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Munich Agreement

The **Munich Agreement** (*Czech*: *Mnichovská dohoda*; *Slovak*: *Mníchovská dohoda*; *German*: *Münchener Abkommen*) or **Munich Betrayal** (*Czech*: *Mnichovská zrada*; *Slovak*: *Mníchovská zrada*), was an agreement between *France* and *Nazi Germany*, that France would not provide military assistance to *Czechoslovakia* in the upcoming German occupation of "*Sudetenland*", effectively dishonoring French-Czechoslovak alliance^[1] and allowing Nazi Germany's *annexation* of the Sudetenland, a region of western Czechoslovakia inhabited by 800,000 people, mainly German speakers. *Adolf Hitler* announced it was his last territorial claim in Europe, and the choice seemed to be between war and *appeasement*. An emergency meeting of the main European powers, not including the *Soviet Union*, took place in *Munich*, Germany, on 29-30 September 1938.

An agreement was quickly reached on Hitler's terms. It was signed by the top leaders of Germany, France, *Great Britain*, and *Italy*. Czechoslovakia was not invited to the conference. Militarily, the Sudetenland was of strategic importance to Czechoslovakia as most of its border defenses were situated there to protect against a German attack. Germany took control of the Sudetenland following a low-intensity undeclared war in the area that had started on 17 September 1938. The agreement was soon followed by the *First Vienna Award* which set the new border between Czechoslovakia and Hungary, while Poland also annexed territories from Czechoslovakia. In March 1939, the *First Slovak Republic* was proclaimed and shortly by the creation of the *Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia* Germany took full control of the Czech parts. As a result, Czechoslovakia was dismembered.

Today, it is widely regarded as a failed act of *appeasement*, and the term has become "a byword for the futility of appeasing expansionist totalitarian states".^[2]



After the summit, British prime minister Neville Chamberlain declared that the Munich agreement meant "peace for our time".

0:00

MENU

Radio broadcast of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's return to Great Britain after signing the Munich Agreement. Recording is 9 minutes, 23 seconds long.

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Demands for autonomy

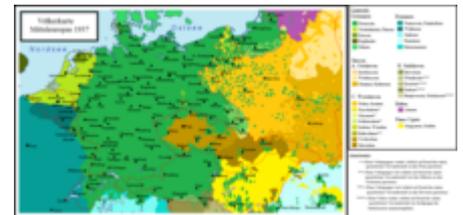
Czechoslovakia was created in 1918 following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of World War I. The Treaty of Versailles recognized the independence of Czechoslovakia with a population that included three million German-speaking people, 24 percent of the total population of the country. The Germans lived mostly in border regions of the historical lands of Bohemia and Moravia for which they coined the new name Sudetenland, bordering on Germany and the newly created country of Austria. The Sudeten Germans were not consulted about whether they wished to be citizens of Czechoslovakia. Although the constitution guaranteed equality for all citizens, there was a tendency among political leaders to transform the country "into an instrument of Czech and Slovak nationalism".^[4] Some progress was made to integrate the Germans and other minorities, but they continued to



Konrad Henlein, leader of the Sudeten German Party (SdP), a branch of the Nazi Party of Germany in Czechoslovakia

be under-represented in the government and the army. Moreover, the Great Depression beginning in 1929 impacted the highly industrialized and export-oriented Sudeten Germans more than it did the Czech and Slovak populations. By 1936, 60 percent of the unemployed people in Czechoslovakia were Germans.^[5]

In 1933 Sudeten German leader Konrad Henlein founded the Sudeten German Party (SdP) which was "militant, populist, and openly hostile" to the Czechoslovakian government and soon captured two-thirds of the vote in districts with a heavy German population. Historians differ as to whether the SdP was from its beginning a Nazi front organization, or evolved into one.^{[6][7]} By 1935, the SdP was the second largest political party in Czechoslovakia as German votes concentrated on this party while Czech and Slovak votes were spread among several parties.^[6] Shortly



1937 ethno-linguistic situation in central Europe



Czech districts with an ethnic German population in 1934 of 25% or more (pink), 50% or more (red), and 75% or more (dark red)^[3] in 1935

after the Anschluss of Austria to Germany, Henlein met with Hitler in Berlin on 28 March 1938, where he was instructed to raise demands unacceptable to the Czechoslovak government led by president Edvard Beneš. On 24 April, the SdP issued a series of demands upon the government of Czechoslovakia, that were known as the Carlsbad Program.^[8] Among the demands, Henlein demanded autonomy for Germans living in Czechoslovakia.^[6] The Czechoslovak government responded by saying that it was willing to provide more minority rights to the German minority but was initially reluctant to grant them autonomy.^[6]

With tension high between Germans and the Czechoslovakian government, on 15 September 1938 President Beneš offered secretly to give 6,000 square kilometres (2,300 sq mi) of Czechoslovakian territory to Germany in exchange for a German agreement to admit 1.5 to 2.0 million Sudeten Germans which Czechoslovakia would expel. Hitler did not reply.^[9]

Sudeten crisis

As the previous appeasement of Hitler had shown, the governments of both France and Britain were intent on avoiding war. The French government did not wish to face Germany alone and took its lead from Britain's Conservative government of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain considered the Sudeten German grievances justified and believed Hitler's intentions were limited. Both Britain and France, therefore, advised Czechoslovakia to accede to Germany's demands. Beneš resisted and on 19 May initiated a partial mobilization in response to possible German invasion.^[10]

On 20 May, Hitler presented his generals with a draft plan of attack on Czechoslovakia codenamed Operation Green,^[11] insisting that he would not "smash Czechoslovakia" militarily without "provocation," "a particularly favourable opportunity" or "adequate political justification."^[12] On 28 May, Hitler called a meeting of his service chiefs where he ordered an acceleration of U-boat construction and brought forward the construction of his first two battleships, Bismarck and Tirpitz, to spring 1940, and demanded that the increase in the firepower of the battlecruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau be accelerated.^[13] While recognizing that this would still be insufficient for a full-scale naval war with Britain, Hitler hoped it would be a sufficient deterrent.^[14] Ten days later, Hitler signed a secret directive for war against Czechoslovakia, to begin not later than 1 October.^[10]

On 22 May, Juliusz Łukasiewicz, the Polish ambassador to France, told the French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet that if France moved against Germany in defense of Czechoslovakia: "We shall not move." Łukasiewicz also told Bonnet that Poland would oppose any attempt by Soviet forces to defend Czechoslovakia from Germany. Daladier told Jakob Surits, the Soviet ambassador to France: "Not only can we not count on Polish support but we have no faith that Poland will not strike us in the back."^[15]

Hitler's adjutant, Fritz Wiedemann, recalled after the war that he was "very shocked" by Hitler's new plans to attack Britain and France 3–4 years after "deal[ing] with the situation" in Czechoslovakia.^[16] General Ludwig Beck, chief of the German general staff, noted that Hitler's change of heart in favour of quick action was due to Czechoslovak defences still being improvised, which would no longer be the case 2–3 years later, and British rearmament not coming into effect until 1941/42.^[14] General Alfred Jodl noted in his diary that the partial Czechoslovak mobilisation of 21 May had led Hitler to issue a new order for Operation Green on 30 May, and that this was accompanied by a covering letter from Keitel stating that the plan must be implemented by 1 October at the very latest.^[17]

In the meantime, the British government demanded that Beneš request a mediator. Not wishing to sever his government's ties with Western Europe, Beneš reluctantly accepted. The British appointed Lord Runciman, the former Liberal cabinet minister, who arrived in Prague on 3 August with instructions to persuade Beneš to agree to a plan



Edvard Beneš, the second President of Czechoslovakia and leader of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile

acceptable to the Sudeten Germans.^[18] On 20 July, French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet, told the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Paris that while France would declare her support in public to help the Czechoslovak negotiations, it was not prepared to go to war over the Sudetenland question.^[18] During August the German press was full of stories alleging Czechoslovak atrocities against Sudeten Germans, with the intention of forcing the Western Powers into putting pressure on the Czechoslovaks to make concessions.^[19] Hitler hoped the Czechoslovaks would refuse and that the Western Powers would then feel morally justified in leaving the Czechoslovaks to their fate.^[20] In August, Germany sent 750,000 soldiers along the border of Czechoslovakia officially as part of army maneuvers.^{[6][20]} On 4 or 5 September,^[18] Beneš submitted the Fourth Plan, granting nearly all the demands of the Munich Agreement. The Sudeten Germans were under instruction from Hitler to avoid a compromise,^[20] and after the SdP held demonstrations that provoked police action in Ostrava on 7 September in which two of their parliamentary deputies were arrested,^[18] the Sudeten Germans used this incident and false allegations of other atrocities as an excuse to break off further negotiations.^{[18][21]}



Adolf Hitler greets British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain on the steps of the Berghof, 15 September 1938

On 12 September, Hitler made a speech at a Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg on the Sudeten crisis in which he condemned the actions of the government of Czechoslovakia.^[6] Hitler denounced Czechoslovakia as being a fraudulent state that was in violation of international law's emphasis of national self-determination, claiming it was a Czech hegemony where neither the Germans, the Slovaks, the Hungarians, the Ukrainians, nor the Poles of the country actually wanted to be in a union with the Czechs.^[22] Hitler accused Czechoslovakia's President Edvard Beneš of seeking to gradually exterminate the Sudeten Germans, claiming that since Czechoslovakia's creation over 600,000 Germans were intentionally forced out of their homes under the threat of starvation if they did not leave.^[23] He alleged that Beneš' government was persecuting Germans along with Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks, and accused Beneš of threatening these nationalities with being branded traitors if they were not loyal to the

country.^[22] He stated that he, as the head of state of Germany, would support the right of the self-determination of fellow Germans in the Sudetenland.^[22] He condemned Beneš for his government's recent execution of several German protesters.^[22] He accused Beneš of being belligerent and threatening behaviour towards Germany which, if war broke out, would result in Beneš forcing Sudeten Germans to fight against their will against Germans from Germany.^[22] Hitler accused the government of Czechoslovakia of being a client regime of France, claiming that the French Minister of Aviation Pierre Cot had said "We need this state as a base from which to drop bombs with greater ease to destroy Germany's economy and its industry".^[23]

On 13 September, after internal violence and disruption in Czechoslovakia ensued, Chamberlain asked Hitler for a personal meeting to find a solution to avert a war.^[24] Chamberlain arrived by plane in Germany on 15 September and then arrived at Hitler's residence in Berchtesgaden for the meeting.^[25] The Sudeten German leader Henlein flew to Germany on the same day.^[24] On that day, Hitler and Chamberlain held discussions in which Hitler insisted that the Sudeten Germans must be allowed to exercise the right of national self-determination and be able to join Sudetenland with Germany; Hitler also expressed concern to Chamberlain about what he perceived as British "threats".^[25] Chamberlain responded that he had not issued "threats" and in frustration asked Hitler "Why did I come over here to waste my time?".^[25] Hitler responded that if Chamberlain was willing to accept the self-determination of the Sudeten Germans, he would be willing to discuss the matter.^[25] Chamberlain and Hitler held discussions for three hours, after which the meeting adjourned and Chamberlain flew back to the UK and met with his cabinet to discuss the issue.^[25]

After the meeting, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier flew to London on 16 September to meet with British officials to discuss a course of action.^[26] The situation in Czechoslovakia became more tense that day with the Czechoslovak government issuing an arrest warrant for the Sudeten German leader Henlein, who had arrived in Germany a day earlier to take part in the negotiations.^[27] The French proposals ranged from waging war against

Germany to supporting the Sudetenland being ceded to Germany.^[27] The discussions ended with a firm British-French plan in place.^[27] Britain and France demanded that Czechoslovakia cede to Germany all those territories where the German population represented over fifty percent of the Sudetenland's total population.^[27] In exchange for this concession, Britain and France would guarantee the independence of Czechoslovakia.^[27] The proposed solution was rejected by both Czechoslovakia and opponents of it in Britain and France.^[27]



A 1938 terrorist action of Sudetendeutsches Freikorps



Czechoslovak Army soldiers on patrol in the Sudetenland in September 1938

On 17 September 1938 Hitler ordered the establishment of Sudetendeutsches Freikorps, a paramilitary organization that took over the structure of Ordnungsgruppe, an organization of ethnic-Germans in Czechoslovakia that had been dissolved by the Czechoslovak authorities the previous day due to its implication in a large number of terrorist activities. The organization was sheltered, trained and equipped by German authorities and conducted cross border terrorist operations into Czechoslovak territory. Relying on the Convention for the Definition of Aggression, Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš^[28] and the government-in-exile^[29] later regarded 17 September 1938 as the beginning of the undeclared German-Czechoslovak war. This understanding has been assumed also by the contemporary Czech Constitutional court.^[30] In the following days, Czechoslovak forces suffered over 100 personnel killed in action, hundreds wounded and over 2.000 abducted to Germany.



Chamberlain greeted by Adolf Hitler at the beginning of the Bad Godesberg meeting on 24 September 1938

On 18 September, Italy's Duce Benito Mussolini made a speech in Trieste, Italy, where he declared "If there are two camps, for and against Prague, let it be known that Italy has chosen its side", with the clear implication being that Mussolini supported Germany in the crisis.^[25]

On 20 September, German opponents to the Nazi regime within the military met to discuss the final plans of a plot they had developed to overthrow the Nazi regime. The meeting was led by General Hans Oster, the deputy head of the Abwehr (Germany's counter-espionage agency). Other members included Captain Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, and other military officers leading the planned coup d'etat met at the meeting.^[31]

On 22 September, Chamberlain, about to board his plane to go to Germany for further talks at Bad Godesberg, told the press who met him there that "My objective is peace in Europe, I trust this trip is the way to that peace."^[27] Chamberlain arrived in Cologne, where he received a lavish grand welcome with a German band playing "God Save the King" and Germans giving Chamberlain flowers and gifts.^[27] Chamberlain had calculated that fully accepting German annexation of all of the Sudetenland with no reductions would force Hitler to accept the agreement.^[27] Upon being told of this, Hitler responded "Does this mean that the Allies have agreed with Prague's approval to the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany?", Chamberlain responded "Precisely", to which Hitler responded by shaking his head, saying that the Allied offer was insufficient. He told Chamberlain that he wanted Czechoslovakia to be completely dissolved and its territories redistributed to Germany, Poland, and Hungary, and told Chamberlain to take it or leave

it.^[27] Chamberlain was shaken by this statement.^[27] Hitler went on to tell Chamberlain that since their last meeting on the 15th, Czechoslovakia's actions, which Hitler claimed included killings of Germans, had made the situation unbearable for Germany.^[27]

Later in the meeting, a prearranged deception was undertaken in order to influence and put pressure on Chamberlain: one of Hitler's aides entered the room to inform Hitler of more Germans being killed in Czechoslovakia, to which Hitler screamed in response "I will avenge every one of them. The Czechs must be destroyed."^[27] The meeting ended with Hitler refusing to make any concessions to the Allies' demands.^[27] Later that evening, Hitler grew worried that he had gone too far in pressuring Chamberlain, and telephoned Chamberlain's hotel suite, saying that he would accept annexing only the Sudetenland, with no designs on other territories, provided that Czechoslovakia begin the evacuation of ethnic Czechs from the German majority territories by 26 September at 8:00am. After being pressed by Chamberlain, Hitler agreed to have the ultimatum set for 1 October (the same date that Operation Green was set to begin).^[32] Hitler then said to Chamberlain that this was one concession that he was willing to make to the Prime Minister as a "gift" out of respect for the fact that Chamberlain had been willing to back down somewhat on his earlier position.^[32] Hitler went on to say that upon annexing the Sudetenland, Germany would hold no further territorial claims upon Czechoslovakia and would enter into a collective agreement to guarantee the borders of Germany and Czechoslovakia.^[32]

Meanwhile, a new Czechoslovak cabinet, under General Jan Syrový, was installed and on 23 September a decree of general mobilization was issued which was accepted by the public with a strong enthusiasm - within 24 hours, one million men joined the army to defend the country. The Czechoslovak army, modern, experienced and possessing an excellent system of frontier fortifications, was prepared to fight. The Soviet Union announced its willingness to come to Czechoslovakia's assistance, provided that the Soviet Army would be able to cross Polish and Romanian territory. Both countries refused to allow the Soviet army to use their territories.^[33]

In the early hours of 24 September, Hitler issued the Godesberg Memorandum, which demanded that Czechoslovakia cede the Sudetenland to Germany no later than 28 September, with plebiscites to be held in unspecified areas under the supervision of German and Czechoslovak forces. The memorandum also stated that if Czechoslovakia did not agree to the German demands by 2 pm on 28 September, Germany would take the Sudetenland by force. On the same day, Chamberlain returned to Britain and announced that Hitler demanded the annexation of the Sudetenland without delay.^[32] The announcement enraged those in Britain and France who wanted to confront Hitler once and for all, even if it meant war, and its supporters gained strength.^[32] The Czechoslovak Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Jan Masaryk, was elated upon hearing of the support for Czechoslovakia from British and French opponents of Hitler's plans, saying "The nation of Saint Wenceslas will never be a nation of slaves."^[32]

On 25 September, Czechoslovakia agreed to the conditions previously agreed upon by Britain, France, and Germany. The next day, however, Hitler added new demands, insisting that the claims of ethnic Germans in Poland and Hungary also be satisfied.



General Hans Oster, deputy head of the *Abwehr* met with other German military officers on 20 September 1938 to discuss final plans of a plot to overthrow the Nazi regime.



Protest in Prague against German aggression, 22 September 1938



Neville Chamberlain with Benito Mussolini, September 1938

On 26 September, Chamberlain sent Sir Horace Wilson to carry a personal letter to Hitler declaring that the Allies wanted a peaceful resolution to the Sudeten crisis.^[32] Later that evening, Hitler made his response in a speech at the Sportpalast in Berlin; he claimed that the Sudetenland was "the last territorial demand I have to make in Europe"^[34] and gave Czechoslovakia a deadline of 28 September at 2:00pm to cede the Sudetenland to Germany or face war.^[32]

On 28 September at 10:00am, four hours before the deadline and with no agreement to Hitler's demand by Czechoslovakia, the British ambassador to Italy, Lord Perth, called Italy's Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano to request an urgent meeting.^[32] Perth informed Ciano that Chamberlain had instructed him to request that Mussolini enter the negotiations and urge Hitler to delay the ultimatum.^[32] At 11:00am, Ciano met Mussolini and informed him of Chamberlain's proposition; Mussolini agreed with it and responded by telephoning Italy's ambassador to Germany and told him "Go to the Fuhrer at once, and tell him that whatever happens, I will be at his side, but that I request a twenty-four hour delay before hostilities begin. In the meantime, I will study what can be done to solve the problem."^[35] Hitler received Mussolini's message while in discussions with the French ambassador. Hitler told the ambassador "My good friend, Benito Mussolini, has asked me to delay for twenty-four hours the marching orders of the German army, and I agreed. Of course, this was no concession, as the invasion date was set for 1 October 1938."^[36] Upon speaking with Chamberlain, Lord Perth gave Chamberlain's thanks to Mussolini as well as Chamberlain's request that Mussolini attend a four-power conference of Britain, France, Germany, and Italy in Munich on 29 September to settle the Sudeten problem prior to the deadline of 2:00pm. Mussolini agreed.^[36] Hitler's only request was to make sure that Mussolini be involved in the negotiations at the conference.^[36] When United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt learned the conference had been scheduled, he telegraphed Chamberlain, "Good man".^[37]

Polish and Hungarian actions during the crisis

Poland was building up a secret Polish organization in the area of Zaolzie from 1935.^[38] In summer 1938, Poland tried to organize guerrilla groups in the area.^[38] On 21 September, Poland officially requested a direct transfer of the area to its own control.^[39] This was accompanied by placing army along the Czechoslovak border on 23–24 September and by giving an order to the so-called "battle units" of Zaolzie Poles and the "Zaolzie Legion", a paramilitary organization subordinate to army command and made up of volunteers from all over Poland, to cross the border to Czechoslovakia and attack Czechoslovak units.^[38] Those were, however, repulsed by Czechoslovak forces and retreated to Poland.^[38]

Hungary followed Polish request for transfer of territory with its own one on 22 September.^[39]

Resolution

A deal was reached on 29 September, and at about 1:30 a.m. on 30 September 1938,^[40] Adolf Hitler, Neville Chamberlain, Benito Mussolini and Édouard Daladier signed the Munich Agreement. The agreement was officially introduced by Mussolini although in fact the Italian plan was nearly identical to the Godesberg proposal: the German army was to complete the occupation of the Sudetenland by 10 October, and an international commission would decide the future of other disputed areas.

Czechoslovakia was informed by Britain and France that it could either resist Nazi Germany alone or submit to the prescribed annexations. The Czechoslovak government, realizing the hopelessness of fighting the Nazis alone, reluctantly capitulated (30 September) and agreed to abide by the agreement. The settlement gave Germany the Sudetenland starting 10 October, and *de facto* control over the rest of Czechoslovakia as long as Hitler promised to go no further. On 30 September after some rest, Chamberlain went to Hitler and asked him to sign a peace treaty between the United Kingdom and Germany. After Hitler's interpreter translated it for him, he happily agreed.

From left to right: Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, Mussolini, and Ciano pictured before signing the Munich Agreement, which gave the Sudetenland to Germany.

On 30 September, upon his return to Britain, Chamberlain delivered his controversial "peace for our time" speech to crowds in London.^[41]

Reactions

Though the British and French were pleased, as were the Nazi military and German diplomatic leadership, a British diplomat in Berlin claimed he had been informed by reliable sources that soon after the meeting with Chamberlain Hitler had furiously said: "Gentlemen, this has been my first international conference and I can assure you that it will be my last". The British diplomat claimed his sources relayed that Hitler viewed Chamberlain as "an impertinent busybody who spoke the ridiculous jargon of an outmoded democracy."^[42] In his postwar memoirs, Winston Churchill, a staunch opponent of appeasement, lumped Poland and Hungary, both of which subsequently annexed parts of Czechoslovakia containing Polish and Hungarian nationals, with Germany as "vultures upon the carcass of Czechoslovakia."^[43]

The agreement was generally applauded. Prime Minister Édouard Daladier of France did not believe, as one scholar put it, that a European War was justified "to maintain three million Germans under Czech sovereignty." Gallup Polls in Britain, France, and the United States indicated that the majority of people supported the agreement. President Beneš of Czechoslovakia was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1939. Even Winston Churchill was reported at the time as commenting that he would have done the same as Chamberlain.^[44]

The New York Times headline on the Munich agreement read "Hitler gets less than his Sudeten demands" and reported that a "joyful crowd" hailed Daladier on his return to France and that Chamberlain was "wildly cheered" on his return to Britain.^[45]

Australian Prime Minister Joseph Lyons said "We owe heartfelt thanks to all responsible for the outcome, and appreciate very much the efforts of President Roosevelt and Signor Mussolini to bring about the Munich conference of the Powers at which a united desire for peace has been shown."^[46]



Sequence of events following the Munich Agreement:

1. Germany occupies the Sudetenland (October 1938).
2. Poland annexes Zaolzie, an area with a Polish plurality, over which the two countries had fought a war in 1919 (October 1938).
3. Hungary occupies border areas (southern third of Slovakia and southern Carpathian Ruthenia) with Hungarian minorities in accordance with the First Vienna Award (November 1938).
4. On 15 March 1939, during the German invasion of the remaining Czech territories, Hungary annexes Carpathian Ruthenia (which had been autonomous since October 1938).
5. Germany establishes the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia with a puppet government, on 16 March 1939.
6. Meanwhile, during the German invasion of Czech territories, a pro-Hitler Catholic-fascist government splits off the remaining territories of Czechoslovakia and declares the Slovak Republic, an Axis client state.

The Führerbau in Munich, site of the 1938 Munich Agreement

Present-day view of the Hitler's office in the Führerbau where the 1938 Munich Agreement was signed. Note the original fireplace and ceiling lamp.

Czechs expelled from the border looking for new home, October 1938.

Joseph Stalin was upset by the results of the Munich conference. The Soviets, who had a mutual military assistance treaty with Czechoslovakia, felt betrayed by France, who also had a mutual military assistance treaty with Czechoslovakia. The British and French, however, mostly used the Soviets as a threat to dangle over the Germans. Stalin concluded that the West had actively colluded with Hitler to hand over a Central European country to the Nazis, causing concern that they might do the same to the Soviet Union in the future, allowing the partition of the USSR between the western powers and the fascist Axis. This belief led the Soviet Union to reorient its foreign policy towards a rapprochement with Germany, which eventually led to the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in 1939.^[47]

The Czechoslovaks were dismayed with the Munich settlement. They were not invited to the conference, and felt they had been betrayed by the United Kingdom and France. Czechs and Slovaks call the Munich Agreement the **Munich Diktat** (Czech: *Mnichovský diktát*; Slovak: *Mníchovský diktát*). The phrase "Munich Betrayal" (Czech: *Mnichovská zrada*; Slovak: *Mníchovská zrada*) is also used because the military alliance Czechoslovakia had with France proved useless. The slogan "About us, without us!" (Czech: *O nás bez nás!*) summarizes the feelings of the people of Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia and Czech Republic) towards the Agreement. With Sudetenland gone to Germany, Czecho-Slovakia (as the state was now renamed) lost its defensible border with Germany and its fortifications. Without them its independence became more nominal than real. Czechoslovakia also lost 70% of its iron/steel industry, 70% of its electrical power and 3.5 million citizens to Germany as a result of the settlement.^[48]

The Sudeten Germans celebrated what they saw as their liberation. The imminent war, it seemed, had been avoided.

Before the Munich Agreement Hitler's determination to invade Czechoslovakia on 1 October 1938 had provoked a major crisis in the German command structure. The Chief of the General Staff, General Ludwig Beck, protested in a lengthy series of memos that it would start a world war that Germany would lose, and urged Hitler to put off the projected war. Hitler called Beck's arguments against war "*kindische Kräfteberechnungen*" ("childish force calculations"). On 4 August 1938, a secret Army meeting was held. Beck read his lengthy report to the assembled officers. They all agreed something had to be done to prevent certain disaster. Beck hoped they would all resign together but no one resigned except Beck. His replacement, General Franz Halder, sympathised with Beck and they both conspired with several top generals, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (Chief of German Intelligence), and Graf von Helldorf (Berlin's Police Chief) to arrest Hitler the moment he gave the invasion order. This plan would only work if Britain issued a strong warning and a letter to the effect that they would fight to preserve Czechoslovakia. This would help to convince the German people that certain defeat awaited Germany. Agents were therefore sent to England to tell Chamberlain that an attack on Czechoslovakia was planned, and of their intention to overthrow Hitler if this occurred. The proposal was rejected by the British Cabinet and no such letter was issued. Accordingly, the proposed removal of Hitler did not go ahead.^[49] On this basis it has been argued that the Munich Agreement kept Hitler in power, although whether it would have been any more successful than the 1944 plot is doubtful.

Opinions about the agreement

The British population had expected imminent war and the "statesman-like gesture" of Chamberlain was at first greeted with acclaim. Chamberlain was greeted as a hero by the royal family and invited on the balcony at Buckingham Palace before he had presented the agreement to Parliament. The generally positive reaction quickly soured despite royal patronage. But

Sudeten Germans cheering the arrival of the German Army into the Sudetenland in October 1938.

A political cartoon from Poland depicts The Soviet Union in the form of "Ivan" being kicked out of Europe: "It seems Europe has stopped respecting me"

Czech refugees expelled from the Sudetenland at the Refugees Office October 1938

Map of the Sudetenland Reichsgau

there was opposition from the start; Clement Attlee and the Labour Party opposed the agreement, in alliance with two Conservative MPs, Duff Cooper and Vyvyan Adams, who had been seen up to then as a die hard and reactionary element in the Conservative Party.

As the threat of Germany and a European war became more evident, opinions changed. Chamberlain was excoriated for his role as one of the "Men of Munich", in books such as the 1940 *Guilty Men*. A rare wartime defence of the Munich Agreement came in 1944 from Viscount Maugham, who had been Lord Chancellor at the time. Maugham viewed the decision to establish a Czechoslovak state including substantial German and Hungarian minorities as a "dangerous experiment" in the light of previous disputes and ascribed the Munich Agreement largely to France's need to extricate itself from its treaty obligations in the light of its unpreparedness for war.^[50] After the war, Churchill's memoir of the period, *The Gathering Storm* (1948), asserted that Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler at Munich had been wrong, and recorded Churchill's pre-war warnings of Hitler's plan of aggression and the folly of Britain's persisting with disarmament after Germany had achieved air parity with Britain. Although Churchill recognized that Chamberlain acted from noble motives, he argued that Hitler should have been resisted over Czechoslovakia and that efforts should have been made to involve the Soviet Union on their side.

Daladier believed Hitler's ultimate goals were a threat. He told the British in a late April 1938 meeting that Hitler's real aim was to eventually secure "a domination of the Continent in comparison with which the ambitions of Napoleon were feeble." He went on to say: "Today it is the turn of Czechoslovakia. Tomorrow it will be the turn of Poland and Romania. When Germany has obtained the oil and wheat it needs, she will turn on the West. Certainly we must multiply our efforts to avoid war. But that will not be obtained unless Great Britain and France stick together, intervening in Prague for new concessions but declaring at the same time that they will safeguard the independence of Czechoslovakia. If, on the contrary, the Western Powers capitulate again they will only precipitate the war they wish to avoid."^[51] Perhaps discouraged by the arguments of the military and civilian members of the French government regarding their unprepared military and weak financial situation, as well as traumatised by France's bloodbath in the First World War that he was personally a witness to, Daladier ultimately let Chamberlain have his way. On his return to Paris, Daladier, who was expecting a hostile crowd, was acclaimed.

American historian William Shirer, in his *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960), took the view that although Hitler was not bluffing about his intention to invade, Czechoslovakia would have been able to offer significant resistance. Shirer believed that Britain and France had sufficient air defences to avoid serious bombing of London and Paris and would have been able to pursue a rapid and successful war against Germany.^[52] He quotes Churchill as saying the Munich agreement meant that "Britain and France were in a much worse position compared to Hitler's Germany".^[48] After Adolf Hitler personally inspected the Czech fortifications, he privately said to Joseph Goebbels, "we would have shed a lot of blood" and that it was fortunate that there had been no fighting.^[53]

"Ghost of Munich"

In the United States and the United Kingdom, the words "Munich" and "appeasement" are synonymous with demanding forthright, often military, action to resolve an international crisis and characterizing a political opponent who advocates negotiation as "weak." In 1950, President Truman invoked "Munich" to justify his military action in the Korean War. "The world learned from Munich that security cannot be bought by appeasement," he said.^[54] Nearly every subsequent crisis has been accompanied by cries of "Munich" from politicians and the media. In 1960, conservative Senator Barry Goldwater used "Munich" to describe a domestic political issue, saying that an attempt by the Republican Party to appeal to liberals was "The Munich of the Republican Party."^[55] In 1962, General Curtis LeMay told President John F. Kennedy that his refusal to bomb Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis was "almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich."^[56] In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson, in justifying increased U.S. military action in Vietnam said, "We learned from Hitler and Munich that success only feeds the appetite for aggression."^[57]

Adolf Hitler drives through the crowd in Cheb, October 1938.

Citing Munich has continued to be commonplace into the 21st century, especially for opposition politicians and conservatives. During negotiations for the [Iran nuclear agreement](#) by [Secretary of State John Kerry](#) a Texas Republican congressman characterized the negotiation as "worse than Munich." Kerry himself invoked Munich in a speech in France advocating military action in Syria by saying, "This is our Munich moment."^[58]

"Munich and appeasement," in the words of scholars Frederik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood, "have become among the dirtiest words in American politics, synonymous with naivete and weakness, and signifying a craven willingness to barter away the nation's vital interests for empty promises." They claimed that the success of U.S. foreign policy often depends upon a president withstanding "the inevitable charges of appeasement that accompany any decision to negotiate with hostile powers." Those presidents who challenged the "tyranny of Munich" have often achieved policy breakthroughs and those who had cited Munich as a principle of U.S. foreign policy had often led the nation into its "most enduring tragedies."^[59]

Consequences of the Munich agreement

On 5 October, Beneš resigned as [President of Czechoslovakia](#), realising that the fall of Czechoslovakia was inevitable. Following the outbreak of [World War II](#), he formed a [Czechoslovak government-in-exile](#) in [London](#). On 6 December 1938, the [French-German non-aggression pact](#) was signed in [Paris](#) by the French Foreign Minister [Georges Bonnet](#) and the German Foreign Minister [Ribbentrop](#).^[60]

Czechoslovakia after Munich

First Vienna Award to Hungary

In early November 1938, under the [First Vienna Award](#) - which was after the failed negotiations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary, as a recommendation to settle the territorial disputes by the appendix of the Munich agreement - by German-Italian arbitration Czechoslovakia had to cede the territory of southern Slovakia (one third of Slovak territory) to Hungary, while Poland independently [gained](#) small territorial cessions shortly after (Zaolzie).

As a result, [Bohemia](#), [Moravia](#) and [Silesia](#) lost about 38% of their combined area to Germany, with some 2.8 million [German](#) and 513,000-750,000^{[61][62]} [Czech](#) inhabitants. Hungary, in turn, received 11,882 km² (4,588 sq mi) in southern Slovakia and southern [Carpathian Ruthenia](#); according to a 1941 census, about 86.5% of the population in this territory was Hungarian. Slovakia lost 10,390 km² (4,010 sq mi) and 854,218 inhabitants for Hungary (according to a Czechoslovak 1930 census about 59% were Hungarians and 31.9% were Slovaks and Czechs^[63]). Meanwhile, Poland annexed the town of [Český Těšín](#) with the [surrounding area](#) (some 906 km² (350 sq mi), with 250,000 inhabitants; Poles made up about 36% of the population - a drop from 69% in 1910^{[64][65]} and two minor border areas in northern Slovakia, more precisely in the regions [Spiš](#) and [Orava](#). (226 km² (87 sq mi), 4,280 inhabitants, only 0.3% Poles).

Soon after Munich, 115,000 Czechs and 30,000 Germans fled to the remaining rump of Czechoslovakia. According to the Institute for Refugee Assistance, the actual count of refugees on 1 March 1939 stood at almost 150,000.^[66]

Admiral Horthy during the Hungarians' triumphant entry into Košice, November 1938

Second Polish Republic annexed the Zaolzie area of Czechoslovakia inhabited mostly by ethnic Poles, October 1938.

"For 600 years we have been waiting for you (1335-1938)." Ethnic Polish band welcoming the annexation of Zaolzie by the Polish Republic in Karviná, October 1938

On 4 December 1938, there were elections in Reichsgau Sudetenland, in which 97.32% of the adult population voted for NSDAP. About a half million Sudeten Germans joined the Nazi Party which was 17.34% of the German population in Sudetenland (the average NSDAP participation in Nazi Germany was 7.85%). This means the Sudetenland was the most "pro-Nazi" region in the Third Reich.^[67]

Because of their knowledge of the Czech language, many Sudeten Germans were employed in the administration of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia as well as in Nazi organizations (Gestapo, etc.). The most notable was Karl Hermann Frank: the SS and Police general and Secretary of State in the Protectorate.

German invasion of the remainder of Czechoslovakia

In 1937, the Wehrmacht had formulated a plan called "Operation Green" (*Fall Grün*) for the invasion of Czechoslovakia^[68] which was implemented as "Operation Southeast" on 15 March 1939.

On 14 March Slovakia seceded from Czechoslovakia and became a separate pro-Nazi state. On the following day, Carpatho-Ukraine proclaimed independence as well, but after three days was completely occupied and annexed by Hungary. Czechoslovak president Emil Hácha traveled to Berlin and was left waiting, while orders to invade were already given. During the meeting with Adolf Hitler, Hácha was threatened with the bombing of Prague if he refused to order Czech troops to lay down their arms. This induced a heart attack, from which he was revived by an injection from Hitler's doctor. He then agreed to sign the communique accepting the German occupation of the remainder of Bohemia and Moravia "which in its unctuous mendacity was remarkable even for the Nazis".^[69] Churchill's prediction was fulfilled as German armies entered Prague and proceeded to occupy the rest of the country, which was transformed into a protectorate of the Reich.

By seizing Bohemia and Moravia the Third Reich gained all the skilled labour force and heavy industry placed there as well as all the weapons of the Czechoslovak army. At the time of Hitler's later attack on France, roughly 25% of all German weapons came from the protectorate Böhmen und Mähren. The Third Reich also gained the whole Czechoslovak gold treasure, including gold stored in the Bank of England. Of a total 227 tons of gold found after the war in salt mines, only 18.4 tons were returned to Czechoslovakia in 1982, although most of this gold came from Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia was also forced to "sell" to the Wehrmacht war material for 648 million of pre-war Czechoslovak crowns. This debt was never repaid.

Germans even took the precaution of sending their troops over borders as early as the afternoon of 14 March, causing an incident between 13th (Silesian) Czechoslovak Battalion and the 8th Infantry Division of the Nazi army in Místek. After a while the Germans decided to pull out as the escalation could endanger "peaceful" takeover.

Chamberlain^[70] claimed the Prague annexation was a "completely different category", moving beyond the legitimate Versailles grievances.

Meanwhile, concerns arose in Great Britain that Poland (now substantially encircled by German possessions) would become the next target of Nazi expansionism, which was made apparent by the dispute over the Polish Corridor and the Free City of Danzig. This resulted in the signing of an Anglo-Polish military alliance, and the consequent refusal of the Polish government to accept German negotiation proposals over the Polish Corridor and the status of Danzig.

Prime Minister Chamberlain felt betrayed by the Nazi seizure of Czechoslovakia, realizing his policy of appeasement towards Hitler had failed, and began to take a much harder line against the Nazis. Amongst other things he immediately began to mobilize the British Empire's armed forces to a war footing. France did the same. Italy saw itself threatened by the British and French fleets and started its own invasion of Albania in April 1939. Although no immediate action followed, Hitler's invasion of Poland on 1 September officially began World War II.

Significant industrial potential and military equipment of the former Czechoslovakia had been efficiently absorbed into the Third Reich.

Strengthening of Wehrmacht's armament

Since most of the border defenses were located in the territory ceded as a consequence of the Munich Agreement, the remaining part of Czechoslovakia was entirely open to further invasion, despite having relatively large stockpiles of modern weaponry. In a speech delivered in the Reichstag, Hitler expressed the importance of the occupation for strengthening of German military, noting that by occupying Czechoslovakia, Germany gained 2,175 field guns and cannons, 469 tanks, 500 anti-aircraft artillery pieces, 43,000 machine guns, 1,090,000 military rifles, 114,000 pistols, about a billion rounds of small-arms ammunition and three million rounds of anti-aircraft ammunition. This amount of weaponry would be sufficient to arm about half of the then Wehrmacht.^[71] Czechoslovak weaponry later played major part in the German conquest of Poland and France, the latter country having urged Czechoslovakia to surrender to Germany in 1938.

Birth of German resistance within the military

In Germany the Sudeten crisis led to the so-called Oster Conspiracy. General Hans Oster, deputy head of the *Abwehr*, and prominent figures within the German military who opposed the regime for its behaviour that was threatening to bring Germany into a war that they believed it was not ready to fight, discussed overthrowing Hitler and the Nazi regime through a planned storming of the Reich Chancellery by forces loyal to the plot.

International politics

Italian colonial demands from France

In October 1938 in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement, Italy demanded concessions from France to yield to Italy: a free port at Djibouti, control of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railroad, Italian participation in the management of Suez Canal Company, some form of French-Italian condominium over Tunisia, and the preservation of Italian culture in French-held Corsica with no French assimilation of the people.^[72] Italy opposed the French monopoly over the Suez Canal because under the French-dominated Suez Canal Company all Italian merchant traffic to its colony of Italian East Africa was forced to pay tolls upon entering the canal.^{[72][73]} Mussolini hoped that in light of Italy's role in settling the Munich Agreement that prevented the outbreak of war, that Britain would react by putting pressure on France to yield to Italy's demands to preserve the peace.^[72] France refused to accept Italy's demands as it was widely suspected that Italy's true intentions were territorial acquisition of Nice, Corsica, Tunisia, and Djibouti and not the milder official demands put forth.^[72] Relations between Italy and France deteriorated with France's refusal to accept Italy's demands.^[72] France responded to Italy's demands with threatening naval maneuvers as a warning to Italy.^[72] As tensions between Italy and France grew, Hitler made a major speech on 30 January 1939 in which he promised German military support in the case of an unprovoked war against Italy.^[74]

Quotations from key participants

Germany stated that the incorporation of Austria into the Reich resulted in borders with Czechoslovakia that were a great danger to German security, and that this allowed Germany to be encircled by the Western Powers.^[75]

German occupation of Prague, 15 March 1939

Neville Chamberlain, announced the deal at Heston Aerodrome as follows:

... the settlement of the Czechoslovak problem, which has now been achieved is, in my view, only the 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

Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

contains but I would just like to read it to you: ' ... We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.'^[76]

The daily newspapers carried long columns of the names of the executed Czechs, 1944.

Later that day he stood outside 10 Downing Street and again read from the document and concluded:

My good friends, for the second time in our history a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time." (Chamberlain's reference to Disraeli's return from the Congress of Berlin in 1878)^{[76][77]}

Chamberlain in a letter to his sister Hilda, on 2 October 1938, wrote:

I asked Hitler about one in the morning while we were waiting for the draftsmen whether he would care to see me for another talk....I had a very friendly and pleasant talk, on Spain, (where he too said he had never had any territorial ambitions) economic relations with S.E. Europe, and disarmament. I did not mention colonies, nor did he. At the end I pulled out the declaration which I had prepared beforehand and asked if he would sign it. As the interpreter translated the words into German, Hitler said Yes, I will certainly sign it. When shall we do it? I said "now", and we went at once to the writing table and put our signatures to the two copies which I had brought with me."

Winston Churchill, denouncing the Agreement in the House of Commons [5 October 1938^[78]], declared:

We have suffered a total and unmitigated defeat ... you will find that in a period of time which may be measured by years, but may be measured by months, Czechoslovakia will be engulfed in the Nazi régime. We are in the presence of a disaster of the first magnitude ... we have sustained a defeat without a war, the consequences of which will travel far with us along our road ... we have passed an awful milestone in our history, when the whole equilibrium of Europe has been deranged, and that the terrible words have for the time being been pronounced against the Western democracies: "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting". And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning. This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time.

Prior to the conference on 13 August 1938 Churchill wrote in a letter to Lloyd George:^[79]

England has been offered a choice between war and shame. She has chosen shame, and will get war.

Legal nullification

During the Second World War, British Prime Minister Churchill, who opposed the agreement when it was signed, became determined that the terms of the agreement would not be upheld after the war and that the Sudeten territories should be returned to postwar Czechoslovakia. On 5 August 1942, Foreign Minister Anthony Eden sent the following note to Jan Masaryk:

In the light of recent exchanges of view between our Governments, I think it may be useful for me to make the following statement about the attitude of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom as regards Czecho-Slovakia.

In my letter of the 18th July, 1941, I informed your Excellency that the King had decided to accredit an Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Dr. Beneš as President of the Czecho-Slovak Republic. I explained that this decision implied that His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom regarded the juridical position of the President and Government of the Czecho-Slovak Republic as identical with that of the other Allied heads of States and Governments established in this country. The status of His Majesty's representative has recently been raised to that of an Ambassador.

The Prime Minister had already stated in a message broadcast to the Czecho-Slovak people on the 30th September, 1940, the attitude of His Majesty's Government in regard to the arrangements reached at Munich in 1938. Mr. Churchill then said that the Munich Agreement had been destroyed by the Germans. This statement was formally communicated to Dr. Beneš on the 11th November, 1940.

The foregoing statement and formal act of recognition have guided the policy of His Majesty's Government in regard to Czecho-Slovakia, but in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, I desire to declare on behalf of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom that as Germany has deliberately destroyed the arrangements concerning Czecho-Slovakia reached in 1938, in which His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom participated, His Majesty's Government regard themselves as free from any engagements in this respect. At the final settlement of the Czecho-Slovak frontiers to be reached at the end of the war they will not be influenced by any changes effected in and since 1938.

To which Masaryk replied as follows:

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your note of the 5th August, 1942, and I avail myself of this opportunity to convey to your Excellency, on behalf of the Czecho-Slovak Government and of myself, as well as in the name of the whole Czecho-Slovak people who are at present suffering so terribly under the Nazi yoke, the expression of our warmest thanks.

Your Excellency's note emphasises the fact that the formal act of recognition has guided the policy of His Majesty's Government in regard to Czecho-Slovakia, but, in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, His Majesty's Government now desire to declare that, as Germany has deliberately destroyed the arrangements concerning Czecho-Slovakia reached in 1938, in which His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom participated, His Majesty's Government regard themselves as free from any engagements in this respect. At the final settlement of the Czecho-Slovak frontiers to be reached at the end of the war, they will not be influenced by any changes effected in and since 1938.

My Government accept your Excellency's note as a practical solution of the questions and difficulties of vital importance for Czecho-Slovakia which emerged between our two countries as the consequence of the Munich Agreement, maintaining, of course, our political and juridical position with regard to the Munich Agreement and the events which followed it as expressed in the note of the Czecho-Slovak Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the 16th December, 1941. We consider your important note of the 5th August, 1942, as a highly significant act of justice towards Czecho-Slovakia, and we assure you of our real satisfaction and of our profound gratitude to your great country and nation. Between our two countries the Munich Agreement can now be considered as dead.^[80]

Following Allied victory and the surrender of the Third Reich in 1945, the Sudetenland was returned to Czechoslovakia, while the German speaking majority was expelled.

Legacy

The West German policy of staying neutral in the Arab–Israeli conflict following the Munich massacre and the subsequent hijacking of Lufthansa Flight 615 in 1972, rather than taking the decided pro-Israel position of earlier governments, led to Israeli comparisons with the Munich Agreement and the Appeasement.^[81]

See also

- Appeasement of Hitler
- Neville Chamberlain's European Policy
- German occupation of Czechoslovakia
- Lesson of Munich
- Treaty of Prague (1973)
- Western betrayal
- Sudetenland Medal
- Causes of World War II

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