into war by way of a German invasion of the Sudeten. Furthermore, the disconnect which Daladier and Chamberlain experienced prior to the arrival of French Chief of Staff General Maurice Gamelin was not prompted out of Chamberlain's ill-desire to plan for an impending war, but his superior desire to hash out a diplomatic plan before the General arrived – seeing as the French representation present erstwhile was lacking in military knowledge and abundant in diplomatic savvy. What's more, Manchester, as is common amongst most scholars in both appeasement and anti-appeasement camps, portrays Chamberlain's actions of the 25th as if they were entirely unaffected by Churchill's call for arms. Though the latter's conception of what this call for arms would look like was impractical, his wartime mentality was not; as such, Chamberlain embraced it – and strongly so.

The compounded policy which was eventually reached by near dawn of the 26th – comprising of Wilson’s intended visit to Berlin and a wartime accord with the French* – walked the fine line between appeasement and resistance. Though Churchill had called for the notion of a Grand Alliance instead of merely an accord with the French, such an endeavor proved to be too risky and, in the worst case, impossible given the timeframe the British were given before Germany swore to attack the Sudeten. An assurance to the French was the most threatening action the British could afford to make without jeopardizing Wilson’s mission to Berlin or instigating a war by way of audacious aggression. This two-pronged action, coupled with the Cabinet’s wartime preparations subsequent to the meeting’s conclusion, is demonstrative of the recondite façade in which Britain would mask itself over the next four days; it was the first step in transposing the responsibility of Europe’s fate onto Germany which would hereafter be re-framed by Britain as an irrational aggressor.

GETTING NOWHERE

Left with a bitter taste in his mouth after Hitler’s coarse and undiplomatic retraction of his Berchtesgaden Memorandum, Beneš and Masaryk concluded that Hitler’s thirst for territorial expansion would only prove satiable after Czechoslovakia was devoured in its entirety – and maybe not even then.³ As such, Beneš wrote Chamberlain on 25 September refusing Czechoslovakia’s compliance:

* After hours of quarreling, the meeting concluded with a promise from Chamberlain to bolster French forces in aiding Czechoslovakia if Hitler invaded the Sudetenland. Still, this assurance was predicated on the understanding that Wilson would first fly to Berlin in an attempt to inveigle Hitler into an international conference wherein the Sudetenland could be transferred from the Czechs’ control to the Germans’; albeit without the consent of Prague.

“It is a de facto ultimatum of the sort usually presented to a vanquished nation and not a proposition to a sovereign state which has shown the greatest possible readiness to make sacrifices for the appeasement of Europe... The proposals go far beyond what we agreed to in the so-called Anglo-French plan.⁴ They deprive us of every safeguard for our national existence. We are to yield up large proportions of our carefully prepared defenses and admit the German armies deep into our country before we have been able to organize it on the new basis or make any preparations for its defense. Our whole national and economic independence would automatically disappear with the acceptance of Herr Hitler’s plan. The whole process of moving the population is to be reduced to panic flight on the part of those who will not accept the German Nazi regime ... My Government wishes to declare in all solemnity that Herr Hitler’s demands in their present form are absolutely and unconditionally unacceptable to my Government. Against these new and cruel demands my Government feel bound to make their utmost resistance and we shall do so, God helping. The nation of St. Wenceslas, John Hus and Thomas Masaryk[†] will not be a nation of slaves. We rely upon the two great Western democracies, whose wishes we have followed much against our judgment, to stand by us in our hour of trial.”⁵

It was the correspondence Chamberlain dreaded most. Given France’s treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia and a similar accord between Britain and France, it was becoming increasingly likely that Britain would be drawn into a war by proxy of signature agreements. However understandable Prague’s noncompliance appeared, it was nevertheless troubling. As it was, Czechoslovakia’s armed forces were dwarfed by those of Germany – a natural relation given that the Czech state had been founded merely two decades prior at the Treaty of Versailles.⁶ Sensibly, its continued existence was wholly contingent on Anglo-French military aid in the case of foreign aggression, and such reliance was just called upon.

At 9:25 P.M. on Sunday, 25 September, the inner circle of Chamberlain’s advisors assembled at the Cabinet table with Daladier and Bonnet.⁷ The two had flown to London immediately after Beneš’ rejection of Hitler’s Godesberg Memorandum to discuss their lamentable position regarding their nation’s burden of upholding its treaty

[†] Father of Jan Masaryk.

obligations to Prague. This much the British Cabinet could have guessed. As far as the French armed forces were concerned, they were in a miserable position – considered weak in the air, militarily debilitated, and constantly bogged down in its own political turmoil. After wading through twelve different political regimes from 1929 to 1933,⁸ France seemed to be constantly distracted by a multitude of massive labor strikes,⁹ extreme public pacifism, delayed impacts of the great depression, and fears of a domestic fascist uprising in the midst of the Spanish Civil War.¹⁰ What came as more of a surprise – especially in light of their grim locus – was Daladier’s adamant advocacy for military action.

After the German occupation of the Rhineland, Daladier had grown skeptical toward Hitler and his expansionary inclinations. His wariness was heightened by the recent Sudeten Crisis and even more so by Hitler’s point pressing Godesberg Memorandum. Quite plainly, Daladier had no qualms with going to war with Germany if it could do so effectively; yet, it remained that Britain’s involvement was a prerequisite for any hope of success. General Maurice Gamelin was on the other side of the issue; he was all too aware of France’s feeble economic, political, and military conditions[‡] to back, in good conscience, his Minister’s penchants for war. Even with aid from Britain, the potential casualties Gamelin expected were too great to abandon further peace initiatives. Upon being made aware of Czechoslovakia’s rejection of the Godesberg Memorandum, Gamelin informed British ambassador Sir Eric Phipps that “all that is best in France is against war, *almost* at any price.”¹¹

While Bonnet and Daladier took their seats, Gamelin was still en route to London. His delay, the cause of which remains unclear, would leave Bonnet and

[‡] Further Details are located in Chapter III under the section: A Disconcerted Cabinet.

Daladier absent of any readily-available military logistics for the first half of the meeting and, in a similar fashion, make partisan the interests of the French and British. So it was, to Gamelin and to Chamberlain, all that was best in France had yet to arrive to London. With Chamberlain noticeably downtrodden by his setback at Godesberg and even more so by his Cabinet's disappointment, it was not difficult for Daladier and Bonnet to sniff out the stench of distress amongst the British Ministry. Reciprocating a similar despondence, the British were intricately aware of France's military weakness and helpless tactical vantages as it pertained to aiding Czechoslovakia. As a result, Chamberlain and Daladier, similarly frustrated yet dissimilarly motivated, proved wholly and absolutely incompatible throughout the evening.

Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office William Strang, who was present with Chamberlain at Berchtesgaden and again at Godesberg, noted that the Anglo-French meeting on the night of the 25th was "the most painful which it has ever been [his] misfortune to attend."¹² The conference commenced with an intensely itemized recapitulation of the Prime Minister's late meeting with the German Chancellor. Chamberlain incepted his narration with unabashed details favorably slanted toward the British in an attempt to recapture the sense of dissidence he exuded toward Hitler at Godesberg. Daladier quickly cut-off Chamberlain's transparently self-inclined summary with a curt announcement: the French Government had, just hours before arriving, unanimously rejected Hitler's new proposals – a much firmer and more tangible resistance than Chamberlain had attempted to convey on behalf of his own government.¹³ Had Parliament reached a similar resolution, all hope at further diplomacy would be snuffed out. In such a case, 26 September might as well have been 1 October – an impression Daladier had just made to the British Ministers.

Halifax, perturbed by Daladier's unwarranted self-assurance, impatiently inquired what the French *knew* to do next. The cutting intonations exaggerated with each side's counter-statement; Halifax's interjection silenced the room's peripheral whispers entirely. Put on the spot by way of undivided attention, Daladier suggested a re-proposal of the Berchtesgaden Memorandum – which Chamberlain knew would be a fruitless effort – and claimed that if it were not accepted, Britain and France would be obliged to uphold their duty in aiding Czechoslovakia against German aggression.¹⁴ Chamberlain was blatantly displeased. Offended by Daladier's audacity to opt for war as the significantly inferior cohort, the Prime Minister fell to the same confounded and enraged look that took him at Godesberg.

After a brief, air thickening abeyance, Chamberlain snubbed Daladier's proposition by suggesting another proposal to Hitler in which the situation could be resolved without conflict; in essence, a median between the Berchtesgaden Ultimatum and the Godesberg Memorandum. What, exactly such a proposition would look like was difficult for the Cabinet to grasp – let alone the French; what hair-splitting design could satisfy both Hitler and Beneš? It was clear that neither side possessed a solution for the time being. Recognizing this, Daladier responded in a plaintive fashion: the Godesberg Memorandum was Hitler's final proposal. If the Czechs were unwilling to accept it, then war would be imminent. In such a circumstance, France would be forced to fulfill her treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia. It was evident to Chamberlain and his Cabinet that Daladier expected the British to take up arms as well – he had mobilized a million French Soldiers to Germany's western front with that very expectation.¹⁵

Before the Prime Minister had a chance to respond, Sir John Simon of the King's Counsel, fired a series of questions at Bonnet and Daladier: in the case of a German

invasion of the Sudeten, would French forces hold at the Maginot Line[§] or would they invade Germany? Did their combat-readiness include the French Air Force or merely ground troops? Was their home turf fortified against intense German aerial assaults? Had they consulted the Soviets? If so, what support, if any, could they be counted on to offer?^{16**} Growing ill-tempered at the hostile manner in which they were being treated, Daladier and Bonnet began to give convoluted and vague responses to the Royal Advisor.¹⁷ Simon remained relentless in his interrogation of the French until finally Daladier exclaimed in a rather fast paced outburst that it would be “ridiculous to mobilize French land forces only to leave them under arms doing nothing in their fortifications.”¹⁸ The French already decided that if Hitler invaded the Sudeten, there would be a land offensive into Germany while its prime military bases and industrial warehouses would be attacked by air.¹⁹ A congruous hush blanketed the room. It was plain that the British Cabinet was irritated. The nonchalant manner in which the French guests supposed such a vehement consequence was shocking in its offensiveness.

Seizing the opportunity of the discontinued inquisition, Daladier put to the Cabinet some questions of his own: were the British willing to accept Hitler’s Godesberg Memorandum if the Czechs could be compelled to do so as well – would Britain actively pressure them accordingly? Did they truly desire the French to do nothing... in any case whatever? All eyes reverted to Chamberlain. As for the Cabinet, they were unsure of their own sentiments on the matter, let alone their Prime Minister’s. Not to entangle His Majesty’s Government in promises it could not keep, Chamberlain evaded all three

§ A line of protective fortifications constructed after World War I to protect the eastern border of France from German aggression.

** Simon’s unyielding inquisition of the French representation was undoubtedly intended to humiliate the them by demonstrating how little they really knew about the defense measures which they imagined they could design.

inquiries. He simply stated that it was not up to the British, but to the Czechs whether they would change their mind and accept Hitler's new Memorandum or remain resolute in their decision. As far as the French were concerned, Chamberlain continued, it was no place for him to direct foreign forces.²⁰ This was far from helpful.

Though Chamberlain appeared reticent to offer support to the French in case Germany invaded the Sudetenland, it was not because Britain would not stand by France if the latter were to be entangled in a war – it most certainly would have; rather, it was because such terms implied that the Sudetenland could not be relinquished to Germany at any cost. Though France's rejection of Hitler's latest Godesberg Memorandum had been briefly touched upon at the outset of their gathering, it had not been confronted as explicitly as it should have been. The result of which was a torturously unproductive meeting wherein the two parties constantly talked passed one another. As it stood, Chamberlain believed the rejection of Hitler's latest terms by the French was ridiculous, and rightfully so. As it was, the Berchtesgaden Ultimatum – a set of terms to which the Czechs agreed – would have enveloped approximately half of the Sudetenland. It would almost seem irrational not to believe that, through the same propagandist efforts it achieved the first half, Germany would eventually expel Czechs from the remaining half. Accordingly, Daladier and Bonnet viewed Chamberlain as a reluctant coward while Chamberlain thought the French had given up on avoiding a conflict altogether and readily accepted their grim fate of war. The Ministers had spent the last two and one-quarter hours getting nowhere but at each other's throats.

BRIDGING THE GAP

At 11:45 P.M. the Ministers took an hour long recess while the Cabinet conversed amongst itself. Tempers cooled. The much needed break sobered the British to a melancholy reminder of the ticking clock; they had to offer some solution to the French. If war were to ensue, poor communication between themselves and France – or worse, none at all – would most certainly bring about the total obliteration of Western Europe. Reinvigorated with fear, Chamberlain conjured the idea of an outreach mission to Germany. Upon reconvening with the French, he expressed his intent to send Wilson to Berlin the next day equipped with a missive to Hitler wherein Chamberlain would request an international conference to settle the matter of transferring the Sudeten territory to Germany.²¹ In the case that the appeal was rejected by the Chancellor, Wilson would be instructed to divulge a threatening ‘special message’ from the Prime Minister – the contents of which were not mentioned at the meeting. If the latter was also rejected, Chamberlain claimed, then “France would go to war and if that happened it seemed certain that [Britain] should be drawn in.”²²

First Lord of Admiralty Duff Cooper, who held the strongest opposition to Chamberlain’s appeasement inclinations within the Cabinet, had to inquire, almost casually so as not to draw suspicion from the French, if he heard the Prime Minister correctly.²³ It was a complete reversal of the absolute anti-war policy the Ministers had agreed to the months before. Notwithstanding, the contingency plan of adjoined forces was a flimsy assurance – presented more as a supposed hypothetical rather than a wartime accord. As for the first half of Chamberlain’s proposal, Daladier remained reluctant to approve a diplomatic pitch without first being assured of Britain’s commitment to bolstering French forces if a war did commence with Germany. Indeed,

this impasse was a direct result of poor communication between the two representatives. However, mutually disquieted by the hours of tense conferences, they finally had some common ground to work on – though, for now, it remained unstable.

The meeting amongst Chamberlain, his Cabinet, Bonnet, and Daladier broke for a second time without a coherent approach to the chilling situation in which both countries found themselves kindred. Daladier and Bonnet relayed to the French Cabinet of the uncooperative stubbornness on behalf of the British and the relentless prodding of militaristic inquisitions of which they knew close to nothing. Chamberlain was equally as frustrated, but for different reasons. Bonnet and Daladier wanted to discuss a military coalition between Britain and France, yet, without any knowledge of their own auxiliary operations. Again, Chamberlain's reluctance to indulge in such talks and determination to focus on diplomatic approaches heretofore did not stem from his reluctance to cooperate with the French if a war did materialize; instead, the Frenchmen who were present were simply more adept at discussing diplomacy than military tactics. As the Prime Minister understood, it would have been a waste of time to discuss any military logistics before Gamelin arrived when they could have achieved a plan on the diplomatic front in the meantime. The disjointed Western powers needed to bridge the gap if they had any hope of preventing war or, in case they couldn't, winning one.

General Gamelin finally arrived in London during the late hours of the night which bled into the early morning hours of the 26th. In a private conversation with Chamberlain, before talks with Daladier and Bonnet resumed, the General was able to disclose a plethora of military details previously unavailable to the British.²⁴ Though Gamelin did detest an immediate war with Germany, he affirmed, within five days' time, if an agreement between the Czechs and the Germans was not attained, French forces

would attack Germany's West Wall by land and pivotal industrial depots by air.²⁵ He continued to disclose that France had twenty-three divisions on their eastern front – opposing only eight German divisions – and could easily draw troops away from the Sudeten line for Prague to have a fighting chance.²⁶ As for the Czech army, they wielded nearly thirty-four divisions of ground troops along with five-hundred airplanes of their own – a number which he believed could be matched by the Soviet Union.^{††} Notwithstanding, Gamelin admitted, as he had done before and would continue to do over the coming days, he had little hope that Czech resistance would last anything longer than a brief period.

After the meeting between Chamberlain and Gamelin concluded, both sides prepared to reconvene for what most thought to be another fruitless gathering. However, to the pleasant surprise of many, the brief interlude proved to cool the fiery excitements that limited the evening's progress.^{‡‡} Bonnet was remarkably calmer in the presence of Gamelin – especially after the martial inquisition he had been subject to by Simon. As for Chamberlain, he was much more frank regarding his own sentiments on the present situation. The Prime Minister disclosed that he felt strongly Hitler's true intentions could be garnered from his speech scheduled the night of the 26th at the Sportpalast^{§§} and that any decisive action should be postponed until after hearing it. For the present, he admitted that it was doubtful the Czechs would accept the Godesberg Memorandum. If Hitler had not altered his intent in his Sportpalast address – that is to

†† This was a speculation made on behalf of General Gamelin. The fact of the matter was, no one truly knew where the Soviet Union stood on all this. Surely the Soviets would not be cajoled into fighting alongside Germany, but the mutual destruction of the largest powers in Europe would not exactly deter them from sitting idly by through the thick of it and sweep in to take their own stake at the continent afterward.

‡‡ This was undoubtedly a result of Gamelin's meeting with Chamberlain.

§§ A multi-purpose winter-sport venue built in 1910 Berlin.

say, if Wilson's diplomatic meeting with the German Chancellor just hours prior was unsuccessful – then Britain would stand by France's side in bolstering Czech opposition to German forces.

Daladier was quite content to hear a firm promise instead of the unsatisfactory circumventions he had quickly grown tired of. He agreed to these terms without hesitation. The three Frenchmen rose from their seats; the Premier wished Chamberlain the best of luck on Wilson's expedition to Berlin and in a blasé fashion, while inching toward the exit, he said, "If Germany attacked Czechoslovakia and hostilities ensued, the French intended to go to war and to commence hostilities with Germany within five days."²⁷ With that guarantee, the French Ministers exited the room.

THE LIMITATIONS OF ALTERNATIVE POLICIES

After Gamelin's arrival, an arrangement was almost immediately hashed out regarding German opposition – the diplomatic plan having been wholly concocted by the British in absence of any constructive aid from the French. In any case, a covenant between the French and the British was finally reached: a compounded act of implementing an outreach mission of appeasement coupled with the coordination of Anglo-French armed forces. It is blatant enough to categorize the former act of diplomacy as a product of Chamberlain, but the latter seems to be a dilution of Churchill's Grand Alliance. If Britain truly intended to guise itself under the ambiguity of diplomatic efforts coupled with wartime preparations, then why was Churchill's aggressive approach substituted with a seemingly much more conservative coalition with only France?

Churchill had long pushed for the creation of what he called a Grand Alliance in the face of, what he perceived to be, Hitler's voracious thirst for expansion. The idea behind this proposal was to corral different countries – selected by Britain and France – into a unilateral defense agreement, based on the League of Nations, which would collectively resist German aggression against Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. Its suggestion was met with reactionary recoil from Chamberlain and the Cabinet: inter-state alliances and treaty obligations were the cause of Europe's trouble in 1914 and proved, again, to be the cause of Britain's current predicament. Notwithstanding, Churchill's Grand Alliance is lamented by himself as well as historian William Manchester as the ideal preemptive opposition that never was.²⁸ Perhaps this is true; yet, what major forces, if any, did Hitler not already envisage as a pending British wartime ally that also could have deterred him from further aggression? With the ideological line in the sand drawn by the Spanish Civil War, all nations of significant influence appeared to have already chosen a side – save for one: the United States. With a formal U.S. dedication to Britain, the latter's military debilitation would be offset by their powerful cousin across the pond. In essence, Germany's strength and Britain's weakness would become moot and war might be avoided. How curious it is that Chamberlain was unwilling to acknowledge the possibility of American intervention while Churchill demanded its prospection.

Chamberlain's profound respect for legislative diplomacy, and Churchill's recognition of its fickleness, explains their diverging outlooks on the 1937 American Neutrality Act and, consequently, the possibility of American dependence. It had barely been a year since the U.S. Congress "prohibited exporting arms and munitions to any belligerent nation."²⁹ For the Prime Minister, American neutrality was as serious as

Belgium's – the U.S. had made its decision and there was little Britain, a nation which it had no vital interest in defending, could do to change it.

Chamberlain's honor of federal proclamations – for which he paid the price at Godesberg – stemmed from his long-time career as a politician. Legislation was all Chamberlain knew; from his start as a Liberal Unionist for Birmingham City Council for the All Saints' Ward within his father's Parliamentary Constituency to his rise to Lord Mayor, and eventually through the ranks of federal government, Chamberlain had no military background to speak of. Political bartering was his trade; he had become a master of give and take governance which had been so unfailingly successful for his ascendancy through Britain's political sphere. Yet, the axioms of inner-state rule would not segue into inter-state policy as seamlessly as he might have hoped. Any onlooker in the late 1930s – whether pro or anti-appeaser – could see that Chamberlain had been cheated out of the reciprocal respect he deserved from Hitler over the preceding months. He was in uncharted territory as far as political bargaining was concerned and was learning so the hard way.

Still, peace was his self-proclaimed mission: "We should seek by all means in our power to avoid war, by analyzing possible causes, by trying to remove them, by discussion in a spirit of collaboration and good will."³⁰ Regrettably, an exchange of 'good will' that may have been standard amongst the Crown's Parliamentary subjects was restricted to the relationships between fellow Englishmen; all bets were off in foreign affairs – especially as it pertained to dictatorships. Whether or not it is true for all nations, it seems, from what can be learned from Anglo-German relations, one nation will only cooperate with another to the extent that collaboration outweigh what it can achieve independently. Unfortunately, Britain remained a benefactor of would-be

teamwork while Germany saw greater accomplishments in unilateral action. Ironically, Chamberlain's statesman-like outlook would blind him to the very element (a Grand Alliance) that would incite a balance of power between Britain and Germany and, as a result, incline the latter toward collaboration rather than rogue action.

Though Churchill pushed for such a comprehensive coalition, it was more a plea for military support rather than a prod for negotiations. The power-politics of yesteryear that Churchill knew from his decades of military experience effectively suppressed any inclination he may have held in favor of reviving communications with Hitler. His service in Cuba, India, Sudan, Oldham, and South Africa proved to fashion a mind of political, economic, and military aggression rather than one of compromise. Moreover, his steady rise to First Lord of the Admiralty and eventual transition to Parliament – wherein he would become Chancellor of the Exchequer – was followed by political isolation by Chamberlain's rise to Prime Minister. Given the intensifying European stage by the late 1930s, Parliament's upper echelon was not large enough for both Chamberlain and Churchill's antithetical perceptions regarding this matter – though it should have been. Had each man been willing to entertain the principles of his counterpart prior to 25 September, it seems that Chamberlain might have backed Churchill's call for a Grand Alliance – as a means to a more powerful stance in negotiation – while, as a result, Churchill might have backed the re-opening of negotiations in light of their improved bargaining position.^{***}

Perhaps, for this reason, Churchill's Grand Alliance was indeed the preemptive opposition that never was; yet, only if it had been considered months earlier and with the

^{***} Here, the absence of a fox-lion dichotomy within Britain's elite political sphere in prior years undercut a promising opportunity for Britain.

foresight of heightened German belligerence. Even if each man's perspective was brought to the forefront of the other's perception now, it remained that just under one week – from the Czechs' rejection of Hitler's Godesberg Memorandum to the Chancellor's threat of Sudeten mobilization – was too narrow a time frame to garner support from the United States. Thus, it held that the Prime Minister was tactically obligated – in both a military and diplomatic sense – to promise a dual-ended solution to the French and *only* to the French: one more shot at diplomacy supplemented with a coalition against Germany in case of its failure. It was too late for any alternatives.

INCORPORATING BOTH COMPLEXIONS

After Daladier, Bonnet, and Gamelin retreated to Paris, the British Cabinet convened to discuss an assortment of emergency defense measures. It was nearly the dawn of the 26th; the sleep deprivation amongst the Ministers had set in. Nevertheless, with the insistent clock winding down to 1 October, they wasted little time in making the proper arrangements: they mobilized the Anti-Aircraft and Coastal Defense Units of the Territorial Army; placed the Royal Air Force on high alert; recalled Parliament to Central London; and arranged a national broadcast for Chamberlain on the evening of the 27th. The Prime Minister conducted the meeting much more efficiently now than he had with the French – with exhaustion streamlining his decisions, he appeared rigid in manner. His prompt and decisive decisions regarding war preparations were encouraging to the Cabinet while simultaneously frightening in their realness.^{31††} The attitude toward war

†† Duff Cooper, who had burdened the Prime Minister countless times about the policies he pursued, felt obligated – in light of the new, war-contingent stance Chamberlain adopted in coalition with the French – to apologize for pressing his opinions “too frequent and too forcibly.” He even went so
(Note Continued on Next Page)

preparations amongst Parliament's elite shifted from frightened denial to that of morbid commitment; Chamberlain himself "placed no particular hopes on this last appeal."³² As he and his Cabinet understood, war was coming, and there was little else Britain could do to stop it.

The deplorable calamity that awaited Europe on 1 October wrecked whatever relationship the British once had with the Germans. The Europe they lived in was now different – the rapport between Hitler and Chamberlain was now different; whatever reason the latter had to trust the former was thrust into jeopardy at Godesberg and nearly broken over the strenuous Anglo-French muster. The Prime Minister was not motivated to pursue further peace initiatives by the remaining fidelity he held toward Hitler – such a trust no longer existed: it is plain in his subsequent militaristic preparations and undeniable in his austere spirit. He was betrayed and he knew it.

Rather, Chamberlain remained undeterred in his search for peace alongside war preparations because he was not a Chancellor, he was a Prime Minister. He did not lead a fascist state, but a constitutional monarchy; he was not motivated by racial decree or territorial redemption – instead, he was fueled by his responsibility to the welfare of his country. If there was any chance at salvaging the peace of the continent, he had a civil and moral duty to strive after it. He could not give up merely because he was lied to at Berchtesgaden or swindled at Godesberg – foreign policy has no place for vindictive feelings or vengeance instigated by dishonor. Historian A.J.P Taylor describes Britain's policy:

"It was a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British life, a triumph for those who had preached equal justice between peoples, a triumph

far as to humbly offer his resignation from the Cabinet, but Chamberlain would have no such action.

for those who had courageously denounced the harshness and short-sightedness of Versailles.”³³

The means by which Britain sought after further diplomatic initiatives remains a critical byproduct of Chamberlain and Churchill’s contrasting wills. Though the Prime Minister appeared to be the unilateral conductor of British foreign policy over the preceding months, Churchill’s call for arms against the Nazis germinated from a distant echo in the back benches of Parliament after the Rhineland, grew into a nearby bellow after the *Anschluss*, and matured into a fiery shout by 25 September 1938. Over time, the lion instilled some courage into the fox which it so desperately needed. Chamberlain knew that he could no longer sit idly by as he had done in the case of the Rhineland and *Anschluss*. He could not simply dismiss Daladier’s call for a coalition at the Anglo-French meeting; such abandonment could have resulted in either the French desertion of the Czechs – left to be annihilated by Germany far beyond the Sudetenland – or a French-Czech resistance wherein the latter would drag the former down with it. In either case, British disengagement would have merely staved off the German problem until it was too large to overcome.

Antithetically balancing the scale, Chamberlain still remained resolute in his caution. Without a firm stance from the United States, Churchill’s Grand Alliance proved too risky to offer any counter-legislative or military declarations. Who is to say that an attempted elicitation of such a coalition would not have prompted Hitler to strike preemptively while Germany still wielded the upper hand regarding military power and before America felt any obligation to come to Britain’s aid? In any case, cajoling the United States into a Grand Alliance before 1 October would be beyond the bounds of possibility. The two-pronged approach of an Anglo-French coalition contingent upon

diplomacy's failure was, in reality, the true medium between Chamberlain and Churchill. As such, the lion's unshaken fortitude and the fox's diplomatic dexterity both played their roles on 25 September. Wilson would fly to Berlin in attempt to salvage what little rapport remained between Germany and Britain; there was, once again, nothing for Chamberlain to do but sit and wait.

II

26 September 1938: Berlin

The Monday issue of *The Manchester Guardian* was saturated with a plethora of articles lamenting the deteriorating situation of diplomatic affairs over the last forty-eight hours.¹ The Czechs' discontent; the agitating Anglo-French meeting; the accelerated German armament along the Sudeten boarder – everything, every pressure of the preceding month had accumulated into a fine point by the dawn of the 26th. Today, Wilson would meet with Hitler to offer him the Sudetenland on behalf of yet unbeknownst to, and against the will of, the Czechs. Britain's dual-sided policy, ready to hold true to their promise to the French if the Chancellor rejected the idea of a conference under which the matter would be settled, was challenged when Hitler neither accepted nor rejected the offer, but instead, dismissed Wilson with groundless anger and a convoluted response. This curious reaction was only made stranger by Hitler's speech at the Sportpalast wherein he held firm in his demands at Godesberg while simultaneously remained open to British diplomacy. One thing was clear, Germany had not yet felt the pressure of Britain's reflective opaqueness offered by their dual-sided foreign policy; if anything, Hitler remained resolute in demonstrating his own ambiguity.

In light of such a paradoxical dilemma, by the end of the 26th, British foreign policy remained in the very state it had throughout the 25th – harboring proclivities for both war and peace. Still, how was this possible when Wilson’s visit to Berlin was seen as a failure; driving a stake even further between appeasers and anti-appeasers? Furthermore, why was Churchill’s inclination to defend Prague largely discredited though military fortifications on the domestic front continued as if war were certain – especially after the news of Hitler’s initial, adverse reaction to Chamberlain’s letter was relayed to London? What implications did this have on Britain’s foreign policy?

To frame the matter, although Wilson’s visit to Berlin was the conciliatory side of the dual-policy the British had just arranged with the French the day prior, counterbalancing their pact to oppose Germany in case of a Sudeten invasion, it would remain a compound mission in and of itself. Wilson would, in effect, extend his invitation to the Chancellor for an international conference and, after Hitler’s Sportpalast speech, reveal to him the threatening ‘special message’ Chamberlain intended to relay if the Chancellor had not already agreed to the meeting. Further, Wilson’s visit was not a failure. Though it had been understood as one by both appeasers and anti-appeasers, it rightfully put it to Hitler to decide whether he would have peace or war; simply because the Chancellor had not yet made a move toward one outcome or the other did not mean that the British did not effectively pressure the German Government with the burden of making a decision – an act which held undesired implications for Hitler and Germany.

Accordingly, the wedge that Wilson’s ‘failed’ endeavor drove between appeasers and anti-appeasers did not place more pressure on Britain to choose one stance over the other more than it created a stir amongst Parliament. The political implications of diplomacy’s success or failure were significant for many politicians in light of their public

and professional allegiance – especially for Chamberlain and Churchill. Still, in reality, there was no heightened pressure for Britain to move out of the indeterminate state of foreign policy that it had resided in since Godesberg, or rather, after the Czechs' rejection of Hitler's Memorandum the day before. Though Churchill maintained that efforts toward bolstering Sudeten resistance should be executed, it stood that his blunder at Gallipoli in 1915 served to undermine his advocacy for armed deployment in the Sudeten. As such, the inner-sphere of British governance was not convinced by Churchill's predilection for war any more than it was pleased to consider further pacification of an expansionist state. As it pertained to the provisional policies employed on the 25th, domestic uncertainty afforded by Churchill's lamentable past served to provide Chamberlain and his Cabinet with an opportunity to enact the critical two-pronged policy it needed to embrace. Moreover, and most importantly, the conditions under which Britain promised to assume wartime mobilization with the French had not been fully met in light of Hitler's convoluted response to Wilson. This ill-resolve would leave Britain unwilling to gage the situation as diplomatically unsalvageable – further postponing a materialization of its contingent commitment to aiding the French.

A FRACTURED WEST

With war clouds looming overhead and growing darker by the hour, the British populace scurried to prepare for the worst. Wilson's gathering with the Chancellor was the final meeting Hitler had promised Chamberlain he would hold before taking action against Czechoslovakia. If the Führer refused Wilson's proposal for an international conference, Britain was almost certainly going to war on the 1st. Today's issue of *The Times* included articles from the Beneš' rejection of Hitler's Memorandum to the

frustrating meeting between the French and British the night before – the periodical appropriately deemed the 25th ‘Gas Mask Sunday.’² Staunch opponent of Chamberlain and open critic of his own party’s stance on appeasement, Leo Amery, was quoted, “Are we to surrender to ruthless brutality a free people whose cause we have espoused but are now to throw to the wolves to save our own skins or are we still able to stand up to a bully?”³

Harold Macmillan, a back-benched politician after harshly criticizing Chamberlain and his predecessor Stanley Baldwin for the preceding two years, remarked that the British people were on the cusp of a German Air raid that “would be beyond all imagination.”⁴ In light of the leaps and bounds by which the aviation industry had grown, the threat from the air, in particular with gas, was for the first time, quite real. The only reference that London had regarding poisonous gas deployment was that of Italian Dictator Benito Mussolini’s assault against the Abyssinians in 1935; its destruction had been made widely known by newspapers and film reels. War, to borrow a phrase from Winston Churchill, threatened to be a disaster of the first magnitude.⁵

As a direct response to Beneš’ London missive regarding his Godesberg rejection, the Prime Minister put to him the idea of an 11th hour conference – as he had discussed with the French. Although this request came after Beneš’ presidential predecessor, Czech Politician Jan Masaryk, publicly announced that his “government feels bound to make their utmost resistance,”⁶ the two Czech leaders nevertheless agreed to discuss the idea amongst their Cabinet. Accompanying Chamberlain’s essay to Prague was a draft of similar nature to Hitler which, as Chamberlain expressed, was put to the Czechs for their consideration prior to its dispatch to Berlin.⁷ After Masaryk conferred with Beneš over the phone on the night of the 25th into the early morning of the 26th and

again at midday, they had agreed to acquiesce to the Prime Minister's request. The elite sphere of the Czech Government concluded that it would be a mistake to deviate from diplomacy wherein France and Britain were engrossed and take up one in which they sequestered themselves from their allies – only to maintain talks with Germany bilaterally.⁸ This is especially true when French and British components offered a basis from which Czechoslovakia maintained a more persuasive bargaining position. If they had chosen to do without Anglo-French aid in such a situation, they would have undercut the pull of their own demands, a pull that was already quite anemic. Moreover, it was possible that Anglo-French openness to renegotiating their own terms as it pertained to their conditions with Germany could further benefit potential outcomes for Prague.⁹ So it stood, the Czechoslovakian government agreed that they must seek a new basis of settlement under the guardianship of their allies.

Though the Czechs did not acquiesce to Chamberlain's requested conference until the afternoon of the 26th, the Prime Minister had already directed Wilson to Berlin hours before with the intent of proposing the gathering to Hitler. Masaryk and Beneš were outraged upon hearing this. It is true that they agreed to a conference and, more, decided that Chamberlain should also approach the German Chancellor. Yet, they had hardly discussed the manner in which it should be proposed – much less approved the German-draft that Chamberlain had attached as an addendum to their own invitation. From the Czech perspective, it was a stark imposition by the British. Prague could only speculate as to the final content of Hitler's invitation: was it an identical draft to that which they had been shown? Or was there other, more sensitive information – of which they would disapprove – embedded within it? They simply had no way of knowing.

Anticipating the disquiet that would ensue, Chamberlain directed British Diplomat Basil Newton to calm any nerves that the two Czech leaders may have had:

*“Explain to the Czechoslovak Government that the communication which is being made to the German Chancellor through Sir Horace Wilson in no way prejudices the position of the Czechoslovak Government. The proposal is simply to substitute a process of negotiation between the Czechoslovak and German Governments for violent military action.”*¹⁰

In reality, the letter that Chamberlain sent to Berlin with Wilson included nothing regarding flexibility of their stance with Germany and remained soft in pushing the point of including participants other than Germany and Czechoslovakia. The opening lines of the message implored Hitler “to agree that representatives of Germany shall meet representatives of the Czechoslovakian Government”¹¹ to remedy the situation with a view to settling, amicably and composedly, the way in which the Sudetenland territory was to be handed over.

While Chamberlain found solace in the presence of his Cabinet’s congenial cognizance after Wilson’s departure, another gathering was taking place a few blocks away, though not one which the Prime Minister would have the pleasure – or perhaps displeasure – of attending. Churchill held an assemblage at his flat in the afternoon hours of the 26th similar to that which he held the morning of the 22nd – when Chamberlain was in Godesberg. After returning to his quarters from a meeting at the Foreign Office, Churchill summarized the de-briefing he had just received regarding the late Anglo-French meeting to his fellow back-benched House Members. He admitted that the “Cabinet hard-liners” and the similarly inclined French representatives – namely Daladier and Bonnet since Gamelin sided with Chamberlain’s anti-war sentiments (incidentally the Frenchman most knowledgeable of military capabilities) – had restored his confidence that had drained from him over the past five and a half days.¹² In fact, to the

shock of many, Churchill exuded a rather tranquil semblance. As he confided in his fellow anti-appeasers, Wilson's mission to Berlin was not a groveling for peace, but instead, an undertaking to give Hitler an opportunity to save face in case he desired to back down from his harshened ultimatum. Though he portrayed a similar optimism which betrayed him on the 22nd, this time, in case a similar fate would befall his hopefulness, Churchill issued an ultimatum to himself and his fellow anti-appeasers: "If Chamberlain rats," wrote English Diplomat Harold Nicolson, Churchill and like-minded peers decided to "form a united block against him."¹³

THE AMBIVALENT IMPETUS OF WILSON'S MISSION

For all of Churchill's talk, it remained simply that – talk. Wilson's visit would position itself in the interim as a defining moment for Britain – unknowing that such an anticipatory milieu would be left unconcluded. Accordingly, the two camps of Parliament staked their reputations on the mission's success or failure. With respect to diplomatic efforts, it may come as no surprise that Churchill had everything to gain from their failure while Chamberlain had everything to lose. They had dictated their fate long ago, but now, the public axioms which their personal sentiments spawned poisoned the very agents from which they originated: Churchill was the face of military action; Chamberlain was the face of political diplomacy. Their stances had been solidified in the eyes of the public and even more so in the minds of fellow politicians. Although the deteriorating undertone of Chamberlain's reputation has been made prominent in history books such as Margaret George's The Warped Vision, Churchill's untrusted military prowess was the more feeble status at the time. No matter how loud Churchill's mantra would grow as he stood on his soapbox, the public and appeasement politicians alike

could not help but think back to a similar cry through which he had effectively rallied support for what would prove to be one of the largest military blunders in British history.

The Gallipoli disaster of 1915 was a direct result of Churchill's one-track scrutiny. A year into the Great War, Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, conceived a proposal to aid their Soviet ally – which had been sequestered by the Central Powers – by executing a trade route through the Dardanelles Strait.* This potential passage would not only grant the Entente powers a supply lane to the Soviet Union, but would also permit access to the Turkish capital Constantinople and much of the nation's industrial powerhouse.¹⁴ If the plan were successful, it would be quite feasible that Turkey would be eliminated from the war while Greece and Bulgaria might find themselves drawn into it against the Central Powers. Naturally, the straight was a prized ambition for Britain and for Churchill; yet, worthy ends are habitually preceded by difficult means. In this case, impossible.

For one, the straits were heavily guarded. To the north, they were protected by the Gallipoli Peninsula, to the south, the Shore of Ottoman Asia. Fortresses were positioned on cliff-tops overlooking the excruciatingly narrow, one-mile shipping lanes.¹⁵ The height advantage of the Turks over any passing naval force was overwhelming; attempting to pass through the straight without first completely annihilating Turkish support would remain next to impossible. Second, military aid from Greece and Bulgaria was a fool's hope. In 1914, Greek Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos had offered the British some 60,000 troops for this type of invasion.¹⁶ Notwithstanding, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey refused as the British were still attempting to cajole the Turks

* A narrow sea passage that linked the Mediterranean Sea with the Sea of Marmora.

into joining forces with the Entente Powers. By the time Turkey sided with Germany, Venizelos' offer had expired; aside from the lapse in time, the proposition was contingent upon Bulgarian support – which was hardly forthcoming.¹⁷ With regard to these obstacles, Churchill, in accordance with would-be Prime-Minister David Lloyd George, browbeat Commander of British Naval Forces in the Mediterranean Admiral Sir Sackville Carden – who was by no means personally in favor of such a campaign – into sketching potential logistics for an attack to be proposed to the War Cabinet.¹⁸

Carden had drawn up a rather detailed plan of assault which, in his best efforts, was sketched to appear unfavorable to the British. However, mesmerized by the immense detail of the plan – though such idiosyncrasies were designed to be deterring – and dismayed by a dispatch from Soviet Commander-in-chief Grand Duke Nikolai calling for radical action to offset pressure in the Caucasus, the War Cabinet, much to Carden's consternation, approved the proposal.¹⁹ Subsequent to this sanction, French naval minister Jean Augagneur – enticed by the potential glory of a successful crusade – took a gamble and disregarded the advice of his peers when he decided to match Britain's commitment to the campaign and undertake the endeavor collectively.

The combination of these factors proved to be disastrous. After two unsuccessful shore bombardments from 19 to 25 February; a failed attempt at forcing the Narrows on 18 March; three failed amphibious assaults at Krithia from 28 April to 4 June; an even more disastrous landing at Suvla Bay on 6 August; and the exhaustion of resources at Salonika just weeks later; British forces evacuated the Peninsula on 11 October.²⁰ By the end of this cataclysmic campaign, Some 480,000 Allied troops had

been dedicated to the failed endeavor – Turkey didn't incur half that.[†] As a consequence, Churchill “lost both his high office and his political reputation. It was considered that he had been led astray by his ‘amateur strategy,’ and allowed his personal enthusiasms to over-rule the advice of naval and military experts.”²¹ Churchill grew cantankerous and unapologetic for the mishap; relentlessly condemning Fisher and Carden for their timidity, he denied any strategic flaws and blamed ill-executed ground operations.

The lingering question behind this historical allusion remains: to what degree did the Sudetenland guise itself as another Gallipoli? With Churchill attempting to push his way back into the Parliamentary spotlight, his overzealous character proved shockingly reminiscent of his audacity in 1915. Having already proven his inability to weigh practicality against principle, his unwillingness to support further diplomatic initiatives with Hitler was unsettling to say the least. Like the Straights, the Sudetenland was tactically futile; it was too far away from Allied support and too proximate to Axis peril for any reasonable hope at success. Moreover, how realistic was American support? No matter the reasons for each man's contradistinction in this regard, it was surely not as realistic as military aid from Greece and Bulgaria was in 1914 – would Britain allow itself to be disappointed again? Though Daladier attempted to coerce Chamberlain into military action against Germany, Augagneur proved equally as striving. Additionally, Britain's precarious situation regarding military action seemed to reflect the very apprehensiveness Lord Admiral Fisher held regarding the quality of the Mediterranean ships he manned in the attacks on the straight, claiming: “These ships are too weak to fight and too slow to run away.”²²

[†] British casualties (including imperial forces) amounted to approximately 235,000. French losses were estimated at approximately 247,000.

A number of eerily similar qualities positioned these two startling scenarios as tactically duplicative. Notwithstanding, there was one variance which distinguished 1938 from 1915: Britain was not at war with Germany. There was no Soviet Union to help, no French frontier to bolster, and no immediate threat to the Crown. If the similarities between these two developments were not enough to deter British action, then surely, its only difference should have been. Assault was no longer a means as it was in the midst of the Great War, but a horrific end in the shadow of a Greater War. The more enthusiastic Churchill grew regarding a conflict with Germany, the more he manifested himself as an overly-ambitious war monger: a lion whose roar was worse than his bite – a fact only a fox had the cunningness to recognize.

For this reason, just as Hitler's betrayal of Chamberlain's trust did not send domestic moral crying for appeasement, Churchill's irresponsible past, discrediting his howl to defend Czechoslovakia with the intent of salvaging the Sudeten, did not elicit a wartime vigor amongst Parliament. Until now, it has been revealed why Britain was obligated to abide by the indeterminate, dual-ended policy of late; yet without a recapitulation of Churchill's deplorable tactical track record, it cannot be fully understood that not only was British foreign policy over these four days ineluctable and sagacious, but was also reflective of the British Government's ambivalence.

Still, such distrust in Churchill's tactical optimism should not have discredited his call for more hard-lined threats toward the Germans. During his debriefing at the Foreign Office, Churchill had offered the idea of sending Hitler a communication wherein the allies disclosed their assurance of mutual support. Such a notice could prove to be intimidating enough to pressure Hitler into, as Churchill described, backing down from his Godesberg Memorandum and accede to his Berchtesgaden terms. He drafted a

concept missive to be sent to Berlin which read, “If... a German attack is made on Czechoslovakia... France would be bound to come to her assistance, and Great Britain and the Soviet Union would certainly stand by France.”²³ Chamberlain and his Cabinet unilaterally rejected Churchill’s proposal; they held that such a threatening letter could spark accelerated mobilization or worse, ignite a Sudeten assault. Churchill’s effort in establishing a common ground between diplomacy and power-politics should be admired. Notwithstanding, both sides of the aisle were reluctant: the appeasers dismissed it as too bold while the anti-appeasers deemed it too weak. As it stood, political fracture was no longer just between Chamberlain and Churchill; their respective political allies now experienced a similar need to stake their own professional career on the success or failure of appeasement. Despite the political schism, a middle-ground still resided somewhere within Churchill’s rejected concept; yet, it would not show itself until the latter half of Wilson’s meeting with Hitler.

INTO THE ABYSS

It was quite a morning for Sir Horace Wilson. Though Chamberlain, Churchill, and the Cabinet were all eager to find out what Hitler would have to say, if anything, to the case their ambassador would make, it remained that Wilson still had to make it. The intensely private diplomat, almost religiously clinging to the shadows of the news reels and never featured in the headlines, was met outside his flat by a sea of photographers, reporters, and journalists attempting to capture a telling snapshot or potent quip surmising his expectation for the day ahead. He offered no such illustration. The truth of it was, Wilson did not know what to expect from the Chancellor – no one did. After all, Britain’s entire foreign policy was predicated on this unknown. Unable to offer any

foresight to the media, Wilson solemnly weaved his way through the dense press to the street-side where he was driven to the Heston Aerodrome.

With Chamberlain's appeal to Hitler in hand, as well as the 'special message' Chamberlain had issued, Wilson landed in Berlin late that afternoon. After momentarily reconvening with his associates at the embassy in case circumstances had changed since his departure from London, which they had not, Wilson continued to the Chancellery with Henderson. At five o'clock they were met by the Führer, Ribbentrop, and German Foreign Office Translator Paul Schmidt. The Chancellor was in a particularly grim mood. Having rehearsed for the last few hours his speech that would take place in just a few more, it was evident to Wilson that his Prime Minister had chosen the exact wrong moment for him to confer with Hitler regarding an alteration of the policy on which his impending discourse was wholly contingent.²⁴ Notwithstanding, Wilson proceeded to do as he was instructed and instigated a dialogue regarding an international convention.

The meeting amongst these six men was intense to say the least. To commence the gathering, Wilson foolishly overstepped his welcome by attempting to recap the previous two weeks in a lecturing and patronizing manner toward the Germans – echoing the mannerisms and intonation of Chamberlain's foolishness at Godesberg. After an unproductive and agitating onset, Schmidt proceeded to translate aloud the first half of Chamberlain's letter. It began with a rather conceited and told-you-so undertone in reference to the Czechs' rejection of the Führer's Godesberg Memorandum. When Schmidt read aloud the words "wholly unacceptable" – a quote in which Chamberlain was referencing the Czechs' sentiments towards the Chancellor's new Memorandum – Hitler launched into a fit of rage.²⁵ Wilson described the instance later:

"Schmidt got up. Ribbentrop got up. Henderson and Kirkpatrick got up. I stayed put. I thought Hitler was very rude to walk out. I was not accustomed

*to being treated like that. I was, after all, the representative of the British Government. I therefore clung to my armchair.”*²⁶

Hitler exclaimed that there was nothing more to talk about and that further discussions would be futile in suggesting anything less than Germany’s acquisition of the Sudetenland in its entirety. Schmidt later remarked that this was the first time he had seen the Chancellor lose his temper.²⁷ Having all but exited the room, Hitler cocked his head back toward the table only to see Wilson remaining seated with a rather unimpressed look upon his face; realizing how boisterous his behavior was, Hitler marched back to his chair like a “defiant boy.”²⁸ Yet, the discourse that followed Hitler’s tantrum only served to maintain the already forceful tone of the meeting. At the conclusion of Schmidt’s translation, Hitler indulged in another series of outbursts which Henderson matched – everyone began shouting at once. Wilson remained calm and attempted to coax the Chancellor into a similar demeanor, but to no avail. “Germany was treated like niggers!” Hitler exploded, “One would not dare treat even the Turks like that!”²⁹ Kirkpatrick was so awestruck by the monstrous display he was observing that, at one point, Wilson had to remind him to continue chronicling the meeting.³⁰ “On the 1st October,” Hitler ranted, “I shall have Czechoslovakia where I want her... If [France and Britain] decide to strike, let them strike. I don’t give a damn!”³¹

Everyone fell silent. After seconds that seemed to last an eternity, Wilson began to placidly reiterate to Hitler what seemed to be lost in translation; he voiced the willingness of His Majesty’s Government to arrange the transfer of the Sudetenland – as the Czechs had already agreed, in principle, to most all Hitler’s demands[‡] – at an international assemblage. After all, as Chamberlain and Wilson understood, little material

[‡] The Czech Government did not, by any means, see it this way; this was an extension of Wilson’s verbal reasoning.

difference, save for the time-table by which it were to be executed, separated Hitler's Godesberg Memorandum from that of Berchtesgaden; if Germany had sections of the Sudetenland, it would only be a matter of months, even weeks, before they had it all. Though the Czechs relentlessly bemoaned the further debilitation of their industrial and economic welfare, with Germany alternatively occupying intermittent tracts of land in *Deutsche*-dense areas (as they agreed to at Berchtesgaden), it proved a matter of principle more than anything else. After hearing what Wilson had to say, albeit for the second time, Hitler exclaimed that the Czechoslovakian government must send immediately an emissary regarding such discussions. He went on to clarify:

*"But it must be clearly understood that he came on the basis of the acceptance of the German memorandum and that there was no alteration in the German decision that the territory should be handed over and should be free of Czechs before the 1st of October."*³²

It was clear to Wilson and his colleagues that Hitler was growing especially concerned with his public image – both domestically and internationally – as the final hour approached. He would be unwilling to back down from his Memorandum which he had delivered to Chamberlain at Godesberg. A leader that depended on his word and the threat which it carried harbored no room in his policies for signs of weakness qua backtracking compromise. As such, Hitler specified that he must receive an affirmative response from the Czechs of their willingness to consent to a Sudeten convection within two days – that being at 2:00 P.M. on 28 September.³³ Though the deadline stipulated in the Goseberg Memorandum was 1 October, it was clear that in order for Hitler to launch a full scale attack on the Czechs, his forces required a forty-eight hour notice before they could effectively mobilize and coordinate an assault at the Sudeten border.³⁴ Wilson knew this. Upon registering the reason for the seemingly accelerated timeframe,

it had occurred to the British diplomat just how serious Hitler was – or how serious he was attempting to appear.

Before the three Englishmen took their leave, Hitler stopped them; motioning to Schmidt to hand him a paper of which its immediate availability was obviously prepared ahead of time. He began to read his own copy of what appeared to be a transcription of a conversation. Preempting the delay of Schmidt's verbal translation to the British representatives, they were all plainly aware of what it was that Schmidt was reading: an interception of the Beneš-Masaryk telephone conversations regarding Chamberlain's proposal.³⁵ After handing the transcript over to Wilson, Henderson, and Kirkpatrick, the three men were made aware, with the aid of Schmidt's bilingual skills, the harsh depictions of Chamberlain and Wilson with which the page was riddled. Further, it included a recommendation from Masaryk to Beneš wherein the former advised the President to play France and Britain for time and "await the overthrow of the Chamberlain Government."³⁶ Disheartened, but no longer susceptible to shock after having experienced the razor's edge of a global war for nearly three weeks, the British simply nodded and quietly took to the exit.

Still with Wilson was the 'special message' he held for Hitler; it had not been mentioned at the meeting and neither Hitler, nor Henderson, nor Kirkpatrick was aware of its existence. Immediately following the conclusion of their first gathering, Wilson phoned Chamberlain. The Prime Minister, upon inquiring why he hadn't made the Führer aware of the 'special message' considering the significance it might hold as it pertained to these talks, Wilson assured him, given the heightened tensions at this meeting and the fog which stubbornness tends to cast over good judgment, that it was not the proper time to discuss information of such weight.³⁷ Further, with the evening

for hot tempers to cool, Wilson thought it wise not to push any more information unto Hitler just yet; he would wait to hear what the Chancellor had to say at Sportpalast first. Unless he attended, explained Hitler, “he would not get an impression of the intense feeling animating the German people.”³⁸

THE POISE OF GERMAN AMBIGUITY

With Wilson in attendance amongst 20,000 Nazi Party supporters and Henderson and Kirkpatrick tuning in by radio back at the embassy, the three British representatives listened to Joseph Goebbels – one of Hitler’s most trusted associates, closest followers, and Reich Minister of Propaganda – present his Führer to a dense congregation of Nazi Party representatives.³⁹ Rising to the podium just a few minutes after 8:00 P.M., Hitler launched his hour long speech; what began with historical context – which, unlike Wilson’s a few hours ago at the meeting, was more favorable toward the German side of things – soon developed into a smear campaign against President Beneš.⁴⁰ The ethos with which Hitler yielded such patronage amongst his own government served to utterly destroy all sympathy or respect for President Beneš that any Nazi leader might have held. With one of the most ferocious speeches Hitler ever delivered, he degraded Beneš’ reputation to that comparable of Hitler’s own name in modern historical discourse.

There were two reasons for Beneš’ arraigned malevolence. First, Hitler knew that Czechoslovakia was not threatening enough in its force to serve as a symbol of the enemy.⁴¹ Instead, he had to put a face to it; President Beneš, a man who once enjoyed the cloak of character ambiguity, would be thrust into the spotlight as a monster – citing his existence as a spore which harbored the disease of Bolshevism. The second reason

for thrusting this image onto Beneš was a direct result of the Masaryk-Beneš phone call which the Germans intercepted. With Wilson and his colleagues already bitter about Masaryk's scurrilous characterizations of the British elite, Hitler found it wise to cast further aspersions on the Czech leader in hopes that the British and French would be more likely to acquiesce to Hitler's appeals[§] than to Beneš'. This act of political manipulation was reaffirmed as Hitler comforted the woes of other involved European nations. After commending Mussolini on his undeterred support of the Third Reich, he went on to quell any presuppositions Poland or France might have harbored regarding German intentions – namely, the threat of German invasion, which Hitler assured was not an answer to the conundrum Germany, France, Britain, Italy, and Czechoslovakia concurrently faced.

Notwithstanding his snarling remarks toward the Czech Government, Hitler did not close the book on British diplomacy just yet. His speech, as it pertained to the Prime Minister and his efforts toward peace, was rather amicable. Having pored for the past few hours over Chamberlain's letter, Hitler decided that the pressure of whether or not to forcefully annex the Sudetenland should not be his to bear, but Beneš'. He Stated:

*"This Czech State began with a single lie and the father of this lie was named Beneš... I have demanded that now after twenty years Mr. Beneš should at last be compelled to come to terms with the truth. On 1 October he will have to hand over to us this area... Now two men stand arrayed against one another: there is Mr. Beneš and here stand I. Now let Mr. Beneš make his choice."*⁴²

With this statement, Hitler still had not responded to Chamberlain's request for an international conference; if the Sudetenland was relinquished from Czech possession in

§ These appeals include Hitler's territorial demands in Poland and Hungary as well as a quick transfer of the Sudetenland. Most importantly, however, it attempted to elicit action on behalf of the Chamberlain rather than himself.

time, he would not 'be forced' to take action against Czechoslovakia. He mentioned nothing of the means through which he would allow such a relinquishment to transpire. Slyly positioning himself as the non-aggressor, he continued to claim, "When this problem is solved there is for Germany no further territorial problem in Europe... I [would] have no further interest in the Czech State – we want no Czechs!"⁴³ Yet, at Hitler's conclusion, Goebbels jumped up from his seat, after his Führer had taken his own, and shouted, "One thing is sure: 1918 will never be repeated!"⁴⁴ To which Hitler rose again to the podium and, in a surge of energy, slammed his fist against his notes screaming, "*Ja!*"⁴⁵

This was perhaps the most disturbing portion of the speech. What was Goebbels saying when he referenced 1918? Surely the German oppression by way of amputated territories and cataclysmic financial repercussions put upon them by the Allied powers. Yet, under what circumstance could such an end potentially reemerge? It is possible that Goebbels was rallying in favor of breaking such shackles by acquiring the Sudetenland by any means; however, it remains more intuitive that he was referencing the outcome of a different scenario: the acquisition of the Sudetenland by force. It seemed, in the instance of the latter, that Germany would not, or could not, be stopped in the case of a fully-fledged continental war as they had been in 1918. Was this a warning to the British and the French more than it was a rallying cry for the Germans? Moreover, what, if any, significance did Hitler play in this outcry? The powerful '*Ja!*' with which he responded to such a bold claim could have been an improvisation to an unexpected shout; still, his passion – as Shirer broadcasted – went unmitigated. Once again, the speech's curious conclusion left the British in the dark as it pertained to Hitler's intent. Regardless of what message the last verse harbored, Goebbels described the speech as a psychological

masterpiece. Amery, who spoke German fluently, characterized the address as, “the most horrible thing... more like the snarling of a wild animal than the utterance of a human being, and the venom and vulgarity of his personal vilifications of ‘Beneš the liar’ almost made me feel sick.”⁴⁶

BRITAIN’S OWN RAVENOUS EDGE

At 9:15 P.M. in London, the Press Department of the Foreign Office issued a statement which was transmitted over the radio almost immediately after the Head of the Department Rex Leeper contrived it. It read:

“The German claim to the transfer of the Sudeten areas has already been conceded by the French, British and Czechoslovakian Governments, but if in spite of all efforts made by the British Prime Minister a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia the immediate result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance, and Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France.”⁴⁷

This stirred commotion within Parliament and throughout Britain. It was bolder than any official statement that had been dispatched by His Majesty’s Government in months. Further, not only did this announcement claim to have definite knowledge of the Soviet Union’s position on the matter, but also affirmed Britain’s willingness to go to war publicly and falsely conferred the Czechs’ willingness to transfer the Sudetenland to Germany. Leeper, undoubtedly siphoning the information he received from Lord Chief Foreign Secretary Edward Halifax, assumed – given their political proximity, though in status rather than opinion – that his sentiments reflected those of the Prime Minister.⁴⁸ Needless to say, Chamberlain would have never been so bold as to exclaim to the public what Leeper had leaked even if it was wholly accurate. At 1:50 A.M., a clear indication

that the ‘Leeper Telegram’ was anything but official, Chamberlain himself broadcasted a response to Hitler’s Sportpalast speech:

“I have read the speech of the German Chancellor and I appreciate his references to the efforts I have made to save the peace. I cannot abandon those efforts since it seems to me incredible that the peoples of Europe who do not want war with one another should be plunged into a bloody struggle over a question on which agreement has already been largely obtained.”⁴⁹

After Chamberlain’s voice rescued the home-front from utter panic, Wilson dispatched a lengthy telegram to London regarding his first meeting with Hitler. They discussed the Sportpalast speech in more open and plain dialogue than the Prime Minister’s public rhetoric could offer and agreed that no action need be taken, at least before Wilson’s second meeting with Hitler. With German-Czech stances solidifying, time depleting, and the Chancellor unwilling to show his hand, Wilson affirmed to his Prime Minister that he did not believe it would have been “necessary or wise to deliver that Special Message to Hitler” until after the Sportpalast.⁵⁰ Far from keen on Wilson’s retrospective self-assurance and even less so regarding Hitler’s stubbornness in his Godesberg conditions, Chamberlain responded:

“After violent attack on Beneš we feel it is useless to ask [the] Czech Government to approach [the] Germans with [a] fresh offer. We do not consider it possible for you to leave without delivering [the] special message, in view of what we said to [the] French, if you can make no progress. But [the] message should be given more in sorrow than in anger.”⁵¹

Having been instructed to do so, Wilson approached Hitler at their reconvention after the Sportpalast with the ‘special message’ in hand. After a brief meeting summarizing their prior discussion and the stark implications set forth in Hitler’s late speech, everyone prepared to adjourn. Prior to leaving the Chancellery, Wilson told Hitler that he had “one more thing to say and he would try to say it in the tone which the Prime Minister would have used had he been himself present.”⁵² He also made it

clear that the reason for disclosing such delicate information was solely because they feared that Anglo-German relations would be greatly jeopardized if the Sudeten question were not settled in a peaceful matter and that Britain, out of their desire for a good rapport between the two great powers, found it necessary to share their full intentions. Wilson reached into his coat pocket and removed a creased slit of paper with a very brief note scribbled on it; he read:

*"If Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, France, as Daladier had informed us and as he had stated publicly, would fulfill her treaty obligations. If that meant that the forces of France became actively engaged in hostilities against Germany, the British Government would feel obliged to support France."*⁵³

This was, in effect, the precise threat which Churchill opted for and which the Prime Minister and his Cabinet struck down! Was Chamberlain so spiteful toward Churchill as to scorn an identical proposal to that which the Prime Minister had already privately concocted during the recess of the Anglo-French meeting? Not quite. This letter had one significant difference – it did not mention the Soviet Union whatsoever. The reason for this is two-fold: first, Britain simply did not have the commitment of the Soviet Union – their stance in case of a German attack on Czechoslovakia and/or Anglo-French intervention was a complete mystery. Even Churchill has been quoted saying, "I cannot forecast to you the action of the Soviet Union. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."⁵⁴ Second, not completely unrelated to the first, Chamberlain was not convinced that Hitler would believe Stalin would make such a pact. After all, the Red Scare in the early to mid-twenties had long positioned the Soviet Union as democratic enemy number one.

Churchill's missive involved the threat of Soviet resistance as a ruse to intimidate the Germans. Yet, for all the British knew, Stalin could have promised the Germans his

neutrality in the case of a European conflict. If Britain were caught in such a lie, it would not only convey a sign of weakness on behalf of the allies, but manifest itself as an excuse for Hitler to mobilize German forces into the Sudeten at once – he had made use of such flimsy justifications before as an excuse to reoccupy the Rhineland and dishonor the Treaty of Versailles. It was a risk the Prime Minister could not afford to take. Thus, just as the appeasement side of the pact Britain made with France harbored a dualistic nature in and of itself, so too did the threatening side of Wilson’s visit to Berlin reside in a middle-ground between Churchill’s proposed threat and Chamberlain’s former tendency toward its proscription.

Notwithstanding the mildness of Chamberlain’s warning to Hitler, its mere existence and the timing of its delivery held bizarre implications from the Chancellor’s perspective. To analyze the situation plainly, Chamberlain, via Wilson, had just informed Hitler that if he invaded the Sudetenland, they would join the French in bolstering Czech resistance to German aggression. This was all well and good save for the fact that Wilson had just attempted desperately to assure Germany that Czechoslovakia would not refuse to transfer ownership of the Sudetenland at the proposed international conference. The latter half of the mixed message that was issued to Hitler over the two meetings did much to infuriate him:

“In the event of a rejection of the Memorandum, I will smash Czechoslovakia! In six days we will all be at war with one another, and only because the Czechs refuse a proposal for the execution of obligations they have already undertaken. I have made preparations for all emergencies! It is not for nothing that I have sent 4.5 Billion Marks on the Western fortifications!”⁵⁵

Wilson, frustrated with Chamberlain’s decision to disclose this information, struggled to express their desire for peace and that they had no reason to do anything but urge the Czechs to cooperate. Wilson’s reminder of what he had guaranteed on behalf of the

Czechs seemed to be of no use – Henderson and Kirkpatrick restrained Wilson from further outbursts. The three Englishmen took their leave. Upon his exit, Wilson remarked to Schmidt and Hitler: “I will make those Czechs sensible.”⁵⁶ Hours later, they boarded a flight back to London. Hitler’s answer to Chamberlain’s proposal was ambiguous to say the least; it seemed that he would accept such an international conference under the sole condition that Czechoslovakia agree to the Godesberg terms prior to the gathering – defeating the entire purpose of the assemblage in the first place.

With these contradicting messages tethered together by the cohesive bond of His Majesty’s Government, Wilson’s visit to Berlin manifested itself as a two pronged edict: it promised Germany the Czechs’ acquiescence to the Godesberg Memorandum under the pretext of an international conference while simultaneously threatened Germany with a collated Anglo-French opposition if such a pretext were rejected. Without agreeing to a conference or dismissing it entirely, Hitler had remained undaunted in the face of Britain’s similar opacity; as a result, Chamberlain – and Britain with him – was forced to remain in the bi-axiomatic state in which the West resided on the 25th. Britain’s effort to force the onus of Europe’s fate onto Germany through the same means by which the latter had originally hoped to pressure the West had not worked – or at least, not yet.

Why did the nation not immediately opt for war in light of Wilson’s apparent failure? How could Wilson’s mission to Berlin and Britain’s undeterred dual-policy thereafter be adjudicated by both intent and consequence in light of historical and political context? To start, the terrifying resemblance between the Sudeten Crisis and Gallipoli – at the very least, Churchill’s over-reaching pathos – undercut any claim he

held for bolstering Sudeten forces. The baggage of Churchill's lamentable past served to turn the ear of British foreign policy toward Chamberlain's call for conciliation – yet, not entirely. Though the pretext of Wilson's visit to Berlin served as an arena for a widened political faction between appeasers and anti-appeasers, the fact of the matter was that its would-be ill-resolve proved no invocation of one stance over the other regarding British foreign policy.

Though Wilson's visit may have seemed ill-devised immediately upon his return to London, especially in light of Hitler's equally convoluted dismissal of the British representatives, the visit, in effect, put the ball back in Hitler's court. During his Sportpalast Speech, the Führer repeatedly thrust the onus of the current European crisis unto Beneš – accusing him of forcing Germany's hand in war by way of the mistreating Sudeten-‘German’ inhabitants. In light of Hitler's increasing concern with his public image, the world needed to know that it was the German Chancellor who was the aggressor, that he did have a choice, and that a continental war would be his doing.

It remains that anything more threatening, such as Churchill's desire to claim the Soviet Union as a military dependent, or less firm, such as leaving out Chamberlain's ‘special message’ as he had been inclined to do after dismissing Churchill's suggested missive the day before, would have resulted in either a justification for Hitler to forcefully annex the Sudetenland in case of the former, or grant him the Sudetenland and leave the door open for further German appeasements down the road in case of the latter. Again, the median between the fox and the lion perseveres; though unknowingly to the British at the time and unrecognizably to historian Margaret George. It is true that Wilson's mission to Berlin was just the right touch – yet, on the eve of the 26th, no such conception could be held. Hitler's 1 October mobilization, now bumped up to 28

September, was still in place. In the interim, Wilson's meeting with Hitler was perceived as a failure...Chamberlain's failure. In the absence of any alternatively convincing information, Britain had no choice but to prepare for war.

III

27 September 1938: The Shadow of War

At day-break of the 27th, the Prime Minister declared a nation-wide state of emergency.^{1*} While a mass exodus from London ensued, the Red Cross and St. John Ambulance hectically sought after new recruits to prepare for the German aerial bomb-raids that they expected would soon decimate the city.² Parliament issued orders freezing petrol prices to prevent a run on gas stations while the BBC broadcasted public service announcements urging citizens against the stockpiling of food to preempt riots.³ London's collective memory of war had been that of agonizing trenches – rotting the bodies and minds of their inhabitants. It had only been twenty years since these horrors transpired and the grim memory of such harsh conditions was still fresh in collective cognition. Having been forewarned that the impending German campaign would incur even more tragedy than that of 1914, Britain's communal fear proved not only to be real, but the thing it feared most proved unfathomable in its abhorrence. Unless circumstances altered drastically, in four days Britain would be at war with Germany for a second time in twenty years.

* A governmental declaration in which the conventional duties of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers are suspended and replaced with autonomous authority to mobilize armed forces and implement civilian order. Such declarations are only forged during a crisis.

It would be a mere twenty-four hours before Hitler would mobilize the bulk of German ground forces to the Sudeten border. The 27th would not be like any of the other four days during this anxious stretch of British foreign policy. There would be no outreach to Germany on behalf of the British or French; there were no pending visits nor was there any scramble for communication. Instead, with war in the air, the British Ministry conferred amongst itself regarding the nation's military capability and economic flexibility if a war were to break out in four days and its relative status of naval power if war were staved off.

Though Britain was in a lamentable position as it pertained to ground forces, it had a significant edge over the would-be axis powers at sea. Accordingly, although the eastern front of France would certainly benefit from a suspension of war wherein Western military armament – by both the French and the British – could be safely heightened in light of their kindred economic fragility, it remained that Japan would ramp up their naval forces erstwhile. Such a tradeoff was heavily debated amongst the Ministry. There was simply no way of knowing whether, if war *were* inevitable (a conjecture which remained questionable in itself), taking action now or rallying for its postponement would be the optimal path. What the British also didn't know was that Hitler had begun to lean in favor of the conference Wilson had proposed the day before. Back at Berlin, a dismal Nazi propaganda march coupled with the Chancellor's self-realization of his growing reputation as the situational aggressor forced the Führer to rethink any predilections for war he might have harbored. Despite his best efforts to place the onus of instigation onto Beneš in his Sportpalast speech, it became increasingly clear, after a number of appeals from the British and the United States, that such an effort was shaping up to be futile.

Notwithstanding, German intention remained a mystery to the West. Most authors will glaze over the day of the 27th, considering it an inert day wherein nothing was accomplished. Yet, remaining still and doing nothing are completely different things.⁴ The silence of the British demonstrated their composure toward the Germans; refraining from action, the British left Hitler in his den to feel the pressure of the world build upon him. This was a loaded pause – an indispensable silence before the British made their next move. It was deliberate and it was necessary. It did not stem from fear, but was a product of the carefully calculated medium in which the British had suspended themselves in the interim of foreign policy, tactfully coordinating present and future recourses on the global stage. For most historians, the conflation stems from academia's inability to distinguish panic from the fact that the policy which Britain bolstered was not incongruent with their own uncertainty; leading to the indication that it was not fright which discouraged Britain from reaching out to Germany on this day, but, instead, steadfast resolve in the face of the unknown.

MOUNTING PRESSURE

The inner circles of Parliament knew that Wilson's mission to Berlin had been unsuccessful in eliciting an immediate agreement to an international conference. Now, capitulations by either side appeared hopeless; both Hitler and Beneš were obstinate in principle and were cemented in such stubbornness by public rhetoric. Interestingly enough, Germany was under the most pressure. Despite Hitler's best attempts to publicly demonize President Beneš in his Sportpalast address as the harbinger of war, after the Chancellor disregarded Wilson's invitation to a transnational assemblage, he inadvertently repositioned himself as the sole instigator of the turmoil that now gripped

Europe. After all, the demands that Hitler made in his late speech had largely been met; and though he was unable, or unwilling, to see so, the rest of the world would not be so blind.

It was not until after the news of his meeting with Wilson went public that Hitler began to reconsider the possibility of an international assemblage. Insofar as the Führer's emerging disposition was concerned, it was not so much inspired by the fact that the British were disgruntled by Hitler's reluctance to accept Czechoslovakian submission by their own hand, but that so too were all countries directly interested in the matter. Hitler had staked his reputation on taking the Sudetenland by 1 October; yet, safeguarding the solidity of his word would mean nothing for his reputation if he were envisaged as a childish, impractical leader unable to bring himself to budge an inch when the British were willing to come a mile.

It would take a plethora of international appeals for Hitler to even consider this reality. The first of such entreaties came even before Hitler's dismissal of Wilson in the form of a preemptive plea for cooperation on behalf of President of the United States Franklin Roosevelt on the morning of the 26th. He writes:

"The supreme desire of the American people is to live in peace. But in the event of a general war they face the fact that no nation can escape some measure of the consequences of such a world catastrophe... The traditional policy of the United States has been the furtherance of the settlement of international disputes by pacific means. It is my conviction that all people under the threat of war today pray that peace may be made before, rather than after, war. It is imperative that peoples everywhere recall that every civilized nation of the world voluntarily assumed the solemn obligations of the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 to solve controversies only by pacific methods. In addition, most nations are parties to other binding treaties obligating them to preserve peace. Furthermore, all countries have today available for such peaceful solution of difficulties which may arise, treaties of arbitration and conciliation to which they are parties... On behalf of the 130 millions of people of the United States of America and for the sake of humanity everywhere I most earnestly appeal to you not to break off negotiations looking to a peaceful, fair, and constructive settlement of the questions at

issue. I earnestly repeat that so long as negotiations continue differences may be reconciled. Once they are broken off reason is banished and force asserts itself. And force produces no solution for the future good of humanity.”⁵

Hitler was agitated after Wilson’s dismissal; he wanted the Sudetenland, but did not want to hash out logistics that might save-face for Britain, France, and especially not the Czechs. Brooding in his chambers with Schmidt, just minutes after Wilson, Henderson, and Kirkpatrick took their leave, the Chancellery received another letter from Roosevelt. It was merely a call for Hitler “to acknowledge [and] reply to [Roosevelt’s] telegram of September 26.”⁶ What Roosevelt did not know, however, is that after his Sportpalast speech, Hitler had dispatched a telegram in response to the President’s first letter which Washington had yet to receive. The Führer’s reply was of a simple nature: “It now rests, not with the German Government, but with the Czechoslovak Government alone, to decide if they want peace or war.”⁷ By the afternoon of the 27th, little had changed for Hitler.

Though none of the appeals from Britain or the United States was enough to prod Hitler into accepting an international conference individually, the three entreatments for stalling mobilization – one from Chamberlain via Wilson, and two inter-related telegraphs from Roosevelt – did awaken Hitler to his deteriorating reputation in the eyes of foreign executives. Such a disconcerting alarm naturally called into question German-domestic morale as well. For months, Goebbels had been endeavoring to rouse a wartime mentality in the German people. He had incepted propagandist falsehoods and nationalist undertones into nearly all of Hitler’s public addresses. The latest of which denounced Beneš as the source of the reigning terror which now befell the Sudeten-‘Germans’ – woefully bemoaning that “whole stretches of country were depopulated, villages burned down, [and] attempts were made to smoke

out Germans with hand-grenades and gas.”⁸ Though this nationalistic hype had been forced onto the German populace for months now, there still remained few signs of domestic enthusiasm for war. The dejected mood which Germany’s citizens collectively harbored would not manifest itself until the nation’s pre-war propaganda rally.

By late afternoon, Hitler ordered a march to take place through the central streets and between the government blocks in Berlin that evening.⁹ What was meant to stir a fiery rally amongst the Berliners served only to bundle thousands of anxious Nazi soldiers amidst an already crestfallen populace. As it turned out, the German people desired a peaceful resolution as much as the British; after all, the Germans experienced the same horrors as the British and the French did from 1914 to 1918 – and over, they had been on the losing side of the war. Forced to accept the burden of guilt and international reparations, the German people felt very little to now sacrifice their re-emergent status for something as trivial as the Sudetenland. Eyewitness, Ruth Andreas-Friedrich,[†] whose chronicles are affirmed by Paul Schmidt’s own impression, wrote:¹⁰

“About two hundred people are standing in the square outside the Reich Chancellery... clustered tightly together, they are staring tensely at an uninterrupted procession from Unter den Linden past the historic balcony... The balcony door upstairs opens. Hitler comes out bareheaded, his hands in the pockets of his tunic. He moves quickly to the railing... I steal a glance at the faces of those around me: tight lips, wrinkled brows. They stand there with their tails between their legs, with the embarrassed, guilty look of people who know perfectly well that they don’t want to do as they must. Not a hand is raised anywhere... the Führer, uncheered, vanishes from the balcony.”¹¹

Schmidt admitted that Hitler “found the scene most disillusioning;”¹² German diplomat Erich Kordt, just minutes after their retreat from the balcony, reported Hitler remarking, “With these people I cannot make war.”¹³ The propaganda march that had

[†] German writer, anti -Hitler activist, and author of *Berlin Underground 1938-1945*.

come to naught validated Hitler's uneasiness regarding domestic spirits. It was quite possible that the Chancellor, after seeing his subjects' dismal dispositions, reached a pivotal point in his conception of the situation that was rapidly unfolding in front of him. Immediately thereafter, Hitler sent a telegram to Wilson – who was in transit to London – which he relayed to Chamberlain over the telephone.

The note began by admitting that the Anglo-French proposal did not differentiate a significant amount from the terms which he had laid down at Godesberg. He continued by thanking Wilson, Chamberlain, and their associates for their efforts toward peace and, what can be identified as the most important facet of the document, he thanked the British for “bring[ing] the Government in Prague to reason at the very last hour.”¹⁴ The latter sentiment is not raised as a question nor is it preceded or followed by any doubt that Britain could accomplish such a feat. Though Hitler alludes here to his incipient hope to settle the Czech problem diplomatically, he had still not accepted the idea of the conference nor did he agree to hold off on any military mobilization. The subtext of the Chancellor's words was anything but clear. Notwithstanding, one fact remained prominent – it was Hitler who was reaching out to the British, not the other way around. Indeed, the pressure which the West had exerted onto Germany had begun to materialize in Hitler's actions.

All the while, Czechoslovakia continued to bolster their forces on the Sudeten-German border. They awaited either an attack from Germany or a phone call from Britain – they were no longer in a position to bargain with the Germans. Hitler's disposition toward Masaryk and Beneš was bearish enough without being subject to yet another unproductive, ill-tempered discussion with a far inferior power: the Czechs let the major-players hash out their problem. Transversely, France was in turmoil –

attempting desperately to bridge the divide between its treaty obligations and dissenting attitude of war.¹⁵

Disconcerted by the twain of his abrasive predilections, as he had come to reconsider the favorability of diplomacy over the last forty-eight hours, Daladier was nevertheless left aloof as to Britain's plan of action if and when Germany attacked Czechoslovakia. Would Chamberlain mobilize troops to the Sudeten-German border at the same time as Daladier or would the former approach the latter in an attempt to pool their economic and military resources at the last minute? These quandaries, left unanswered since they were first put to the British at their meeting on the 25th, were far too important to be foregone. As such, Daladier and Bonnet found it best to express such concerns in a letter to British ambassador Phipps. The message therein was a compounded one: as it pertained to the questions themselves, the French would be pleased to have them answered. The sooner and more detailed the reply from Chamberlain, the better. However, the French could hardly expect that Chamberlain, whilst still pressing for an international conference, would have paid much time to coordinating an Anglo-French assault for a war he was fighting with all his might to prevent. All too aware of this, Daladier and Bonnet dispatched their concerns regarding an assault strategy not so much as to elicit answers – though they would be thrilled to receive some – but more to express how unconvinced they were in Chamberlain's promise to stand by France.

Daladier wanted action in the case of German advancement into the Sudetenland but was growing fearful that without military aid from the British, there would be no such opposition. In case Chamberlain reneged on his commitment to supporting Daladier against Hitler, no action would be taken by the French – they would simply be

annihilated. As a result, “in ten years France would be only a second class power.”¹⁶ Fine, but what was to be done now? Daladier and Gamelin held a preliminary consultation in which they concluded that, despite the increasingly alarming situation, in the absence of any qualifying information from Britain, they had no choice but to delay their plans for military mobilization to Prague. So it followed, as the deadline approached, with Beneš and now Daladier looking to Chamberlain, the Prime Minister proved to be under an equally intense pressure as the Chancellor – each one looking to the other for relief.

It was, in the *pro tem*, a stalemate. While Britain had attempted to reflect Germany’s pressure by way of an identical resolve, the French and the Czechs were left unconvinced by Britain’s foreign policy in light of the seemingly unfazed German government. To elaborate, Britain’s actions were completely misunderstood by France and wholly unknown to Czechoslovakia; the French did not seem to recognize the methodology behind, what they understood to be, pure indecisiveness on behalf of the British. As for the Czechs, they remained wholly ignorant of Parliament’s interworking beyond its impetus for Prague’s cooperation. With this, it is not difficult to understand why Bonnet and Daladier were so unnerved by Chamberlain and why Masaryk and Beneš were so off-put by his apparent timidity. Yet, each foreign leader’s perception of British policy manifests itself as rather derisory in light of what Chamberlain was truly undertaking. The truth of it is that Britain had to wait until the final hour for the pressure they had refracted onto Germany to set in. Only then would a missive to Berlin materialize as an additional stress on Germany rather than a sign of weakness on behalf of the British Prime Minister. Mobilizing ground troops was also out of the question; no one could know for sure how Hitler would react to an incipient incarnation of Wilson’s threat of opposition via fortifying France’s eastern border. The West still had to appear

understanding and diplomatically approachable – revealing a proclivity toward the lion’s side of things proved too risky. As it stood, British inaction on the 27th emanated a Western poise that had begun to wear on Hitler.

STAYING THE COURSE

In London, the Prime Minister called for a brief meeting at Downing Street. Those in attendance included Chamberlain, Minister for Coordination of Foreign Defense Sir Thomas Inskip,[‡] and his staff: the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse; Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General the Viscount Gort; and Chief of the Air Staff, Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall.¹⁷ The report which the latter had the displeasure of presenting to Chamberlain was disheartening to say the least:

*“It is our opinion that no pressure Great Britain and France can bring to bear, either by sea, on land, or in the air, could prevent Germany from overrunning Bohemia and from inflicting a decisive defeat on Czechoslovakia. The restoration of Czechoslovakia’s lost integrity could only be achieved by the defeat of German and as the outcome of a prolonged struggle, which from the outset must assume the character of an unlimited war.”*¹⁸

As the meeting continued into the late morning, more Cabinet members were invited to Downing Street. Eventually, the staff in attendance grew to include: Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs Alexander Cadogan; Former Prime Minister of Australia and soon to be a member of the Imperial War Cabinet, Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Stanley Bruce; military attaché to Berlin

[‡] Inskip, who had been reinstated from retirement in light of Britain’s late predicament, had been appointed to his post over Winston Churchill in 1936 by Prime Minister Baldwin. Churchill is famous for remarking, upon Inskip’s appointment to Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, “This is the most cynical appointment since Caligula made his horse a consul.”

Noel Mason-Macfarlane;[§] and former Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs Malcolm MacDonald.**

By half past four, little had changed regarding the outlook of Sudeten defense. Mason-Mac shared his experience as the deliverer of the Godesberg terms to Prague a few days prior. The collective disposition of Masaryk and Beneš “appeared to him to be poor, and much of the material preparations were not completed. The Customs Frontier Guards were definitely scared stiff.”¹⁹ Furthermore, on the Southern front near Linz – the capital of Austria and, coincidentally, Hitler’s place of birth – the Czech’s opposition appeared equally as ill-prepared. The dismal outlook for Czechoslovakia was only compounded by a telegram from Henderson, who had recently spoken to Hitler and his advisor Hermann Göring, regarding German preparations for Sudeten annexation:

*“It was quite evident from his attitude that every detail of the plan for occupying Sudeten districts was now finally prepared. He was neither nervous nor excited but absolutely confident that if the Czechs resisted, their opposition would be overcome by overwhelming force in the briefest possible time. It is quite obvious... that the die is cast, that British mediation is at an end and that if delegates do not arrive at Berlin with full authority to make the best terms they can on their own with Germany before 2:00 P.M. tomorrow [28th], general mobilization will be ordered at that hour and occupation of Sudeten areas will begin immediately.”*²⁰

Erstwhile, it was agreed, in light of the low-probability of military effectiveness, London should deter the French from taking any military action against Germany without prior consent of the British Cabinet. On the other hand, Backhouse was successful in convincing Chamberlain and the rest of the members in attendance of the immediate and dire need to mobilize the Royal Fleet. This would not be as aggressive as ground troop mobilization, Backhouse explained, nor would it appear as threatening. He

[§] Noel Mason-Macfarlane commonly went by the nickname, Mason-Mac.

** MacDonald was reinstated to membership from retirement along with Sir Thomas Inskip.

plainly conveyed that if Hitler did not accept Chamberlain's request of an international conference, assuming the Czechs had still not handed over the Sudetenland to Germany, and war commenced on the 1st, Britain's naval forces needed to depart immediately in order to be effective in defending England and its dominion territories from a German campaign.²¹ If anything, this *defensive* precaution would demonstrate Britain's firmness to commit to a war while, at the same time, appear less menacing than the *offensive* preparation afforded by the deployment of ground troops to France's eastern front. Convinced by this apt reasoning, Chamberlain gave orders to mobilize the Royal Fleet. It was the first sign of combat readiness that Britain had shown since 1918.

In the meantime, the Cabinet contemplated the administration of White Papers^{††} to Parliament which had been requested by Labour Party Leader Clement Attlee. It was approved that all relative documents that were kept from the larger sphere of Parliament be disclosed to the House the next day. Notwithstanding the purpose of full disclosure, one piece of information was agreed to be withheld: telegraphs from London to the French and British plenipotentiaries stationed in Prague – from 22 to 25 September – ordering them to apply pressure on the Czech Government to give up the Sudetenland.²² Such delicate correspondences were far too potent in their essence to be propagandized at the hands of Churchillians. Those in favor of going to war would be outraged at their illegitimate impression of the lack of consideration for a seemingly inevitable one. With certain sensitive documents omitted from the circular, White Papers were distributed to Parliament, and the Prime Minister prepared for his 8:00 P.M. radio broadcast to the nation.²³

†† White papers are documents produced by the Government setting out details of future policy on a particular subject. A White Paper will often be the basis for a Bill to be put before Parliament.

After all the scrambling that had been done through long plane flights, infinite dispatches, and laborious phone calls, the citizens of Britain remained in the dark. Exhausted, Chamberlain retreated to the Cabinet Room and began to deliver his address to the nation through a single microphone.²⁴ To start, he acknowledged the plethora of letters he had received from Londoners thanking him for his efforts at maintaining peace and urging him not to abandon such endeavors. Next, he slowly described the grim situation that Britain resentfully faced and which stared back at the nation ever so derisively. He admitted that there was “nothing further [he] could usefully do in the way of mediation” as “the substance of what Hitler wanted” was largely procured.²⁵ After a listless soliloquy condensing countless stress-filled days and sleepless nights’ worth of effort and political strife, Chamberlain announced in his conclusion a powerfully significant statement:

“However much we may sympathize with a small nation confronted by a big and powerful neighbor, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account. If we have to fight it must be on larger issues than that... Armed conflict between nations is a nightmare to me, but if I were convinced that a nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should believe it must be resisted. Under such domination, life for people who believe in liberty would not be worth living... War is a fearful thing, and we must be very clear, before we embark on it, that it is really the great issues that are at stake.”²⁶

His speech was strangely reminiscent of Eyre Crowe’s 1907 Balance of power formulation.²⁷ To the English populace, this message was foggy to say the least. It seemed contradictory to belittle the thought of the British Empire waging war on behalf of a country in which they had little interest while simultaneously declaring the firmness of the that same British nation to oppose a Napoleonic attempt at continental domination.²⁸

However, this speech wasn't for the British populace more than it was for Hitler and the rest of the world. Through all the shaky, noncommittal rhetoric, Chamberlain had effectively reiterated what Wilson explained to the German Chancellor at Berlin: Britain would go to war if it had to, but circumstances simply did not elicit the need for such action. Chamberlain's own words, however, had a little more bite than Wilson's; they seemed to go on to imply that if Hitler would agree to a conference, the Sudetenland would be the continent's last concession to Germany. This point was made plain; Britain would not allow Europe to be bullied any further. Moreover, Chamberlain sharpened the point on the 'special message' he had put to Hitler via Wilson the day before. This time, the threat of opposition was not given in sorrow; instead, the Prime Minister made explicit his promise to defend Europe against a power-hungry dictator – precisely the image Hitler was forced to exude to the world over the course of these four days by way of Britain's double-edged foreign policy.

How could Germany not be seen in the world's eye as the wrongdoer when Britain promised, quite agreeably it seemed, that a conflict could be avoided and the continental status quo – envisaged as a post-Versailles recalibration – could be obtained if only Hitler would cede to a meeting? After all, it was the only way Britain could practically offer the transfer of the Sudeten to Germany. Though Hitler wanted Chamberlain to do his bidding by forcing Beneš to his knees, it had become quite clear that the latter would not subject himself to any such humiliation and more, that the world now understood why.

Halifax spent most of Chamberlain's speech dispatching a message to Paris not to undertake any military mobilization. Phipps, who relayed Halifax's message to Daladier, reasoned:

“[I]f efforts for peace fail... we may expect to be faced in a very short time with a fait accompli, so far as Czechoslovakia is concerned. No declarations of actions of France or Britain in the meantime can prevent this sudden and overwhelming result.”²⁹

Furthermore, it would be essential to their mutual success that any military counteraction made on behalf of the British or French be done with full disclosure to the alternate party if not in complete cooperation and coordination. Finally, Chamberlain gave an unexpected answer to the bitter logistical inquiry from Daladier and Bonnet – none too soon, it still remained that the Prime Minister intended to keep the promise he made to the three Frenchmen two days prior. The message was well received by Bonnet who remarked to Phipps, “It behooves us both (himself and Daladier) to be extremely prudent and to count our probable and even possible enemies before embarking on any offensive act whatever.”³⁰ The French were pleased to be reassured of Britain’s commitment to the threatening tinge of Chamberlain’s double-pronged communications to Germany. Similarly, the British were glad to hear of France’s compliance; no matter how coordinated Anglo-French efforts were, their likelihood of prevailing against Germany was undeterminable.

WEIGHING OPTIONS

In light of further ambivalence spawned out of undeterminable economic and militaristic conjectures, an unwavering tenacity toward Germany remained the only pursuable path until the pressure on Hitler ripened. Whether or not Britain would benefit from even a six to twelve month postponement of a conflict – that is to say, if

Britain could only stave off a war and not prevent one entirely^{‡‡} – remained inconclusive. Just as the Gallipoli disaster of 1915 made the British Cabinet apprehensive toward tactical Sudeten efforts, the labyrinth of militaristic and economic speculations left many uncertain as to whether appeasement would help or hurt Britain in case of its eventual failure.

For the first time in decades, Britain was finally forced to take a real look at its military capabilities – the findings were hardly indisputable. Lieutenant General Sir Henry Pownall, Chief of Staff to the British Expeditionary Force, wrote the British Counsel:

“From the military point of view the balance of advantage is definitely in favor of postponement. This is probably an exception to the rule that no war is inevitable, for it will almost certainly come later. Our real object is not to save Czechoslovakia – that is impossible in any event – but to end the days of the Nazi regime. This is not our selected moment, it is theirs,^{§§} we are in bad condition to wage even a defensive war at the present time; the grouping of the powers at the moment makes well-nigh hopeless the waging of a successful offensive war... A period of even six months, provided full pressure of work were maintained and financial obstructions removed, would go a long way to provide at least our essential needs [and make Britain] reasonably secure against defeat.”³¹

Chamberlain agreed. Britain simply did not have the military capacity to sustain a lengthy war with Germany, let alone one on three fronts.³² Back in 1937, the Chiefs of Staff (COS) submitted a report to Chamberlain entitled “A Comparison of Strength of Great Britain with Certain other Nations at January 1938.” After disclosing to him their projected numerical estimations of Japanese Naval forces and German Air forces, the

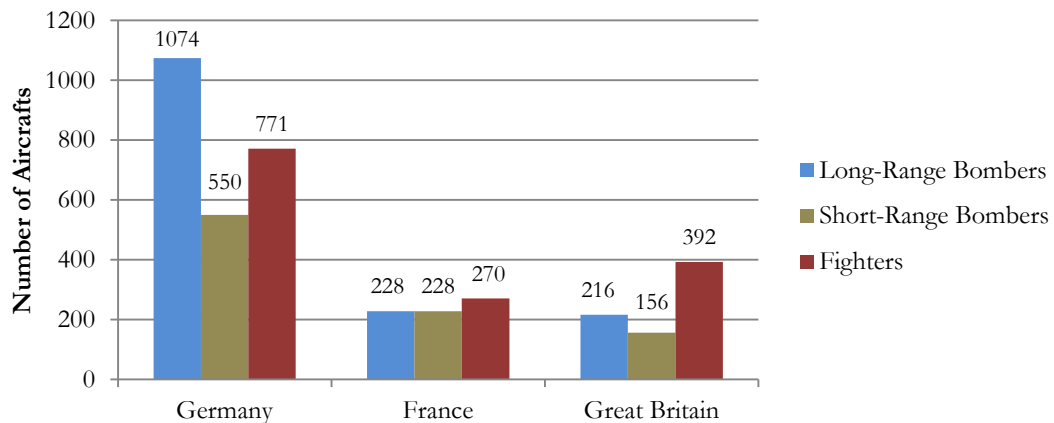
‡‡ Although Chamberlain had hoped to prevent a war completely and absolutely, he was not so ignorant as to forego the possibility that one could only be deferred. As such, the Cabinet was forced to consider the nation’s relative auxiliary state – compared with Germany – now and after a six to twelve month delay.

§§ Here, Pownall is alluding to a prose from Sun Tzu’s The Art of War: “It is the rule in war, if ten times the enemy's strength, surround them; if five times, attack them; if double, be able to divide them; if equal, engage them; if fewer, be able to evade them; if weaker, be able to avoid them.”

COS turned their findings over to the Committee for Imperial Defense (CID) for analysis.³³

The general consensus among the CID was that Great Britain’s defensive capabilities were dismal. Furthermore, they determined that neither Britain’s naval power nor air power was strong enough to bolster its peripheral interests in case of a war. British dominions were scattered across the globe – the financial and militaristic necessitations for securing trade routes during times of peace were difficult enough. Further, preempting economic sanctions against British colonies in Africa and Southeast Asia looked to be nearly impossible.³⁴ As a result, both the COS and the CID agreed that the best course of action would be for Britain to preempt any enterprise that could create future enemies and implement methods of diplomacy so as to gain allies.³⁵ As Inskip stated, “It is true that the extent of our resources imposes limitations upon the size of the defense programs which we are able to undertake.”^{36***}

**Relative Aircraft Power Among France, Britain, and Germany
1938**



*** The information comprising the figure on this page is siphoned from a report from Chamberlain’s Chiefs of Staff entitled, “A Comparison of Strength of Great Britain with Certain other Nations at January 1938.” A copy of which resided on page 97 of John Ruggiero’s *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament: Pride, Prejudice, and Politics*.

Notwithstanding Britain's late rearmaments, Churchill had called for a rapid resurgence in defense capabilities since Chamberlain first took office in 1937:

*"My mind was obsessed by the impression of the terrific Germany I had seen and felt in action during the years of 1914 to 1918 suddenly becoming again possessed of all her martial power, while the Allies, who had so narrowly survived, gaped idle and bewildered. Therefore, I continue by every means and on every occasion to use what influence I had with the House of Commons and also with individual Ministers to urge forward our military preparations..."*³⁷

Historian John Ramsden laments Churchill's unheeded words as the neglected inoculation that might have made Britain immune to their present military debilitation and, transitively, Hitler's martial intimidation. Though it is true that heightened military capabilities would have certainly given Chamberlain a leg up in deterring Hitler from launching an assault on the Sudetenland, it remained that a drastic upsurge in armaments would have resulted in a total annihilation of Britain's economy.

Funding for the defense program in the case of accelerated rearmament was obtainable in two ways: increased taxation and supplementary borrowing. At an already steep 25% income tax marginal rate – 5 Shillings per Pound (on the 20:1 pre 1971 decimalization) – the Treasury feared that a regression to a WWI income tax of approximately 35% would send Great Britain straight back into a depression it had suffered only 5 years ago.³⁸ Already at the limit of taxation, Britain concurrently found itself in an identical situation as it pertained to borrowing. Although the Treasury noted that Britain could borrow up to £80 million per year without causing hyper-inflation, a £400 million loan obtained earlier in the year served to have already shattered the Treasury's ideal monetary ceiling.³⁹

To complicate matters further, economic struggles of accelerated rearmament were not simply limited to English qualms. Due to the disheartening fact that some of

Top Importers of British Goods 1938
(In Millions)

India, Burma, Ceylon	£39.9
South Africa	£39.5
Australia	£38.2
Canada	£22.5
Germany	£20.6
United States	£20.5
Eire	£20.3
Argentina	£19.3
New Zealand	£19.2
Denmark	£15.8
France	£15.1
Netherlands	£13.1

Britain's most vital commercial export interests depended on relaxed trade between Germany and the Crown's dominion territories, German opposition posed substantial trade complications – complications that would have been far more devastating to the British than the Germans.^{40††}

As it stood, significant rearmament would not have only cost the price of production, but would have detracted £20.6 million per year from Britain's existing revenue heretofore procured through German trade. In light of these constraints, Inskip and the rest of the treasury set the defense programs financial limit at £1.5 Billion per 5 years – a breach of this, as they understood, could result in economic catastrophe. The Defense Requirements Committee, knowing that this allowance was not enough to rearm at their desired rate, reluctantly agreed that the pursuance of allies and avoidance of enemies was essential for the time being.^{41‡‡}

Chamberlain explains:

“The corner-stone of our defense policy must be the security of the United Kingdom. Our main strength lies in the resources of man power, productive capacity and endurance of this country, and unless these can be maintained

†† The information comprising the figure on this page is siphoned from a report from Chamberlain's Chiefs of Staff entitled, “A Comparison of Strength of Great Britain with Certain other Nations at January 1938.” A copy of which resided on page 97 of John Ruggiero's *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament: Pride, Prejudice, and Politics*.

‡‡ By July 1939, heightened defense expenditures and overly-accelerated military spending had provoked exactly the financial crisis Chamberlain had so desperately attempted to avoid. Evocative of the economic catastrophe of 1931, Britain may have fiscally exerted itself beyond sustainability, if World War II had not come as soon as it did following rapid rearmament, leaving it unable to withstand the first onslaught of German attacks before collapsing from the inside out. Though Britain escaped fiscal ruin, it did not do so without some luck.

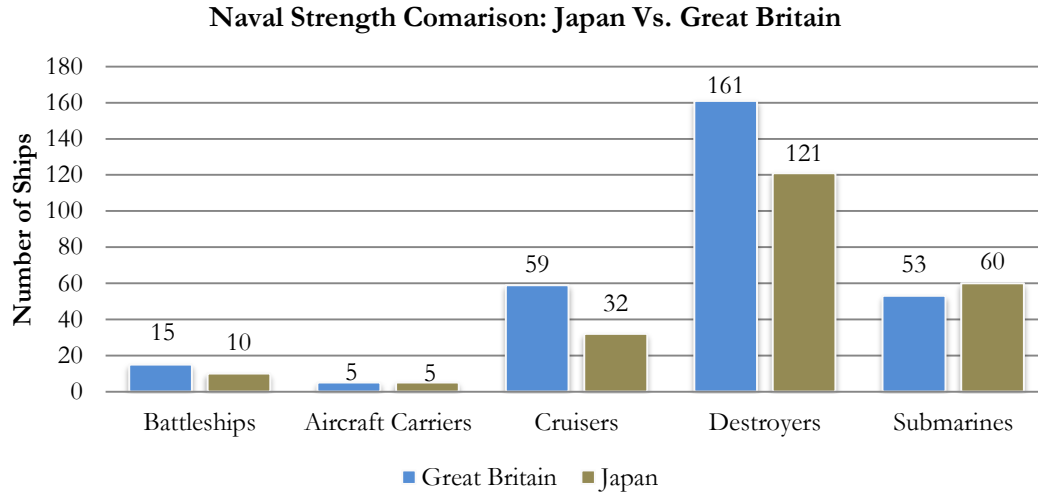
*not only in peace but in the early stages of war, when they will be the subject of continuous attack, our defeat will be certain whatever might be the fate in secondary spheres elsewhere. Therefore, our first main efforts must have two main objectives: we must protect this country and we must preserve the trade routes upon which we depend for our food and raw materials.”*⁴²

In his Gathering Storm, Churchill grants an alternate view captivating in its simplicity and disturbing in its accuracy. Quite plainly, he turns the argument on its head by weighing the country’s economy against the country’s sovereignty; in essence: what would a healthy economy matter if all of Britain fell under German rule? Surely the price of annihilation outweighed the deficit spending needed to compensate for the nation’s bear-market economy. Further, as Churchill understood, the advantages Britain would gain by staving off war for a six or even twelve month period were menial. Historian Telford Taylor rightfully illuminates Pownall’s fallacious letter he put to the British Counsel:

*“It was a hastily drawn paper, but even allowing for time pressures the analysis was superficial. Nothing in the body of the document supported the conclusion in favor of postponement, except a highly speculative suggestion that Italy would be a less likely belligerent in ‘a later war...fought on some other pretext.”*⁴³

To be sure, there was much debate over Britain’s military capabilities. Though it was agreed that they were much weaker in comparison with Germany than they had been in 1914, or than they ought to be currently, Henderson had thought a brief deferment would benefit the Germans more than themselves.⁴⁴ Land-locked as they were, Germany would be forced to rely on Japanese naval forces to counter the Royal Fleet. The sea was the one advantage Britain still had over Germany – and at the rate the

would-be Axis Powers were accelerating, with a six month grace period, Germany might come within striking distance of the Royal Navy's capabilities.⁴⁵§§§



Such a calamity would leave England, an isolated island in the North Atlantic, without a last line of defense. Transitivity, there was nothing the British could do in six months that would favor their position regarding aerial assault capabilities; Germany's Air Force towered over the Royal Air Force at a magnitude nearly five to one – five to two including French support. An immediate aerial raid on primary German hangars and industrial depots might have evened the playing field, though such an operation would prove extremely risky. Open to this gamble, many anti-appeasers opted to rally for a war with Germany then and there. In fact, Niall Ferguson concludes that a preemptive strike against Germany was the best option militarily.

Though Churchill grimaced at further appeasement, even he was not so rash as to prescribe a frontal assault on Germany before Hitler ordered any mobilization into

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the Sudetenland. Apart from the integral moral cloudiness of a preemptive strike, it remained that Britain would be acting to defend a nation to which it had no direct obligation – motivated by nothing other than a militaristic forecast; it would have been a bold move even for the French. Moreover, and most importantly, the inevitability of war remained an enigma. There was simply no way of knowing whether or not this matter would be settled at the final hour until that time had come and gone.

THE VALUE OF COMPOSURE

All things considered, neither Churchill nor Chamberlain embellished or neglected certain military or economic data to their advantage – either purposely or subconsciously. Rather, the counter-distinguished values and perceptions of each leader fashioned opposing frameworks in which they analyzed such data. Naturally, each man's ideological perceptions came to an alternate conclusion as it pertained to their pressing predicament. However, neither man was incorrect in his logic: they simply reasoned passed each other. It is undoubtedly true that rapid rearmament would have delivered a severe body blow to the British economy – undercutting the nation's ability to brook a lengthy opposition against Germany. It is also true that if Britain were dragged into war at the present, rapid armament would be necessary to offer even an initial opposition against Germany. Whether Britain would benefit from a war's postponement was unclear to say the least.

The partition manifests itself from the accumulation of the preceding perceptive disconnections and the question upon which they all hinged: was war avoidable? The response to which differed for each man. For Churchill, war was inescapable and, if he considered such data significant, thought it best to engage in one at the present rather

than months down the road. Transversely, Chamberlain did not weigh the factors of postponement against immediate perseverance so much as he was startled by the lamentable circumstances at each point in time. Accordingly, he sought to permanently snuff out the possibility of a conflict.

Britain was faced with a difficult decision: it could launch a war now wherein it might have an advantage at sea or postpone a war wherein it would relinquish such an advantage for an improved status on the ground. These two options were equal save for the fact that the possibility for a long-term peace settlement – afforded by Germany's grim reputation in the world's eye – was obtainable by the latter route. With this, staving off war would be favorable; not because of the land-sea trade-off, but, all things being equal, because a conflict might be avoided altogether. Still, any chance at a permanent settlement was entirely predicated on thrusting the onus of Europe's current disarray unto Germany: only when Hitler fully materialized as the belligerent could the Nazis be deterred against further territorial annexation by way of a more universal opposition.

In essence, a preliminary accord with Germany offered more options for long-term peace; yet, only if pressure continued to mount on Hitler. As such, Britain was obligated to continue its double-sided foreign policy to maintain the momentum of Hitler's deteriorating image in the world's eye and force him into presenting himself as either a harbinger of war or a maniac who had to be talked off the edge of one. The limbo in which British foreign policy was suspended remained between the inclinations of Chamberlain and Churchill through a stoic resolve on the 27th and would culminate on the 28th with another outreach to Germany coupled with a war inclined speech from Chamberlain. Indeed, with the French abiding by Britain's stillness, the West would

stand united in its composure and afford the Germans little alleviation from the pressure which had begun to weigh on them so heavily.

Historian Robert Self praises the Prime Minister's late commitment to the two-fold policy of gradual rearmament and diplomatic endeavors during these days. This, he claims, was the only reasonable mean – or, in more familiar terms, the product of arbitration between the lion and the fox. This adjudication is, at best, partially correct. There is no denying that this policy was a mean between the two extremes; yet, it was one that remained ineffective with regard to military strengthening. The gradual armament Britain underwent from Chamberlain's rise to the premiership to 27 September 1938 was hardly divergent from the military rehabilitation model following 1918. In any case, it was not nearly as substantial as it needed to be in order to offer any noteworthy gains in relation to the relentlessly expanding German forces. Self's attempt to frame Chamberlain as a moderate politician is not only untrue, but also, impossible. There was no actual middle-ground to stand on between armament and diplomatic relations – at least not beyond political rhetoric and certainly not so late in the game.

The British Policy which had suspended itself between its proclivities for peace and readiness for war did not manifest itself in Chamberlain's two-pronged policy of rearmament and diplomacy – the former was simply too relaxed to be considered threatening. Instead, it manifested itself in Britain's silence; it would stand by the double-sided code it had embraced since the 25th by making no capitulations. Indeed, Britain's poise and Chamberlain's address to the nation were purposely redolent of, and successfully loyal to, Wilson's venture to Berlin. Though Chamberlain was not so hopeful as to fully depend on Hitler's cooperation at the final hour, it remained that he was not so bold to launch a preemptive strike or exacerbate tensions between Germany

and Britain by mobilizing ground troops unnecessarily early as he was already forced to do, albeit in a timely fashion, with the Royal Navy. Instead, Britain waited for the pressure to accumulate on Germany. Knowing that Hitler still held inclinations to solve the matter through diplomatic means, as was transparent in the Chancellor's dispatch to Wilson, the British understood that they had to wait for such inclinations to ripen before instigating another outreach.**** Alas, the night of the 27th concluded in the same anticipatory anxiety as the 26th. Chamberlain needed a diplomatic miracle to avoid war or an unobtainable grand allegiance of allies to win one. For all the lion's impatient roars and fox's sly diplomatic operations, Britain remained intimidating in its collective equanimity afforded by their double-sided political tenet.

**** Although the two pronged approach had stood the test of a twenty-four hour silence, the Czechs were not going to relinquish control of the Sudeten without a fight if they had France and Britain at their backs. It was still not wholly known by the Czechs that the international meeting for which Chamberlain so insistently pushed was simply a medium to transfer the Sudetenland over to Germany. Indeed, Masaryk and Beneš remained wholly ignorant of how undermining their cockiness was to the wavering support from the British – their stubbornness was, as Chamberlain understood, the true imposition.

IV

28 September 1938: A Deceptive Relief

On 28 September 1938, crippled with fatigue and burdened with the unforeseeable fate of Britain, the Prime Minister, with his wife, Anne Vere Chamberlain, sauntered through the garden of Downing Street tormented by a three day festering anxiety. The air was damp; the all-to-familiar foggy overcast suspended with it a particularly bleak ambiance on this morning. Remaining silent for most of the walk, Chamberlain would occasionally express sighs of concern in exchange for an empathetic caress of the arm by Anne. After persistently fixating on the damp grass that lay before each step, the Prime Minister lifted his focus. Motioning to his wife with a subtle nod of his head the weather-beaten brick wall enclosing the lot, he whispered: “I would gladly stand up against that wall and be shot if only I could prevent war.”¹

Not unlike those before it, the 28th remained a grim day infused with intense stress. Today, Chamberlain would reach out to Hitler again, but now by a different angle. This time, he would call for an international conference through Mussolini. Knowing full well that the Italians were starkly unprepared for war, Chamberlain thought that Hitler might be more willing to agree to a conference if it had been suggested to him by a friend rather than an agitated diplomat from a disparate creed. All the while, holding true

to Britain's non-committal policy, Chamberlain prepared a speech on the home-front to Parliament in which he would all but declare war on Germany. It would be a hectic morning, but all of the scurrying and frantic diplomatic disarray would take place at far-away embassies – wholly unknown to the Ministers back London. On this day, with Hitler's agreement to attend an international conference, the axiomatic limbo in which Britain had heretofore resided would be abandoned upon the German Chancellor's decision not to go to war. With Hitler's acceptance, Britain would again return to a country dedicated to, and reliant on, appeasement.

HELTER SKELTER

The view from London was grim. There were only a few affairs of which the House of Commons was certain: first, domestic public opinion was staunchly against war. Compared with what they perceived to be German avidity for the Sudetenland – unaware of Hitler's dismal propaganda march in Berlin – they had little hope of maintaining the civil and military morale that was much needed for engaging in combat at such a distant and foreign front. Second, England would receive little military support from dominion territories. Australia and South Africa vehemently insisted that the Godesberg terms be accepted – as if Chamberlain needed to be convinced. Third, Czech resistance would not hold out for long. Given the reports from their own Chiefs as well as Gamelin, there was little reason to entertain the possibility of effective Czech resistance. Fourth, as far as the Soviet Union was concerned, Stalin promised little aid to the British or French; watching the two most powerful democracies in Europe and the two most belligerent fascist states trade heavy blows without having to lift a finger was, again, appealing in light of the Union's expansionary ambitions.

Italy, too, was a wildcard. For the preceding month, Hitler kept Mussolini in the dark for most of his arrangements; however, with the possibility of war seeming almost certain – an end which the Italian Government had been discounting – the Duce made efforts to reach out to the German Chancellor. Mussolini did not want to go to war – as it was, Italy was hardly prepared for one. Notwithstanding, in case his nation was inevitably drawn into combat by the kindred nature of German-Italian political ideologies, he certainly would collaborate with Hitler.

Whatever Chamberlain's character, it is certain that he was not a man who would sit idly upon such perilous circumstances. Without any word from Hitler, and knowing full well that German mobilization toward the Sudeten border could commence at any hour, Chamberlain drafted two personal appeals: one to Hitler and one to Mussolini. Both were written without the knowledge of his own government, the French, and especially not the Czechs. To the German Chancellor, Chamberlain expressed his bewilderment and disgust of what he perceived to be irrational behavior on behalf of the Third Reich:

*"I feel certain that you can get all essentials without war, and without delay. I am ready to come to Berlin myself at once to discuss arrangements for transfer with you and representatives of the Czech Government, together with representatives of France and Italy, if you desire. I feel convinced we can reach agreement in a week. I cannot believe that you will take the responsibility of starting a world war which may end civilization for the sake of a few days delay in settling this long-standing problem."*²

This letter of Chamberlain's moral disapproval was accompanied by a missive of much different intonations to Mussolini. In this epistle, Chamberlain attempted to elicit Italy's help in assembling an international colloquium wherein this dire matter could be finally settled peacefully and directly.³

*"I trust Your Excellency will inform German Chancellor that you are willing to be represented and urge him to agree to my proposal which will keep all our peoples out of war. I have already guaranteed that Czech promises shall be carried out and feel confident agreement could be reached in one week."*⁴

This was not the first appeal for an intervention that Mussolini had received, but it was certainly the boldest. The previous day, the British ambassador to Italy, Lord Perth, had asked the Duce to act as peace-maker and utilize his influence to induce Hitler to accept the proposal of a conference on the 28th. Incidentally, Mussolini was the last chance the continent had at peace; all other efforts having been in vain, Perth writes of Chamberlain's late request: "It cannot be rejected – by rejecting it Hitler would draw the hatred of the world upon himself and have the sole responsibility for the conflict."⁵ Indeed, concentrating this pressure onto Hitler was the very aim of British policy over the preceding three days.

On the morning of the 28th, Mussolini had already taken action on Perth's request. Mussolini telephoned his ambassador to Berlin, Bernardo Attolico, and instructed him to see Hitler at once to deliver a personal request for German postponement of military mobilization for twenty-four hours. Knowing full well the importance of his directive, the ambassador left immediately for Wilhelmstrasse where he was received by Erich Kordt. Attolico, disregarding salutation formalities, promptly exclaimed to him, "I have a personal message from the Duce for the Führer, and must see him quick, quick, quick!"⁶ In light of his determined temperament, the Italian ambassador was shown directly to the Chancellery. Upon his arrival, he was informed that Hitler was currently tied up in a meeting with French Ambassador André François-Poncet. Distressed by frustration, Attolico convinced the S.S. adjutant to carry a note

into the meeting for Hitler to read informing him that there was an urgent message from Mussolini.

Hitler and Schmidt promptly exited the room to meet him. Pleased that Hitler recognized the urgency of his request, Attolico told Hitler, through Schmidt, that he had direct orders from Mussolini which instructed him to ask for, on the Duce's behalf, a twenty-four hour postponement of military mobilization. Pausing for only an instant, Hitler responded, "Since Mussolini requested it [I will] delay affairs twenty-four hours."⁷ It was with great astonishment and felicity that Attolico received such news in a surprisingly blasé manner. With little time to ponder Hitler's prompt answer, Attolico allowed Hitler to resume his meeting with François-Poncet and phoned Mussolini to deliver the good news. Though delighted, Mussolini had news of his own. The Duce relayed Chamberlain's late request for Italy to advocate for, on behalf of Britain, a five power conference – comprising of Germany, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and Britain. Mussolini, still against being drawn into battle, ordered Attolico to see Hitler once more and most poignantly beseech him to agree to such a meeting.

Attolico ventured back to see the Führer at his Chancellery anon and presented the proposal for a conference – a plea Hitler had heard *ad nauseum* – and proceeded to confide Mussolini's personal desire for his acceptance in Chamberlain's final plea for an international conference. Hitler was struck with bewilderment; Chamberlain's latest missive had not reached Berlin at the speed it had Rome.⁸ Unknowing of the appeal to which Attolico was referring, the Italian minister promised to fetch a copy of Chamberlain's letter which Mussolini had received.⁹ Yet, while Attolico was away, Neville Henderson entered the room for the meeting's third interruption. Henderson approached Hitler with little care for the meeting's privacy to give Hitler the

Chamberlain appeal that was in question. After Schmidt had translated the missive to Hitler, the Führer responded that he would have to confer with Mussolini before making a decision.

Entering the room for the meeting's fourth interruption, Attolico rushed to the three statesmen to give Hitler the now unneeded copy of Chamberlain's appeal to Hitler as well as further word from Mussolini that Italy would be glad to represent themselves at Chamberlain's conference should it materialize.¹⁰ Hitler responded with a brief monologue; he explained to Attolico and Henderson rather superfluously how he had gotten the impression at Godesberg that Chamberlain would have acquiesced to his demands had the Prime Minister not been met with such harsh opposition upon returning to London.¹¹ With this lucid thought aired, Hitler turned to Attolico and said that he would agree to a conference only if Mussolini himself was in attendance.¹² With this piece of news, Attolico rushed back to his embassy and phoned Rome. It wasn't long before Attolico had returned to the Chancellery, for the fourth time, to inform Hitler that Mussolini agreed to attend the conference himself. Further, it was agreed that the Czechs not be consulted; this was a last minute addendum which Chamberlain thought could push the two dictators into finally accepting such a gathering – he was not wrong.

With Prague's exclusion, a four power conference was not difficult for François-Poncet to concede on behalf of Daladier; after all, what had Masaryk and Beneš done besides cut off communications with Germany and undermine Britain's attempt at a peaceful resolve. They were in no position to make any demands militaristically and had squandered their diplomatic privileges by hostile and stubborn correspondences. As for Hitler and Mussolini, it was not long before the two dictators had agreed in unison to the

conference. Henderson and François-Poncet, serendipitously present, phoned their respective governments of the good news: a conference to be held in Munich on the morning of 29 September.

A TEMPORARY RESOLVE

With all of this occurring in a far-away land at such a rapid pace, no news had reached London regarding the success of Britain's foreign policy. Still, fully anticipating the persistent regression of the already dismal situation in Europe, Chamberlain had awaited the return of House Members sojourning abroad to whom he would deliver his speech. Its content would demonstrate the nation's commitment to France; for all Chamberlain knew, war was coming and the threatening component of the nation's dual-policy looked to be the end Hitler would choose. As such, the Prime Minister remained true to the strategy which his nation had embraced up to the final hour.

Upon his arrival at Heston Aerodrome, Chips Channon, temporarily stationed in France, found that "there was war atmosphere already, with young airmen lounging about, smoking; we heard the word Boche* again, and someone said mufti."^{†13} It was World War I all over again – nationalism, coupled with its detestable relative, bigotry, indoctrinated the mindset of those politicians who had, merely two decades prior, experienced the atrocities which Britain again faced. Still, tensions ran higher at Churchill's flat; anti-appeasers had a new-found merit under failing diplomatic efforts by Chamberlain. As Leo Amery described, "Some of the young men, particularly Harold

* Offensive Slang used as a disparaging term for Germans, especially German soldiers in World War I or World War II.

† Offensive Slang used to describe a person in civilian garb with an allusion to a disparaging depiction of the primitive nature of Muslim clothes.

Macmillan,[‡] [were] very wild, clamoring for an immediate pogrom to get rid of Neville and make Winston Prime Minister before the House met.”¹⁴

At 11:30 A.M., utterly unaware of the hectic diplomatic scramble in Berlin, Members of Parliament made their way to the House of Commons to hear Chamberlain’s eagerly awaited address. Whitehall lay amass with a silently distressed crowd of citizens; each onlooker staring with “dumb, inquisitive eyes.”¹⁵ Churchill waded his way through the masses to the House alongside his close ally Brendan Bracken and the Polish ambassador to Britain, Count Raczynski. “[I will] not allow Chamberlain to rat and give in,” Churchill told Count Raczynski, and if need be, was “prepared to speak and to oppose any surrender.”¹⁶ The mood inside the Chamber was grim; even the immense number of spectators overlooking the proceedings from the public galleries were utterly silent. The MPs blended seamlessly into the crowd – displaying the same awestruck mannerisms which the sentimentally homogeneous populace uniformly emitted. Everyone yearned to know what was in stall for their city; and with Chamberlain’s speech, they soon would.

The business of the House began as it always had, with prayers followed by departmental queries. At 2:50 P.M., as the Speaker was announcing the passing of a former member, Chamberlain slipped into the room and assumed his place. His arrival was met with powerful applause; but for every empty bench once filled with now standing supporters, there were a few anti-appeasement politicians who remained seated, silent, and still. Though this was not entirely uncommon, one artifact served to symbolize the significance of this day; in front of Chamberlain, on a pile of books

[‡] A Tory radical and harsh critic of appeasement who would rise to high office as the protégé of Churchill; later to become Prime Minister in 1957.

stacked on the dispatch box, sat a radio microphone. As English diplomat Sir Harold Nicolson described, it was “a strange metal honeycomb ... that filled us with mingled horror and pride in the occasion.”¹⁷ Originally, it was meant to serve as a medium through which the first live broadcast from Parliament would be relayed. However, at the last minute, it was decided that Chamberlain’s voice would only be transmitted as far as the House of Lords where political colleagues had gathered. Chamberlain awaited the conclusion of the formalities before he began to deliver his much awaited speech. All eyes fixated on him, he began:

*“Shortly before the House adjourned at the end of July I remember that some questions were addressed to me as to the possibility of summoning the House before the time arranged, and during the Recess, in certain eventualities. Those eventualities referred to possible developments in Spain. But the matter which has brought us together to-day is one which even at that time was already threatening but which, I think, we all hoped would find a peaceful solution before we met again. Unhappily those hopes have not been fulfilled. To-day we are faced with a situation which has had no parallel since 1914...”*¹⁸

The Prime Minister’s first words were met with a deathly silence. Britain had been bled white by the German forces during the First World War and several of those present had experienced such blows first hand. Though, for many members of Parliament, this comparison had been the unspoken undertone of most political discussions and the precipitate of an atmosphere thick with fear, upon its verbalization – by the Prime Minister of all members – it was finally real; forced to the forefront of Britain’s collective political cognition. And why shouldn’t it have been? There had been no news of Chamberlain’s appeals – appeals of which most House Members were entirely unaware. For the majority of Ministers, Chiefs, and Lords, the Sudeten dilemma which had wracked Europe with a prolonged international crisis on the brink of war had finally come to a head.

At 3:15 P.M., as one of the few elite statesmen not attending Chamberlain's address, Cadogan was in his office at Foreign Affairs when his phone rang. It was Neville Henderson in Berlin. The latter communicated to the former that, "Herr Hitler invites the Prime Minister to meet him in Munich tomorrow morning. He has also invited Signor Mussolini, who will arrive at 10:00 A.M., and M. Daladier."¹⁹ Cadogan scurried to write down the message. The phone call concluded abruptly, after the vital information was communicated, whereupon Cadogan bolted across Whitehall to Parliament and rendezvoused with Halifax on the Peers' Gallery. The two briskly made their way to the small lobby behind the Speaker's Chair all while attempting to suppress their excitement. Wilson took the paper on which Cadogan had scribbled Henderson's relayed invitation, and signaled for Chamberlain's Private Parliamentary Secretary Lord Douglass to come hither. After flopping over several colleagues in a confused and anxious manner, he questioned Wilson, "What on earth has happened? Has he marched in?"²⁰ Almost unable to comprehend a response from Wilson so antithetical to his expectation, he snatched the note from the diplomat's hand and passed it to Simon who was sitting in front of him and next to the Prime Minister.²¹ At first, upon reading the message, the Royal Advisor was unsure how to inform Chamberlain, who was in mid-speech, of the news he had just received. The hushed excitement amongst the Cabinet caused a noticeable flurry – the House knew something important was afoot.

As Chamberlain hit his rhetorical stride, Simon waited for a short break in dialogue and managed to gain the Prime Minister's attention by sharply tugging at his coat-tails. Chamberlain turned to Simon expecting a vocal message, but instead was handed the note. Intrigued, the Prime Minister – having paused his speech – unfolded the thin sheet of paper. "His whole face, his whole body seemed to change. He raised his

face so that the light from the ceiling fell full upon it. All the lines of anxiety and weariness seemed suddenly to have been smoothed out; he appeared ten years younger and triumphant.”²² Having been in such proximity to the microphone, even the radio broadcast to the House of Lords transmitted Chamberlain’s voice as he asked Simon, “Should I tell them now?” To which Simon answered, “Yes.”²³

It had been approximately one hour since Cadogan received the phone call from Henderson. At 4:15 P.M., having talked for the past hour – only now receiving the reply he had been so eager to acquire – Chamberlain disclosed the personal messages he had dispatched to Mussolini and Hitler just hours ago. He informed the House of the Duce’s cooperation and success in convincing the German Chancellor to hold off mobilization for twenty-four hours. A sigh of immediate relief swept through the room. There was a slight pause in Chamberlain’s diction – now came the most important news:

*“I have something further to say to the House yet. I have now been informed by Herr Hitler that he invites me to meet him at Munich tomorrow morning. He has also invited Signor Mussolini and M. Daladier. Signor Mussolini has accepted and I have no doubt M. Daladier will also accept. I need not say what my answer will be.”*²⁴

As the final syllable of Chamberlain’s last word echoed throughout the hall, a fraction of a moment passed in dead silence before the House erupted in an effervescent clamor. “Thank God for the Prime Minister!” it was shouted. Handshakes and cheerful exchanges spread throughout the room like wildfire.²⁵ Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had succeeded in his final requisition for peace.

The focus of Chamberlain’s perspective contrasted sharply with that of Churchill’s regarding Hitler’s agreement to attend an international conference. Yes, war was avoided, or more accurately, postponed. But for how long? Would Germany really

cease to claw after more territory in Eastern Europe or could Hitler be counted on to remain dormant?[§] In either case, Chamberlain felt he owed it to the welfare of the continent and his own country to try for a long-term settlement while Churchill felt that he did not owe the Führer yet another chance to betray the West. Similarly, where Chamberlain saw the transfer of the Sudeten as a malignant cancer cut away from endangering the whole of Czechoslovakia, Churchill merely witnessed the butchering of an innocent state – the hacking away of an industrial limb from country Britain, itself, had helped create and which France, her own ally, had sworn to uphold. Moreover, would Britain be in a superior or inferior military state within six months to a year? The Cabinet had failed to come to a consensus regarding this matter. Interestingly enough, perhaps the door reopened for U.S support via Churchill's Grand Alliance proposition. Indeed, even if Germany's naval forced grew through Japan, the incorporation of America into the Anglo-French opposition would be enough to suppress or halt any further aggression made on behalf of Germany.

After staring into the abyss that was Germany for approximately four days in an attempt to mirror the opacity which instilled such fear into the Western powers, Hitler had flinched. British diplomacy was successful as far as it won the political staring contest of which it was attempting so desperately to be the victor. What could be said? By 4:15 P.M. of the 28th, both Chamberlain and Churchill had compelling reasons to harbor such distinguished sentiments. Everything else being equal, it held that one perspective brought peace and the other, war. The fox had struck an accord with the wolf and the lion – whose roar was hoarse from abuse – was forced to sit in his den and

§ This is an especially difficult question when the threat of the West qua military rearmament was increasing by the day.

wait. Though he was in blithe spirits at the opportunity of peace that now lay before Europe, Chamberlain would not be so ignorant to stall Britain's military growth; the Prime Minister would not allow himself to be caught in another political snare wherein his means for escape were restricted to diplomacy in lieu of brawn. Similarly, though Churchill would be glad to remain dormant if war could be avoided, he stood on high alert – none could convince him of such a fairytale ending.

Conclusion

On 30 September 1938, returning home from a four-power conference amongst Germany, Italy, France and His Majesty's Government, Neville Chamberlain knew what it was to be at the pinnacle of his political career. After transferring the Sudeten district of Czechoslovakia to Germany, albeit without the consent of Edvard Beneš, Chamberlain had, as he believed, secured peace with honor.¹ Upon touching down at Heston Aerodrome, Chamberlain was met by immense crowds, ecstatic cheers, and enthusiastic reporters eager to hear what the Prime Minister had to say. In addition to the already publicized peace agreement to which Hitler, Mussolini, Daladier, and Chamberlain himself all agreed, the Prime Minister timidly walked up to a cluster of microphones to reveal another private accord he made with the German Chancellor:

*"The settlement of the Czechoslovakian problem which has now been achieved is, in my view, only a prelude to a larger settlement in which all Europe may find peace. This morning, I had another talk with the German Chancellor, Herr Hitler; and here is the paper which bears his name upon it as well as mine. Some of you perhaps have already heard what it contains, but I would like to just read it to you: 'We, the German Fuhrer and Chancellor and the British Prime Minister have had a further meeting today and are agreed in recognizing that the question of Anglo-German relations is of the first importance for the two countries and for Europe. We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German naval agreement as a symbol of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.'"*²

As the masses erupted in applause, the beloved Prime Minister took his rightful seat in the Royal Car which slowly weaved through the crowd of blithe and grateful citizens before returning to his home at 10 Downing Street. Not even the day's drizzly weather could dampen the spirit of the British people in the midst of such an occasion. Little did they know, within a year of this joyous day, their hallowed Chamberlain would deliver another speech that would change the world – only this time, it would be a declaration of war. “Few men can have known such a tremendous reverse of fortune in so short a time,” recounted Chamberlain, reminiscent of his whirlwind devolution from a beloved bearer of peace on 30 September 1938 to a hated catalyst of war merely one year later on 3 September 1939.³ Eight months after declaring war on Germany, Chamberlain resigned the position of Prime Minister to his successor Winston Churchill; seven months after that, he died of cancer.⁴

The academic community, more so now than in the years immediately succeeding the Second World War, has grown divided on its respect and understanding of each leader's aptitude. Clouded with sympathy and fogged with wistfulness, most contemporary work regarding Chamberlain and Churchill is quick to position one individual over the other with little interest in a comprehensive understanding of each man's perception and the value that their actions yielded regarding British foreign policy from 25 to 28 September 1938; this is the real warped vision. It must be acknowledged that from the Czechs' rejection of Hitler's Godesberg Memorandum to the German Chancellor's agreement to attend an international conference, British foreign policy guised itself as an unpredictable entity: for every effort made toward peace qua appeasement, Britain afforded a stern warning of steadfast opposition. Britain's relation with Germany over these four days was not wholly dependent on appeasing the

Chancellor nor was it a product of conciliation as it would be after the signing of the Munich Agreement.* Instead, unknowing of what Germany was truly after, Britain mirrored the German sphinx in an attempt to pressure Hitler into a decision. Positioning the Chancellor as the aggressor, Britain would frame Germany as the harbinger of war in case one ensued and itself as the keeper of peace if the Führer opted for a conference.

Accordingly, the Munich Agreement was the only possible outcome for Britain. Not because it refused to bolster French forces in case Germany launched an assault on the Sudeten, but rather, for the reason that Hitler decided not to engage in such an operation. The fox's tactful appeals for an amicable settlement backed by the lion's fierce and fanatical roar – threatening what would befall the wolf should irresolution ensue – bore an unsettling ambiguity which deflected the very opacity Hitler intended to display to the West back unto himself. As such, the burden of deciding Europe's fate, the responsibility of which the Führer attempted to thrust upon the Britain and the blame of which he tried to put on Czechoslovakia, was forcibly reciprocated back upon Germany.

Academia, journalists, diplomats, etc. have long conflated the notion of responsibility with the concept of preference: simply because Hitler had the choice between peace and war does not mean that he would get what he wanted. Indeed, whatever Hitler's intentions were with his Memorandum at Godesberg and his subsequent abstruseness thereafter, it is clear that he desired no responsibility for the destiny of Europe. As a result of Britain's unique foreign policy after the Czechs' rejection of Hitler's Godesberg Memorandum, war, if the Chancellor would have it, would not be the war he wanted – if he wanted one; Germany would be the villain in the

* The product of this conciliation would be backed by the world's distrust of Hitler's Germany and the threat of more wide-spread opposition if the Munich Agreement was betrayed.

eye of the world. As such, the dual-policy which Britain undertook over the four days preceding the Munich agreement eliminated from Germany the possibility of engaging in a contained conflict – forcing the Third Reich to answer to the world in 1939 and not just to Britain and France in 1938. Hitler grants this elucidation just two months before his own suicide:

“When that arch capitalist bourgeois, Chamberlain, with his deceptive umbrella in his hand, put himself to the trouble of going all the way to the Berghof† to discuss matters with that upstart... he knew very well that he really intended to wage ruthless war against us. He was quite prepared to tell me anything which he thought might serve to lull my suspicions. His one and only object in undertaking this trip was to gain time. What we ought then to have done was to have struck at once. We ought to have gone to war in 1938. It was the last chance we had of localizing the war...”³

With this, whether Hitler did or did not desire war in 1938 (and whether Hitler’s impression of Chamberlain’s war-like proclivities are accurate) remains uncertain; still, what is transparent is the Munich Agreement’s success in muddling the European political context on which Hitler’s intent at Godesberg – whatever it was – had been predicated. Similarly, any hope at further territorial annexation in Europe thereafter, at least by amicable means, would be impossible for Germany. It seems that Churchill was not wrong when he boasted that history would be kind to him as he intended to write it; alas, to the political victor go the political spoils. Yet, truth is a fierce shaker of legend and vexatious redeemer of the faint-hearted. In reality, both men were imperative to Britain’s foreign policy and the result which it yielded.

This curious implication brings into question Sun Tzu’s tenet: “The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.” Prior to this work, it would seem only natural to associate such an accomplishment with Germany which, despite everything,

† Hitler’s home in Berchtesgaden.

obtained what it demanded without needing to fight for it. Notwithstanding, it remains equally as possible that Hitler wanted more than the Sudeten; that he wanted Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia in its entirety – as Edvard Beneš thought – and that it was Britain which subdued Germany to achieve what *it* wanted: peace at the cost of the Sudeten. What else could be made of Hitler's lamentable quote of late or Chamberlain's *Peace in Our Time* speech? However one adjudicates the short period before the Munich Agreement, it holds that those four days which preceded the most infamous appeasement in the world to date were, in reality, infused with a British spirit wholly incongruent with that which appeased Germany in the past. It would, enigmatically enough, harbor its highest temperament for war since 1914: clutching an olive branch in one hand and a sword in the other.

Greek stoic Epictetus once wrote that “courage is not inconsistent with caution;”⁶ a concept on which twentieth century writer Joseph Epstein expounds: “Courage is nine-tenths context. What is courageous in one setting can be foolhardy in another and even cowardly in a third.”⁷ As much as history is obliged to cipher through all that it can to achieve a proper outlook on certain developments, it nevertheless harbors within it a predisposition of romanticism; after all, it is difficult not to garner nostalgia of great men under perilous circumstances. Yet, the Munich Agreement, what it was, what it accomplished, and the British policy which preceded it, has been warped by the polarizing lens of retrospect. Its materialization was not born of the cowardice of a spineless politician any more than its collapse should be envisaged as the vindication of a superiorly foresighted man; its creation was nothing more than Hitler's decision not to go to war and its collapse was nothing more than Hitler's reinvigorated motivation to go to war – albeit under less favorable conditions to Germany.

It is the great mischief of superficial depictions to foolishly prize one man's reputation with the hanging of the other. Once more: such an attempt is not only groundless, but impossible. The inimitable duality of foreign policy which Britain embraced over the four days preceding the Munich Agreement suspended the nation between the realm of appeasement and resistance. Indeed, in absence of the lion, Hitler might have been allowed to take all of Czechoslovakia, as well as his claims in Poland and Hungary; without the fox, Britain and France might have been crushed by the German war machine with little commotion from the United States. Whatever one may speculate, it is certain that both proverbial beasts comprised Britain's unique German policy in this period; a dogma which remained an ineluctable response to Germany and a manifestation of all that was wise, resolute, and calculated in British foreign affairs.

Annotated Bibliography

In Search of Peace, published in 1939 after Chamberlain's resignation as Prime Minister, is a collection of speeches he gave during his tenure. As much as this source is useful, it is equally as limited. It is no secret that there usually exists a break between political rhetoric and personal sentiments.¹ Notwithstanding, what is said – and, equally as important, what is not said – pertaining to the situation in Europe grants an interesting insight of public opinion during this era as well as the larger concerns of other politicians to whom Chamberlain gave addresses.² Surely that which needed bolstering from the highest political office was of the utmost debate in the interior of Britain's political sphere.³ As such, this work highlights the political tent-poles of the situation in Europe; both for Chamberlain and for Churchill. Though they each ran in vastly different political circles, the grander atmosphere of Parliament was an environment in which they both needed to maneuver.⁴

The Gathering Storm by Winston Churchill is a primary source written in 1948 and a highly regarded first-hand glimpse into the interim of pre-WWII British policy. Its main objective, as one might glean from the author, is to defend Churchill's actions by way of circumstantial evidence.⁵ Already, the objective remains slanted toward the ethos of one man over the other;⁶ its preconceived agenda of personal vindication muddies the

waters of what can or should be believed.⁷ Since the questions asked are largely guided by the answers the author wants to make known, its lack of perspective (namely, that of Chamberlain's) simplifies complicated notions into overgeneralized impressions. It relies heavily on identifying perceived weaknesses of character virtues exuded by, what Churchill thought to be, Chamberlain's susceptibility to deception and ignorance to Adolf Hitler's true intent and ambition.⁸ Yet, there is much to be salvaged from this work. Unlike the opaqueness of public rhetoric, these memoirs are quite explicit in their descriptions. Although this account harbors a not-so-hidden agenda of outlining why Churchill's perspectives were superior, it nevertheless discloses a number of political pressures and outlooks on war that factored into both his cognition and other politicians' during the four days preceding the Munich Agreement.

Churchill's Memoirs of the Second World War, first published in 1959, harbors similar proclivities concerning his own vindication. Although this comprehensive commentary is meant to tell the happenstances of the war itself rather than events leading up to it, there does exist a chapter dedicated to the Munich Agreement entitled, *The Tragedy of Munich*,⁹ preceded by *Czechoslovakia*,¹⁰ and *The Rape of Austria*.¹¹ Embedded in these pages are allusions to Churchill's prior war experiences.¹² Calling on his experience as a source of vindication, Churchill, once again, is quick to belittle the notions of others when they diverge from his point-of-view. Although he references times in which his foreign policy analysis was spot-on, he purposefully marginalizes operations of his own failure or associated guilt – chiefly the tragedy of Gallipoli.¹³ What he chooses to include and exclude from his experience outlines what he has learned from relevant professional knowledge as well as illuminates any factors that he is unable, or unwilling, to acknowledge in his assessment of late 1930s Europe.

The Origins of the Second World War by A.J.P Taylor serves as an adequate filter for the arguments put forth by Churchill. It examines the *realpolitik* that faced Great Britain during this time and grants higher weight to the political, military, and economic constraints that confined Chamberlain in the paths he could pursue.¹⁴ This work's publication in 1961 was the first quality composition of external factors thrust upon Britain; moreover, it is the first work that alludes to the different factors on which both Churchill and Chamberlain were focused.¹⁵ Hereafter, historians and political philosophers alike were finally forced to reconsider the Munich Agreement which had long been framed as a necessary expedient born of weakness.¹⁶ Although this fresh take on an old conception is quite useful as a point of measurement concerning prior works, it is obsessed with the *realpolitik*.¹⁷ This is not meant to be a criticism – it accomplishes precisely what it aims to; it so happens that its aims are inconsistent with mine. The *realpolitik* aside, this work does embed within its mechanical analysis an illumination of percipience as it relates to Churchill and Chamberlain. Here, what each man saw that the other did not, and why they weighed factors that they both saw differently can be answered.

The Warped Vision, written by Margaret George in 1965, aims to “provide not a description of the course of the disaster of British appeasement policy, but an explanation of the decisions which British statesmen reached in their agonizing effort to stabilize a world unhinged by war and revolution.”¹⁸ Though the latter half of this synopsis aligns partially with the purpose of my work – save for the contextual submersion of the two-man dichotomy within the confines of the Munich Agreement – it is undermined by its former half. Already, it is clear that it harbors inclinations toward castigating Chamberlain's perspective. Falling short of a full explanation in a similar

manner Churchill's Gathering Storm does, it holds that the objective of this work and some evidence that it puts forth can be salvaged from the biases in which the book is entrenched. It is important to note here that this work is not guilty of prejudices because it chooses a side; it is guilty because it misinterprets British foreign policy in the days preceding the Munich Agreement. Still, this work should be commended; it is the first attempt to identify the impetus behind Churchill and Chamberlain's diverging perceptions.

Munich: The Price of Peace by Telford Taylor, published in 1979, also provides a valuable framework for this period in European history. As one of the first works to focus on the Munich Agreement as the lens through which to understand the relationship between these two subjects, it constructs its narrative quite originally. Concentrating "not in what transpired on the day of Munich, but in the why and how of the crisis as a whole"¹⁹ allows for an exegesis of British foreign policy and opts for a wider scope of the problem than merely the character of these two men. Neither Chamberlain nor Churchill was permanently situated in their mindsets throughout the 1930s; feelings toward the situation and toward each other intensified as the occupation of the Rhineland and the *Anschluss* passed. This work can be used not so much as evidence to solve the enigma of *why* each leader held different conceptions, but what these different conceptions looked like and how they influenced their actions during the four days preceding Munich Agreement. There was much to be gleaned from the style of this work as well; it provided information that supplemented abstract facets of my work with grounding in reality and chronology.

Neville Chamberlain: A biography, a work published in 1988 by Robert Self, grants a unique character elucidation in regards to Chamberlain. Though Churchill

enjoys several published memoirs – Memoirs of the Second World War and The Gathering Storm – the combination of Chamberlain’s voice being filtered by political rhetoric in public addresses and his death shortly after his resignation leaves sincere primary accounts from him wholly absent.²⁰ Though there exists a plethora of correspondences between Chamberlain and his loved ones during this exasperating period, fate would not allow him the opportunity to defend his choices in the same manner it allowed Churchill. Although this work is slanted toward defending Chamberlain by way of circumstantial constraint, what I gathered from the abundance of personal missives and idiosyncratic qualities proved to be invaluable in revealing the influence and role his personality had on his decisions leading up to Munich.

The Last Lion: Alone, 1932-1940 is the second volume of a series of works by William Manchester and Paul Reid – though the former is solely responsible for this volume published in 1988. This narrative has found itself largely critiqued throughout this dissertation. From its preliminary editions published in the 1980s to its late sequels still in progress, this set is one to be admired. It should be recognized that it is not the intent of this exposition to condemn the comprehensiveness or the thoroughness of this work; if anything, the opposite should be admitted. Instead, my critique stems from the foundation of its deductions. I do not intend to dispute the chronicles which it so adeptly systematizes, but the opinions which are garnered from such accounts. This work is quite vast in content; spanning from the beginning of Churchill’s life to the onset of World War II and beyond, it harbors many elucidations which are vital for understanding the views of anti-appeasers and their perception of Germany and European affairs throughout the first half of the twentieth century. On whole, though my dissertation diverges from the outlooks harbored by Manchester, his second work

within the series was nevertheless critical to understanding Churchill's mindset during these four tense days and the value he brought to British foreign affairs.

Munich, 1938 by David Faber, published in 2008, is one of the more contemporary works on the Munich Agreement. Though it does not deal so much with Churchill, it nevertheless grants insight into the latest take on the Munich Agreement and serves to emphasize certain individuals – such as Lord Halifax²¹ and French Premier Daladier²² – as critical in the road to Munich. There is a lot to be said about the company a man keeps; as such, the allies of Churchill can be cross-examined with the allies of Chamberlain to expose another dimension to this enigma. Further, the political pressures and diplomatic obligations that are coupled with such relationships must be considered. It is hard to overstate the importance of such influences.

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