How information received from the foreign contacts of the German resistance influenced the development of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement from May 1937 to September 1938

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Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to provide a substantial examination of the foreign contacts of the German resistance with the British government, specifically between Prime Minister Chamberlain's accession to power in May 1937 and the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938. The contacts under examination will include Carl Goerdeler, Ludwig Beck, Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, Ernst Freiherr von Weizsäcker, and Erich and Theodor Kordt. The central motivation of this thesis is an attempt to understand the development of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement until the Munich Agreement, and how information received from German resistance contacts influenced official British policy. Similarly, a study of the September Plot within Germany will be included in an attempt to ascertain the readiness of the resistance to remove Adolf Hitler in the event of a positive response from the British Government.

Résumé

L'objectif de ce mémoire est d'examiner en profondeur les contacts étrangers de la résistance allemande avec le gouvernement britannique, plus précisément entre l'arrivée au pouvoir du Premier Ministre Chamberlain en mai 1937 et les Accords de Munich du 30 septembre 1938. Les contacts examinés incluent Carl Goerdeler, Ludwig Beck, Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, Ernst Freiherr von Weizsäcker, ainsi qu'Erich et Theodor Kordt. Le but primordial de ce mémoire est de tenter de comprendre le développement de la politique d'apaisement de Chamberlain jusqu'aux Accords de Munich, et comment l'information reçue par l'entremise de ses contacts dans la résistance allemande a influencé la politique officielle du gouvernement britannique. Une analyse du complot de septembre en Allemagne sera également offerte afin de déterminer si la résistance allemande aurait été prête à éliminer Hitler si le gouvernement britannique lui avait donné une réponse positive.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the history of the Third Reich, there were German citizens who opposed the Nazi Regime. Yet at the same time, a widespread popular-based opposition never existed within Nazi Germany. The primary objective of the German opposition, in the pre-war period, was always the preservation of peace in Europe. Such a goal, while remaining the same, resulted in different approaches and policies. It became clear that Hitler's aggression aimed at expanding German territory through military operations would consequently lead to a general European War. Therefore, resisters came to the conclusion that the only way to maintain the peace was to remove the Führer. Thus, the German resistance, in its commonly understood form, was born during the Sudeten crisis of 1938, in opposition to Hitler's decision to invade Czechoslovakia. Having decided to overthrow the Regime, the resistance looked towards the British Government to obtain foreign support in the form of firm commitments to fight if Hitler ordered the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Unlike in countries occupied by the Nazis, the formation of a unified resistance movement in Germany never evolved past the stage of localized groups which formed around individuals.[1] The majority of historical research on the German resistance has therefore been focused on dramatic events, such as the July Plot of 1944, and on important individuals.[2] Yet, opposition could be found in many forms. For some, the failure, or refusal, to publicly give the Nazi salute represented an act of defiance.[3] There was a great deal of sincere opposition within the Third Reich, yet for the vast majority of those individuals, opposition did not lead to resistance. Only a courageous few reached the level of active resistance that eventually led to a conspiracy against the Regime beginning in 1938.[4]

Britain's foreign policy toward Nazi Germany between 1937 and 1938, defined as appeasement, finds its roots in the aftermath of the Great War. Most historians associate appeasement with the First World War, inextricably linked with the Treaty of Versailles. It

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[1] Klemens von Klemperer, *German Resistance against Hitler: The Search for Allies Abroad, 1938-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4
[2] Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death: The Story of the German Resistance.* Translated by Bruce Little (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), 3
[3] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 2
[4] John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945* (London: MacMillan & Company Limited, 1961), 385

is not the purpose of this thesis to examine the rise of Nazism within Germany or appeasement within Britain. Briefly, Hitler's success can be attributed to the high unemployment rate throughout the Great Depression, general resentment regarding the Treaty of Versailles, and the treatment of Germany as a defeated nation despite their Army leaving the battlefield largely intact. Hitler's nationalist rhetoric with regard to past German greatness was appealing.

However, as 1932 drew to a close, Hitler was isolated within Germany as the Nazis had suffered a setback in the national election of November 1932, as two of three voters rejected the party.[5] By January 1933, thanks to the misguided efforts of former Chancellor Franz von Papen to seek revenge on then-current Chancellor General Kurt von Schleicher, Hitler was handed power. At about 11:30 a.m. on 30 January, President Hindenburg administered the oath of office to Adolf Hitler.[6] The arch-enemy of democracy had been installed as head of government, yet the so-called defenders of the Weimar Republic initially made no attempt to resist.[7] Born out of the ashes of the Great War, the Republic had never touched the hearts of a majority of Germans, who now lived in the Third Reich.

It must be asked why no one person, or group, opposed the Nazis in the early stages of the Regime? There is no complete answer. It is striking that at the moment when revolutionary action on the part of the Social Democrats would have been constructive, such tactics had been abandoned. The Social Democrats saw their task as riding out the current storm, not revolutionary opposition to the Nazis.[8] The attempt on the part of the Socialist movement to remain active underground is evidence of the impossibility of successfully maintaining a large scale opposition under totalitarian rule.[9] The individual German had no influence on the events of Hitler's accession to power, the Reichstag Fire Decree or the Enabling Act.[10] As a result, one of the major problems within Germany became not solely the lack of will to resist, but also a clear understanding of the nature of Nazism. Eventually,

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[5] Henry Turner Jr., *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (United States of America: Basic Books), 160
[6] Ibid., 155
[7] Ibid., 157
[8] Gerhard Ritter, *The German Resistance: Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*. Translated by R. T. Clark (Salem, N.H. Ayer Company, Publishers, Inc. 1970), 42
[9] Ibid., 43
[10] Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945*, 3rd ed (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 8

legal resistance within Nazis Germany became an impossibility; there was no chance for any successful action against the Regime through established channels.[11]

Perhaps Hitler's greatest talent was that he was able to initially convince the world, and even some of those closest to him, that he was a moderate, or at the very least susceptible to persuasion by moderate elements. It is necessary to examine Adolf Hitler as he was in 1938. It would be impossible to expect British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to have known what Hitler was prepared to do during the Second World War and the Holocaust. Winston Churchill, well known and respected for his skill at predicting future threats, wrote an open letter to Hitler published in *The Times* on 7 November 1938: "I have always said that if Great Britain were defeated in war, I hope we should find a Hitler to lead us back to a rightful position among the nations."[12] Hitler's ability to mask his true intentions from the German people, and the world, made the misconceptions of many of the British leaders understandable, but considerably more costly. It has been said that had Hitler died in the summer of 1938, he would have been remembered as one of the most successful statesmen in German history[13]; the tragedy is that he did not.

Through the process of *gleichschaltung*, Hitler's control over Germany became largely incontestable and any opposition encountered was overcome by Nazi policies. In fact, only within the Churches did a genuine popular movement against National Socialism survive in the early years of the Regime. Unlike other political groups which might have hoped to oppose the Nazis, the Churches had several unique advantages. They had their own forum in which members could demonstrate, into which the police were disinclined to enter, and the Regime could not risk entirely closing down.[14] Apart from the Churches, the only institutions which could offer opposition to Hitler were those whose power, authority, and position within the Reich made them resistant to *gleichschaltung*. Foremost of those, and critical for the purposes of this thesis, the *Auswärtiges Amt* (Foreign Office) and the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht / Amt Ausland / Abwehr* (Military Intelligence), contained two of the central groupings of resisters.

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[11] Ibid., 9
[12] Robert J O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933-1939* (London: Cassell, 1966) , 149
[13] Heinz Hohne, *Canaris*. Translated by J. Maxwell Brownjohn (London: Secker & Warburg, 1976), 283
[14] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 50

Following the short period of legal opposition, it took a full four years, 1934 to 1938, before the true conscientious opponents of Hitler's Regime emerged from nearly every stratum of German society. Greater activity on the part of those opposed to the Regime could only be expected when the impulse and atmosphere of oppression were strong enough. The conditions required to produce resistance whose actions could directly affect Hitler were not generally present until 1938.[15] The Hossbach Conference of 5 November 1937, the Fritsch-Blomberg crisis of February 1938, and the possibility of war over the Sudetenland, were required to motivate intensive opposition efforts to overthrow the Regime.[16] In the end, it was Hitler's policy of aggressive war, beginning with Czechoslovakia, that galvanized individual resisters into action. A constant stream of resistance emissaries left Nazi Germany and went foremost to Britain, among the Western democracies, in order to inform and warn them of Hitler's impending plans for war.[17]

The policy of Nazi Germany was the product of one man – Adolf Hitler. As a result, the development of German foreign policy can mostly be understood as being directed solely by his wishes. In comparison, the decisions made by the British Government during this period were the product of several Foreign Secretaries, Prime Ministers, and an ever-changing cast of characters in the Foreign Office and Cabinet. Therefore, to attempt to understand the British policy and attitude in 1938, it is necessary to examine the changing personalities which dominated Whitehall leading up to the Sudeten crisis. The evolution of British policy beginning in 1937 will form an integral part of this thesis as it is a defining factor in their evaluation of resistance contacts. As well, an understanding of the progression of the policy of appeasement which permeated British thinking throughout 1938 is a critical component for an adequate comprehension of what the resistance encountered while in London.

The German resistance was a largely scattered and disparate group of individuals, who while sharing some characteristics, were nevertheless united mainly by their opposition to Hitler. They attempted to use both official and unofficial channels to argue, persuade, and cajole foreign leaders into adopting a firm stance with respect to the Regime. British foreign

[15] Hoffmann, *History of the German Resistance*, 28
[16] Ibid., 28
[17] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 5

policy, with respect to Germany, and within a general European context, was not randomly invented prior to Munich. Chamberlain's primary goal throughout the Sudeten crisis was to avoid a military confrontation with Germany over Czechoslovakia at nearly all costs. Resistance envoys therefore hoped to affect a complete alteration of British policy.

2. The Historiography of Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement

During the nearly seven decades since the culmination of Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement at Munich, historiography of his attempt at a general settlement has undergone three distinct phases: Churchillian or *Guilty Men,* Revisionist, and Counter-Revisionist. The definition of the term appeasement has been altered due to Chamberlain's failure from its original meaning "to bring peace and settle," to "pacify by satisfying demands."[18] Historian Donald Cameron Watt argues that the term has passed permanently into historical usage to describe a specific period of European diplomacy prior to the start of the Second World War.[19]

In the immediate aftermath of the Munich Conference, the historical judgment of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement was predominantly negative. Unequivocal denunciations of Chamberlain were at first highly polemical, rather than balanced historical works. Certainly the best known of these was the 1940 publication of *Guilty Men* by CATO, a pseudonym for Frank Owen, Michael Foot and Peter Howard. Rather than a rational examination of the facts, many of which were unavailable at the time, *Guilty Men* is a straightforward condemnation of appeasement. CATO's three main charges were that the appeasers failed to rearm Britain adequately, were blind to the true nature of the Nazi challenge by making unnecessary concessions in the vain hope of securing peace, and used a large parliamentary majority to force through unnecessary policies. *Guilty Men's* single defence of Chamberlain was that he had been left a mass of unsolved problems which Britain's previous leaders, MacDonald and Baldwin, had failed to address.[20]

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[18] Earl of Avon, *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon: Facing the Dictators* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), 324
[19] William Rock, *British Appeasement in the 1930s* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 23
[20] CATO [pseudonym for Frank Owen, Michael Foot, Peter Howard], *Guilty Men* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1940), 20

A significant historical record appeared in the immediate months and years following the Munich Agreement, along similar lines as the *Guilty Men* thesis. Popular examples of such works include Simon Haxey's *Money Lords, Tory M.P.,* R.W. Seton-Watson's *From Munich to Danzig,* and Hubert Ripka's *Munich: Before and After,* all published in 1939. All these works lack evidence as the authors have chosen to focus on emotional, instead of factual arguments. The result is an unsophisticated historical interpretation, not based on archival research, but that should not detract from their importance in establishing a significant historical trend. Robert Caputi argues that *Guilty Men* enshrined the disillusion of a generation, and set the tone of debate for the study of appeasement for twenty years after the war.[21]

However, the *Guilty Men* thesis was not left unchallenged by the supporters of Chamberlain's policy. A hagiography of Chamberlain written by Derek Walker-Smith entitled *Neville Chamberlain: Man of Peace* (1940) presents the British Prime Minister as a rational man who had the ability to deal with anyone, including Hitler, to ensure the peace of Europe. In a similar vein, Duncan Keith Shaw's *Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain* (1939), praises Chamberlain for his diplomatic efforts while reminding readers of the heinous wrongs perpetrated at Versailles. Stuart Hodgson's *The Man Who Made the Peace: Neville Chamberlain* (1938) also defends and praises Chamberlain's personal diplomacy.

The first major historical work which broke the cycle of polemic and apologia interpretations was Sir Keith Feiling's official biography of the Prime Minister entitled *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (1946). This initial effort is still perceived by many to be the best of the genre.[22] Feiling was the third author asked by Mrs. Chamberlain to write her deceased husband's biography, utilizing for the first time his official letters and private papers. Feiling's work is widely recognized as balanced and remains the standard presentation of Prime Minister Chamberlain as a genuinely good individual who believed in peace but was ill-prepared to understand the menace that Hitler represented.

Despite Feiling's positive presentation of Chamberlain, the historiographic trend continued to move strongly towards a general condemnation of his efforts. The most

[21] Robert Caputi, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 17
[22] Ibid., 35

important publication following Feiling's was Winston Churchill's first volume of the *History of the Second World War*, entitled *The Gathering Storm* (1948). He once joked that history was going to be kind to him, since he intended to write it. Churchill, whom many saw as the savior of Britain, was to some the greatest Englishman of the twentieth century. His impact on the historiographic trend served to fortify the *Guilty Men* thesis, due to his credibility. It is quite understandable that Churchill's contribution could have been perceived as the 'last word' on the subject.[23] The decade and a half following Churchill's publication saw a steady stream of autobiographies and biographies written by, and about, the so-called men of Munich. Lord Halifax's autobiography *The Fullness of Days* (1957) must be considered a disappointment. Despite his central role as Foreign Secretary throughout the Sudeten crisis, Halifax states that it is not his desire to rewrite history and he deliberately passes over the Munich agreement.[24] Duff Cooper, who was Chamberlain's First Lord of the Admiralty, published *Old Men Forget* (1954). Cooper follows Churchill's well-worn arguments about the foolishness of appeasement and the lack of proper rearmament.

At the same time as the Churchillian genre of condemning Chamberlain's policies in the memoirs of several important politicians, there were also those who defended their former Prime Minister. Viscount Maugham, Chamberlain's Lord Chancellor from May 1937 to September 1939, published *The Truth about the Munich Crisis* (1944), which contains many of the same defences of appeasement that are still used today. Maugham concluded by praising Chamberlain for gaining time for Britain to rearm, which he saw as the decisive factor in the victory of the Battle of Britain in 1940.[25] Sir John Simon, Chamberlain's Chancellor of the Exchequer and former Foreign Secretary, was throughout the entire Sudeten crisis one of the Prime Minister's strongest supporters. Sir John published *Retrospect: The Memoirs of Sir John Simon* (1952), in which he charged that the Prime Minister's opponents were without a workable plan. According to Simon, Chamberlain's actions were justified by the international situation at the time and his efforts to maintain the

[23] Caputi, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 57
[24] Lord Edward Halifax, *Fullness of Days* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1957), 199
[25] Viscount Maugham, *The Truth about the Munich Crisis* (London: Heinemann, 1944), 68-70

peace in Europe should be remembered and honored.[26] Nevile Henderson, Chamberlain's ambassador in Berlin during the Sudeten crisis, published *Failure of a Mission* (1940). Henderson, often the object of criticism, attempts to defend his actions and those of the Prime Minister throughout the period. Sir Samuel Hoare, Chamberlain's Home Secretary, published *Nine Troubled Years* (1954), which has become one of the clearest and most persuasive works produced in the 1950s in defence of Chamberlain.. Sir Samuel wrote that "[Chamberlain] was not an autocrat who imposed his views upon doubting or hostile colleagues. Appeasement was not his personal policy. Not only was it supported by his colleagues; it expressed the general desire of the British people."[27]

As well, several members of the British Foreign Office published memoirs and diaries. Aside from Anthony Eden and Lord Halifax, Chamberlain's two Foreign Secretaries, Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary between 1938 and 1945, and Oliver Harvey, Private Secretary to Eden and then Halifax until December 1939 published diaries. Unlike their political counterparts, the publications by Foreign Office officials tended to walk a fine line between approval and condemnation of Chamberlain's policies. Cadogan's *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945* (1971) edited by David Dilks, provides a fairly balanced presentation. *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940* (1970) edited by his son John, is a more critical analysis of Chamberlain's policy, as Harvey forcefully states his displeasure with the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.

By the 1960s, the debate over Chamberlain's appeasement policy had been ongoing since 1939. After twenty-one years it would begin to take on an entirely different approach and tone. The 1960s ushered in a new generational approach to the appeasement debate. The result was a more sophisticated scholarship that focused on research and empirical facts rather than emotional arguments. Greatly benefiting and fueling the drive to more fact-based examinations of Chamberlain was the Public Records Act which reduced the traditional fifty year embargo on official documents to thirty. Following the massive release of public

[26] Sir John Simon, *Retrospect: The Memoirs of Sir John Simon* (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1952), 238-239
[27] Viscount Templewood Sir Samuel Hoare, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins Publishing, 1954), 375

documents concerning Chamberlain and appeasement beginning in 1967, a full blown revisionist school was born.[28]

By the end of the 1960s, the revisionist interpretation of Chamberlain and appeasement had altered the debate away from guilt and culpability. One of the most important revisionists has been David Dilks. His portrayal of Chamberlain, was in direct conflict with the Churchillian model. Dilks provides a classic defence of Chamberlain and describes him as a skilful Realpolitiker enacting a realistic policy that commanded almost universal consent rather than being a product of individual desires.[29] Other texts originating in the mid-1960s that contributed to the revisionist school include Martin Gilbert's *The Roots of Appeasement* (1966), Keith Robbins' *Munich* (1968), Michael Howard's *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (1972), and Peter Neville's *Appeasing Hitler: The Diplomacy of Sir Nevile Henderson, 1937-1939* (2000).

Nevertheless, the revisionist school has not gone unchallenged. Unlike the previous period of Churchillian texts, the counter-revisionists have employed empirical research and not polemical attacks to denounce Chamberlain's policy. One of the most important counter-revisionists is Keith Middlemas, whose *Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-1939* (1972) was one of the first works to use the recently opened British archival material that extended to the start of the war. According to Middlemas, Chamberlain was certainly not a coward but the fact that Munich did not alter his calculations with respect to Hitler is particularly troubling.[30] In the same vein as Middlemas' work, Telford Taylor's *Munich: The Price of Peace* (1979) represents empirical research covering twenty years of diplomacy. Taylor claims that the British defensive situation, particularly air defence, had improved by 1939 over what it had been in the previous year.[31]

By the start of the 1990s, the counter-revisionist interpretation was bolstered by the appearance of several works which directly aimed at disputing the claims of the revisionists.

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[28] Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement, and the British Road to War* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 4
[29] David Dilks, *The Origins of the Second World War*, edited by Patrick Finley (London: Arnold, 1997), 36
[30] Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1946), 448-449
[31] Telford Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 987

The counter-revisionists dispute the interpretation that Chamberlain had no other policy option than to pursue appeasement due to British military unpreparedness. R.A.C. Parker's *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (1993) can be considered a leading representative of the counter-revisionist school. Parker argues that Chamberlain and his colleagues made decisions to pursue a policy of appeasement and that he rejected the option of a close Franco-British alliance, a potentially effective deterrent, and that his powerful obstinate personality stifled serious chances of preventing the Second World War.[32] Parker is joined by Gaines Post's *Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defence, 1934-1937* (1993), and Frank McDonough's *Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Road to War* (1998).

The sophisticated scholarship of the post-1960s has only further muddied the waters. The certainty of CATO's *Guilty Men* thesis has been replaced by various interpretations which promise to keep the appeasement debate alive and well for the foreseeable future. The fact that the British foreign policy documents for 1938 alone contain well over a quarter of a million documents, and that most do not provide the necessary background and context, allow for various interpretations.[33] As is often the case, the most reasonable understanding of Chamberlain's foreign policy can be found somewhere between the revisionists and counter-revisionists schools, a middle ground covered exceedingly well by Keith Middlemas, Telford Taylor, and to a certain extent Keith Feiling. Many of the arguments of the revisionists, while initially convincing, such as the necessity to buy time for rearmament, were never Chamberlain's primary intention. It was only the collapse of the Munich Agreement that caused its defenders to shift their defence of the accord from securing the peace to buying time for war.[34] Considering the continued value of Feiling's biography of Chamberlain sixty one years later, a *Times* review of his book from 14 December 1946 can provide the appropriate conclusion to this historiography section: "The book therefore should enable the reader to make his own estimate of a man who is no more likely to get a

[32] R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 347
[33] McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement, and the British Road to War*, 7
[34] Erik Goldstein and Igor Lukes, eds. *"The Munich Crisis, 1938": prelude to World War II* (London: Portland, 1999), 982

unanimous verdict from a jury of historians looking back on his life two-hundred years hence than from his own contemporaries."[35]

3. The Historiography of the German Resistance

Following the conclusion of the Second World War, British politicians were not eager to admit to having had contacts with so-called German resisters which could prove embarrassing. The British continued to view the resisters as conservative monarchists, Prussian Generals and not altogether different than Hitler's Nazis in goals if not methods. John Wheeler-Bennett's memorandum completed 25 July 1944 after the coup d'état had failed is illustrative of official British attitude regarding the German resistance:

> "It may now be said with some definiteness that we are better off with things today than if the plot of July 20 succeeded and Hitler had been assassinated. The Gestapo and SS have done us an appreciable service in removing a section of those who would have posed as 'Good' Germans after the war while preparing for a Third World War. It is to our advantage therefore that the purge should continue since the killing of Germans by Germans will save us from future embarrassments of many kinds."[36]

As Wheeler-Bennett accurately stated, most of the resisters were being hunted down and executed by the Regime they had attempted to overthrow. Few left behind memoirs or political testaments. For most, the thought of committing their actions to paper while living under a totalitarian Regime that they were fighting was dangerous, not just to themselves but to their compatriots and families. With few survivors and little primary information, the result has been a thoroughly cloudy and debatable presentation of the German resistance by academic supporters and detractors. At times, lies and misrepresentations have damaged the reputations of courageous men who risked their lives in an attempt to reach out to Britain and bring about the destruction of their tyrant.

In the immediate post-war period, some British statesmen such as Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary of State until 1 January 1938 and thereafter Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the Government, shamelessly attempted to rewrite history. In his unfinished memoirs, *The Mist Procession* (1958), Vansittart mentions Theodor and Erich

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[35] *The Times*, 14 December 1946.
[36] Peter Hoffmann, "The Question of Western Allied Co-Operation with the German Anti-Nazi Conspiracy, 1938-1944". *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 34, No.2 (Jun., 1991), 463

Kordt only once in passing with a factually correct but disingenuous statement: that they "remained in Hitler's service."[37] In fact, the brothers had provided Vansittart with secret information on numerous occasions and clearly identified themselves as members of a German resistance attempting to overthrow Hitler. At the start of the war in September 1939, Vansittart urged the brothers not to resign their posts, in the hope that they could continue to provide the British with information.[38] In the great majority of other memoirs produced by members of the British government and Foreign Office, information surrounding the German resistance is difficult to find. Anthony Eden and Lord Halifax have both completely omitted from their official autobiographies any references to information received from resistance emissaries. The autobiographies and diaries of members of the Foreign Office include only the barest of details about the most important and obvious exchanges. For accurate information concerning contacts of the German resistance and the British government, research must be expanded into the secondary literature along with the few diaries and personal accounts which members of the opposition left behind.

The personal accounts of German resisters are obviously limited. Of the resisters who survived the war, Fabian von Schlabrendorff's *Revolt Against Hitler* (1948), republished as *The Secret War Against Hitler* (1994), must be considered a valuable source. Schlabrendorff's account written after the war clearly benefits from hindsight. Nevertheless, the information included has been confirmed through other sources. In the field of foreign contacts, Ulrich von Hassell's diary, *The Von Hassell Diaries 1938-1944* (1947) edited by Hugh Gibson, provides one of the best accounts, albeit incomplete, of the activities of the German resistance. Hassell, who was executed after the failed 20 July Plot, wrote and hid his diary throughout the war in various sections. Its survival can only be considered remarkable. Hans Gisevius, who survived the war, immediately sought to have his 'diary' published entitled *To The Bitter End* (1947). However, his work has come under considerable attack from respected historians. Peter Hoffmann views Gisevius' account as a

[37] Lord Robert Vansittart, *The Mist Procession: the Autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), 495
[38] Patricia Meehan, *The Unnecessary War: Whitehall and the German Resistance to Hitler* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), 189

self-serving text, not necessarily based on firsthand information.[39] Equally disputed, but for different reasons, is Ernst Freiherr von Weizsäcker's *Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker* (1951). Von Weizsäcker, who was tried for war crimes, has in the years following his imprisonment been recognized as a resister who attempted to maintain the peace in Europe. While not dealing directly with the subject of this thesis, it is worth mentioning the following titles as examples of primary sources: Hans Herwarth's *Against Two Evils* (1981), Otto John's *Twice Through the Lines: The Autobiography of Otto John* (1972), and Hjalmar Schacht's *My First Seventy-Six Years* (1955).

Much of the secondary literature available on the German resistance, and specifically the foreign contacts, unfortunately degenerates into a debate about their existence, or an attempt to assign blame for their failure. The number of historical works which completely deny the existence of the German resistance has substantially diminished since the immediate post-war period. Yet, in 1949, the Research Department of the British Foreign Office compiled a list of all known members of the German opposition. At over two hundred pages, there was still no mention of direct contact between members of the resistance and the British Government, the Foreign Office, or leading British officials.[40] Erich and Theodor Kordt are not included on the list, while the 1938 September Plot is glossed over as a non-event.[41] Generally, several of the most dismissive authors, with respect to the resistance, are those who had direct dealings with or knowledge of the time in question. Certainly Sir Robert's selective memory in *The Mist Procession* (1958) and *Lessons of My Life* (1943) have served to limit the general knowledge of several important contacts. John Wheeler-Bennett's *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945* (1967) is less than supportive of the resistance's attempts.

A.P. Young's *The 'X' Documents* (1974) edited by Sidney Aster, and Young's autobiography *Across the Years: The Living Testament of an Engineer with a Mission* (1971) provide an excellent counter-balance to the largely missing story of Carl Goerdeler's contacts with the British Foreign Office throughout 1938 and early 1939. Young, who was

[39] Hans Gisevius, *To The Bitter End: An Insider's Account of the Plot to Kill Hitler*. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston, reprinted with a new introduction by Peter Hoffmann(New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), xx
[40] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 393
[41] Ibid., 393

Goerdeler's primary contact throughout the period, recounts the series of meetings with the famous resister. Gerhard Ritter's biography of Goerdeler, *The German Resistance: Carl Goerdeler's Struggle against Tyranny* (1958) is the definitive source on the resister. Ritter's treatment of Goerdeler must be considered far superior to Nicholas Reynolds' biography of General Ludwig Beck. In *Treason was no Crime: Ludwig Beck, Chief of the German General Staff* (1976), a generally supportive text is nevertheless plagued by several misrepresentations and misunderstandings on the part of the author.

Historians such as Hans Rothfels, Gerhard Ritter, Richard Lamb, and Patricia Meehan positively discuss the resistance and blame the British for missing an opportunity to overthrow Hitler without risk. Meehan has written in *The Unnecessary War: Whitehall and the German Resistance to Hitler* (1992) "that everything depended on leadership by Britain and it was Britain that failed at every moment of opportunity throughout that fateful year [1938]".[42] Meehan's criticism, while not completely without merit, is nevertheless a substantial simplification of the complex forces which dominated British decision making throughout the period. Rothfels' *The German Opposition to Hitler: An Appraisal* (1948) was one of the first texts to positively discuss the foreign contacts of the resistance and their attempts. Another important source is T. Philip Conwell-Evans' *None So Blind: A Study of the Crisis Years, 1930-1939* (1947). Conwell-Evans, Joint Honorary Secretary of the Anglo-German Fellowship, was able to use his contacts with German political and military figures to provide Vansittart with information.

There are several worthwhile general histories of the German resistance which contain some information surrounding the foreign contacts of the opposition. Some examples include, but are not limited to, Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death: The Story of The German Resistance* (1996), Anton Gill, *An Honorable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance 1933-1945* (1994), Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *The Canaris Conspiracy: The Secret Resistance to Hitler in the German Army* (1969), and Allen Dulles' *Germany's Underground* (1947). British journalist-turned historian Ian Colvin has produced several books on the period, including *Chief of Intelligence* (1951), and *The Chamberlain Cabinet* (1971), which have all been generally well-received by the historical community.

[42] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 115

For his book on Sir Robert entitled *Vansittart in Office* (1965), Colvin relies on Vansittart's private papers to produce a more accurate picture of his activities throughout the period. Sources which deal more specifically with the pre-war period and must be considered balanced include Terry Parssinen's *The Oster Conspiracy of 1938: The Unknown Story of the Military Plot to Kill Hitler and Avert World War Two* (2003), Klemens von Klemperer's *German Resistance Against Hitler: The Search For Allies Abroad, 1938-1945* (1992), Harold Deutsch's *Hitler and his Generals: The Hidden Crisis, January-June 1938* (1974) and *The Conspiracy Against Hitler in the Twilight War* (1968).

The numerous contributions of Professor Peter Hoffmann have served as some of the definitive sources available on the German resistance. Professor Hoffmann's *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945,* (1996) must be considered one of the most important works currently published on the subject as it provides an exhaustive overview of resistance activities throughout the history of the Third Reich. As well, *German Resistance to Hitler* (1988) and *Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905-1944* (2003) rely on primary sources and have been equally well received. Of particular importance for the purposes of this thesis are several articles by Professor Hoffmann including: "Ludwig Beck: Loyalty and Resistance", "Peace through Coup d'état: The Foreign Contacts of the German Resistance, 1933-1944", "The Question of Western Allied Co-Operation with the German Anti-Nazi Conspiracy, 1938-1944", and "The German Resistance to Hitler and the Jews: The Case of Carl Goerdeler".

In addition to the material already discussed, I will be examining *The Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* as well as *The Documents on German Foreign Policy.* The goal of this thesis is to provide a substantial examination of the various foreign contacts of the German resistance with the British government between Prime Minister Chamberlain's accession to power in May 1937 and the Munich Agreement of September 1938. Of primary importance is how the information each contact provided was received and how the British government, and particularly Chamberlain, utilized these secret sources to alter official policy. The principal contacts under examination will include Carl Goerdeler, Ludwig Beck, Ewald von Kleist-Schemzin, Ernst Freiherr von Weizsäcker, and Erich and Theodor Kordt. As well, the development of Chamberlain's appeasement policy

will be studied with particular focus on his succession to the office of Prime Minister, on Lord Halifax's visit to Hitler in November 1937, and on the Anschluss leading through to the Munich Agreement.

4. British Foreign Policy from Versailles to May 1937

Following the conclusion of the Great War, Britain was an exhausted nation. Nearly bankrupt, the country had seen an entire generation sacrifice itself in the fields of France against Imperial Germany. What Britain had been fighting for, and what it ultimately won in 1919 at Versailles, planted the first seeds for the next conflict. Whatever the intent of the architects of Versailles, it must be generally stated that as a 'victorious' power, Britain hoped to live in an international community free of warfare for the foreseeable future. According to historian Keith Middlemas, for Britain, war was considered an absolute evil.[43] The experiences of the Great War drastically affected British policy throughout the interwar period, and the chief lessons it had chosen to learn were a general disinterest in continental commitments and a military policy which lay between keeping spending as low as possible and complete disarmament. British military weakness in the late 1930s can be traced back to the experiences and impact of the Great War.[44] With respect to international affairs, the watchword of the 1920s was 'collective security' through the League of Nations. Germany's entry into the League in 1926 signalled a positive step forward in the normalization of the international community. Yet, whatever progress which had been made was quickly followed by the Great Depression and increased isolationism, as the 1920s ended with little optimism for the future.

For whatever reason Britain was not prepared to make concessions towards Republican Germany. Britain during the 1920s was in a position of strength in regard to Germany which would have been the traditional situation to implement appeasement.[45] Customarily throughout history, appeasement was a policy based on concessions made from

[43] Keith Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-1939* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 52
[44] McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War*, 33
[45] Rock, *British Appeasement*, 25

a position of strength within set limits controlled by the appeaser.[46] Tragically, the assumption of power by Hitler and the Nazis began the slow alteration of British policy which eventually led to Munich. Following Hitler's installation as Chancellor on 30 January 1933, British policy began to slowly evolve along two separate tracks. Firstly, necessity of rearmament eventually became clear to most British statesmen, yet a debate continued over the speed and financing of such programs. Secondly, appeasement which was initially passive and piecemeal was eventually transformed into an active and resolute policy by the accession of Neville Chamberlain to the office of Prime Minister in May 1937.[47]

Hitler's assumption of power did not end the hopes of a general settlement with Germany that the British Foreign Office had been musing about but done little for years.[48] The character of Adolf Hitler had been accurately described by the British ambassador in Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps after his first meeting with the dictator. According to Sir Eric, cold hard logical reasoning would produce no effect on the Nazi leader.[49] As early as 10 May 1933, Sir Robert Vansittart produced a surprisingly accurate prediction of the future. Vansittart envisioned three possibilities: first, the collapse of Hitler through economic failure; second, the success of Hitler followed by a general European war in four to five years; and third, a preventive war on Germany before she is strong enough to attack anyone else.[50] However, by the end of 1933, the view was emerging within the Foreign Office with Vansittart's support that a satisfactory agreement could be possible with Germany if direct negotiations were substituted for the League of Nations construct in Geneva.[51] Direct personal diplomacy, so often characterized as Chamberlain's policy after September 1938, was proposed as a possible solution as early as December 1933. It should be noted that no other form of diplomacy, aside from absolute silence, was really practical at the time, as Hitler had withdrawn Germany from the League of Nations in October 1933. At the same

[46] Rock, *British Appeasement*, 25
[47] Ibid., 39
[48] David Dilks ed. "Appeasement and Intelligence" in *Retreat From Power Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the 20th Century, Vol. 1: 1906-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 81
[49] Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, *Appeasers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), 44
[50] Ian Colvin, *Vansittart In Office* (London: Victory Gollancz Ltd, 1965), 23-24
[51] Dilks ed., *Retreat From Power*, 84

time, he withdrew from the Disarmament Conference which had been in progress in Geneva.[52]

After 1933, British foreign policy in relation to the dictator states stumbled along through a series of emergencies and periods of inactivity. By early 1934, it was clear to some that Nazi Germany represented the long term threat. On 28 February 1934, the Imperial Defence Requirements Sub-Committee recognized that Germany was the ultimate threat and potential enemy against whom the British long range defensive policy must be directed.[53] Even Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, whose pacifism was widely admired during the 1920s, consented to defence spending increases. By 1934, pressure for rearmament was mounting, and despite his aversion to war, Neville Chamberlain as Chancellor of the Exchequer was the moving spirit behind the increase in spending.[54] As the major motivator behind the defence increases, Chamberlain's personal views on the international situation and the type of military needed to prevent the next war dominated. In May 1934, Chamberlain announced that lessons from the last war indicated to him that funding should be directed towards the Navy and Air Force and not the Army.[55] This became the viewpoint of the military leaders as well, and as a result funding was raised for the Home Air Force, while at the same time appropriations for the Army were halved.[56] Funding the Air Force was seen as an appropriate deterrent to German military action.[57]

By the end of 1934, military funding was being increased, albeit slowly, and only in certain branches. The following year saw the abandonment of the League of Nations as an effective international body capable of preventing aggressive war, the short lived, perhaps stillborn Stresa Front, the reintroduction of universal military service in Germany and the replacement of the ailing Ramsey MacDonald by Stanley Baldwin as Prime Minister. In short, the structure of 1919 was in ruins.[58] By 1935, the Foreign Office was already debating the policy which became known as appeasement.[59] Mixed messages continued to travel back

[52] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 17
[53] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 33
[54] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 258
[55] Dilks ed., *Retreat From Power*, 110
[56] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 258
[57] Ibid., 258
[58] Ibid., 261
[59] Ian Colvin, *Vansittart In Office*, 47

to London about Hitler's true intentions. From Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps continued the critical line in his dispatches, and was even seen by some as an obstacle to better relations.[60] Conversely, on 29 January 1935, Lord Lothian met with Hitler for nearly three hours, writing to the Prime Minister that Germany did not want war and was prepared to renounce it as a method of settling disputes.[61]

The Stresa Front of Britain, France, and Italy agreed in a declaration to oppose by all practical means any unilateral repudiation of treaties which might endanger the peace of Europe.[62] Despite its general wording, it was directed primarily towards possible action by Germany to engulf Austria. However, the Stresa Front was short lived. With the League of Nations incapable of preventing the aggressive war Italy launched against Abyssinia, modern day Ethiopia, Britain turned towards personal diplomacy. The result was the secret and leaked Hoare-Laval Pact, which allotted for cession to Italy the part of Ethiopia that Italian troops had already conquered and a zone of one third of the rest.[63] The plan, which had in essence been accepted by the British Cabinet was disavowed after public protest, and nine days after it was signed, Hoare rose in the House of Commons to explain his resignation. It was acknowledged within the Cabinet that they had deserted their own policy and Hoare was quickly ushered back soon afterwards.[64] Prime Minister Baldwin attempted to restore his reputation as a supporter of the League by making Anthony Eden, Secretary for the League of Nations, the new Foreign Secretary on 22 December 1935.[65]

The year 1935 was a turning point in the history of diplomacy and international relations leading to the Second World War. Defence White Papers recommended increasing military spending which British Ministers agreed to, albeit reluctantly. By the end of 1935, it was accepted by most that some concessions would have to be made to Germany in order to achieve a long lasting peace. The foundation for appeasement had been laid. In a letter addressed to King George V, Sir Robert wrote that,

> "We therefore come down to the basic fact that if any lasting agreement is to be made with Germany, some expansion will have to be allowed for, and that

[60] Ian Colvin, *Vansittart In Office*, 47
[61] James Ramsay Montagu Butler, *Lord Lothian* (London: Macmillan, 1960), 203
[62] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 29
[63] Ibid., 53
[64] Ibid., 54
[65] Ibid., 55

> expansion can only take place by restoring to her some of, not all of, her former colonies. This conclusion will no doubt raise considerable objection on the Right in this country, but it will have to be faced in the long run."[66]

Vansittart, known as one of the staunchest opponents of appeasement, was proposing essentially the same policy, as long as it involved African colonies. With the collapse of the Disarmament Conference in 1933, the chief aim of British Foreign Policy in Europe was to come to a détente with Germany.[67] 1936 was the first year in which an active attempt was made to come to that détente, as British officials were eager to follow up the perceived success of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of the previous year.

Anthony Eden, as new Foreign Secretary, recommended on 14 February 1936 the acceptance of German remilitarization of the Rhine as part of a comprehensive agreement.[68] For Eden, such a policy, easily defined as appeasement in the traditional sense, was only logical if it formed part of a general agreement. His understanding of appeasement was a two-fold combination: in the long term, a League-sanctioned disarmament could only be achieved successfully if short term rearmament was completed.[69] Eden's policy towards Germany had been spelled out in a Cabinet memorandum from January 1936. Its two conclusions were the necessity to complete British rearmament and to come to some *modus vivendi* with Hitler, which were safe for Britain.[70] Yet, before remilitarization of the Rhineland could be offered as part of a general settlement, Hitler had already ordered troops across the Rhine on 7 March 1936. The spirit of Locarno, as well as the treaty, was dead; the guarantors, Italy and Britain, were diplomatically opposed over sanctions, while France, without a government on the day itself, was unprepared to act without prior commitments from Britain.[71] Even those less inclined towards Germany felt that there was little which could be done. Eden wrote that "not one in a thousand in Britain were prepared to take action with France against Germany, since most felt that she could do what she wished in

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[66] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 51
[67] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 37
[68] Dilks ed., *Retreat From Power*, 92
[69] Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policies 1933-1940* (London: Cambridge, 1975), 105
[70] RJQ Adams, *British Policy and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993) 36
[71] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 278

her own territory."[72] It was only years later that the so-called Rhineland crisis was selected as a moment when Hitler could have been stopped; at the time even those opposed to the dictator's action were not prepared to fight a war over the issue.[73]

A month prior to German remilitarization of the Rhineland, on 9 February 1936, a report was presented to Cabinet which stated that if war was prevented for a few years, Britain would have had time to build an Air Force so powerful that no one would dare strike first for fear of retaliation.[74] A similar plea for time was expressed by Vansittart in September 1936 when he argued that the only credible policy which Britain could pursue under the current international situation was an attempt to stall, and continue efforts at conciliation with Germany until at least 1939 at which point rearmament would be completed to an acceptable level.[75] As a result, the Foreign Office was assigned the unfortunate and difficult task of securing time,[76] which was akin to staying alive in a poker game with dwindling chips and bad cards. The product was a dual policy of 'cunctation' as Vansittart described it, as well as keeping Germany guessing,[77] which was a feeble attempt at navigating several courses at once in the hopes that Hitler would not be able to predict what Britain would do next.

By the fall of 1936, little progress had been made in relation to Germany. Amazingly, during this critical period, there was no sense of urgency. Near the end of October 1936, Baldwin returned to London and spoke with Eden for the first time in several months, at which time the Prime Minister mentioned "as a result of the forthcoming abdication, I hope you will not trouble me too much with foreign affairs right now."[78] Over several months while Germany signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan and fascist soldiers entered the Spanish Civil War, the only affair which attracted the attention of British Ministers was the Royal scandal.[79] When Baldwin finally resigned in May 1937, nearly half a year had been lost, a new King had been crowned, but in a period of immediate

[72] Avon, *Facing The Dictators*, 338
[73] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 66
[74] Ibid., 66
[75] McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement, and the British Road to War*, 30
[76] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 68
[77] Ibid., 68
[78] Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, 410
[79] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 288

danger, nothing of any importance was accomplished with respect to rearmament or foreign affairs.[80] Stanley Baldwin regarded foreign affairs as the domain of experts, and as Prime Minister he avoided it constantly.[81] It was clear to those who would listen that the main danger came from Germany, a fact asserted by Eden at the first Cabinet meeting of 1937 on 13 January.[82]

Under Baldwin's stewardship, foreign policy as developed mostly by Eden, was to keep Germany guessing. In fact, the guessing was all done by the British Government.[83] According to historian Klemens von Klemperer, official policy involved an unsteady course which shifted between a League policy, cautious rearmament, and bilateral negotiations with the fascists with the hope of mollifying and appeasing them.[84] However, when Baldwin officially resigned, he had not personally kept firm control over foreign policy, but insofar as it existed, it could be called appeasement.[85] By May 1937, the world order created at Versailles was merely a memory. It was still too difficult for many British politicians and policy makers to accept a return to deterrence and alliances, which seemed to most an admission of defeat and a final judgment that the Great War had been meaningless.[86]

5. Neville Chamberlain Becomes Prime Minister

Even prior to his accession to the position of Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain was one of the most powerful ministers in the British Government. During his tenure as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had been the driving force behind the previous six national budgets as well as an important factor in the allocation of military spending. When Stanley Baldwin announced his intention to step down, Chamberlain was the only logical replacement. Therefore, on 28 May 1937, Neville Chamberlain became British Prime Minister, the third since Adolf Hitler's assumption of power little more than four years earlier. Historian D.C. Watt has written that after Hitler, Chamberlain was the single most

[80] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 117
[81] Earl Of Birkenhead, *The Life of Lord Halifax* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), 361
[82] Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, 480
[83] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 359
[84] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 87, Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusions*, 41-43
[85] Roy Douglas, *In the Year of Munich* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 6
[86] McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement, and the British Road to War*, 30

important individual in the events leading to war, as he dominated British political life.[87] However, when he became Prime Minister, Chamberlain knew little of foreign affairs.[88] A popular story that circulated about Chamberlain's lack of foreign expertise was that at a dinner party, he was talking about the Austrian problem when his half brother, Sir Austen Chamberlain, the famous former Foreign Secretary and Nobel Peace Prize winner, interrupted him. In dismissing his brother's analysis, he reportedly said "you must remember you don't know anything about foreign affairs."[89] In retrospect, it can be said that as Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain was probably as vital to appeasement as Adolf Hitler was to the success of Nazism in Germany.[90] Yet, Chamberlain did not invent appeasement, but he did turn the policy into a nearly lifelong mission. Unlike some who supported such a policy, Chamberlain did not do so because he favoured the Nazis. His mistrust and dislike of Hitler and his party were quite evident,[91] and he called the Regime the bully of Europe.[92] Nevertheless Chamberlain believed he had no other choice but to negotiate with the properly elected government of the most powerful continental nation.

The Foreign Secretary was not unhappy with the prospect of Chamberlain taking a greater interest in foreign policy, since Eden privately commented that it would be impossible for anyone to have taken less than Baldwin.[93] On 4 May, three weeks before Chamberlain became Prime Minister, he spoke with Eden about the necessity of replacing Vansittart.[94] His overly pessimistic warnings about Germany did not suit the current political environment. At the same time, his role in the aborted Hoare-Laval Pact resulted in criticism of his actions by members of Cabinet.[95] Chamberlain said during the debate that the Foreign Secretary, who had been forced to resign, had been greatly misled by his staff.[96]

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[87] Donald Cameron (D.C.) Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 46
[88] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 139
[89] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 45; Avon, *Facing The Dictators*, 445
[90] Rock, *British Appeasement*, 55
[91] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 139
[92] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 52
[93] Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, 445
[94] Oliver Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*. John Harvey ed (London: Collins, 1970), 44
[95] Dilks ed., *Retreat from Power*, 137
[96] Ibid., 137

Privately, shortly before he became Prime Minister, Chamberlain told Lady Astor that he meant to be his own Foreign Secretary.[97]

Chamberlain arrived in office ready to get right down to work. He hoped to show that as Prime Minister he could get more done in a month than Baldwin had in six,[98] which with respect to foreign affairs would not be overly difficult. As Prime Minister, he was later described as an anomalous combination of weak in respect to his dealings with Hitler, and dictatorial in relation to his Cabinet. In truth, neither is an accurate representation of reality. Chamberlain had a type of self-confidence which could verge on contempt for his colleagues; over time he increasingly took over the responsibilities of others,[99] particularly in foreign affairs. Despite his relative lack of knowledge about the subject, Chamberlain had concrete ideas for the type of policy he would pursue as Prime Minister. Unlike Baldwin, who was slow to override his Cabinet colleagues, Chamberlain at times acted with speed and impatience which in turn led to a tendency to work within an Inner Cabinet of three other Ministers whom he trusted.[100] Upon beginning his tenure as Prime Minister, Chamberlain wrote "I believe the double policy of rearmament and better relations with Germany and Italy will carry us safely through the danger period, if only the Foreign Office would play up."[101] His disregard or lack of respect for Foreign Office officials was clearly apparent, yet it was not completely unreasonable. Chamberlain had seen the damage Eden and Vansittart had suffered through, and the destruction of the two previous Foreign Secretaries Hoare and Simon, and had a low opinion of perceived Foreign Office lethargy.[102] Chamberlain's first objective was to detach the dictators from each other, and involve each in general negotiation. He knew which was the bigger catch, writing "if only we could get on terms with Germany, I would not care a rap for Musso."[103]

In April 1937, Nevile Henderson was appointed British ambassador in Berlin. In the eyes of some, he quickly became one of the most catastrophic failures in British ambassadorial history. As early as July 1937, he was dubbed by Foreign Office critics as

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[97] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 552
[98] Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler*, 149
[99] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 552
[100] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 60
[101] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 319
[102] Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler*, 152
[103] Goldstein and Lukes, eds., *The Munich Crisis 1938*, 281

"our Nazi ambassador in Berlin."[104] In 1940, Sir Nevile wrote that he was "resolved if anything on the side of impartiality" in an attempt to see the good of the Nazi Regime, if there was one, while at the time believing in Hitler's word until it was proven that he had broken it.[105] Historian Sir Lewis Namier, critical of Chamberlain's policy, has written that "Henderson's communications to London contain enough to prove him unsuited for an ambassador. His only qualification was that he echoed and reinforced Chamberlain's opinions and policy."[106] There have been few historians willing to defend Henderson's actions while in Berlin. Ironically, his appointment was decided by Eden under the recommendation of Vansittart, a staunch anti-appeaser. There appears to be a shocking lack of consideration given to the selection of an ambassador for one of the most important posts in the world. It might have been less troubling to discover that Henderson was selected by Chamberlain specifically because his views on Germany coincided with those of the soon to be Prime Minister. However, that is not the case. Vansittart's notes on the selection process indicate "that Sir Nevile has done his stint in South America, he shall have his reward."[107] Writing years later, Eden took responsibility for the decision, which he states was entirely his, but nevertheless mentions that he had recommendations in Henderson's favor, and that no one could foresee the opinions he was about to hold.[108] One thing is clear from the historical record, that Henderson did have Chamberlain's confidence, unlike the Foreign Office[109], and together they were often able to bypass the traditional conduit of diplomacy.

6.1. Dr. Carl Goerdeler, 1937

The flow of German emissaries abroad was initiated by the man who became one of the most tireless travelers of the opposition, Carl Goerdeler. He served as *Reich* Prices Commissioner in Heinrich Brüning's government between 1931 and 1932. For the rest of his life, Brüning never ceased to regret that following his resignation, his proposal of Goerdeler as successor was not accepted by President Hindenburg.[110] In 1934, Goerdeler was asked by Hitler to return to his former post of Prices Commissioner, which he accepted

[104] McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement, and the British Road to War*, 50
[105] Sir Nevile Henderson, *Failure of A Mission: Berlin 1937-1939* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), 28
[106] Sir Lewis Namier, *In the Nazi Era*, (London: Macmillan, 1952), 162
[107] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 146
[108] Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, 503
[109] Peter Neville, *Appeasing Hitler, The Diplomacy of Sir Nevile Henderson, 1937-1940*, (Houndsmills, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000), 38
[110] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 56

in order to be able to persuade the Nazis to alter their policy direction.[111] Goerdeler was willing to work with Hitler in the early years of his Regime, hoping that his rational arguments could cause the Führer to alter his policies. However, it should be noted that concerning the treatment of German's Jewish population, Goerdeler had never agreed with the National Socialists; as early as April 1933, he had intervened against a national boycott.[112] In full formal dress as mayor of Leipzig, he confronted the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) while they were attacking Jews and Jewish businesses, and even used the local police to liberate those who had been detained and beaten by the SA.[113] Goerdeler's arguments, as directed towards Hitler, while designed primarily at changing the economic policy of the government, quickly involved other questions such as an end to the persecution of the Jews, the Churches, and a deceleration of rearmament programs.[114]

Goerdeler resigned as mayor in November 1936 due to the removal of a statue of composer Felix Mendelssohn by the deputy mayor who was an ardent Nazi.[115] The statue had been placed in front of the Leipzig *Gewandhaus* concert hall in 1892, in honor of Mendelssohn, a Christian, but due to the Nazi racial system he was qualified as Jewish because of his descent. Goerdeler repeatedly denied the Nazi deputy mayor Haake permission to remove the statue, and before leaving for a trip to Finland even secured the support of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels and Hitler to leave the monument where it was for the time being.[116] But while Goerdeler was away, Haake had the statue removed and some historians have since attempted to taint Goerdeler's resignation as motivated primarily due to his deputy's insubordination.[117] However, such an argument is ill-founded. Goerdeler's opposition to the Regime had been steadly increasing and he utilized the opportunity to resign and began to focus on resistance activities.

Following his resignation, Goerdeler was given a haven by Robert Bosch in the form of a loose contractual arrangement which enabled him to enter actively into opposition activities and which served as a cover for an elaborate schedule of foreign journeys. Bosch

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[111] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 32
[112] Peter Hoffmann, "The German Resistance and the Holocaust" (Boston College, 2002), 8
[113] Ibid., 8
[114] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 33
[115] Ibid., 36
[116] Hoffmann, "The German Resistance and the Holocaust", 9
[117] Ibid., 10

was a rather unique captain of industry, a bitter enemy of Hitler personally, and an active opponent of the Regime. He delighted in finding and funneling large sums of money for relief of the Regime's victims, particularly the Jews in Swabia.[118] In his unfinished autobiography, Sir Robert Vansittart states that he met Goerdeler in 1935, while he was still mayor, but does not offer any information as to whether the meeting included conspiratorial activities.[119] Writing years after their meetings, Vansittart reserved the few kind words he had with regard to the German resistance for Goerdeler. Sir Robert described him "as a genuine article, the only man with such a past that I ever liked, for Goerdeler desired the destruction of Hitler with catonian simplicity."[120] Vansittart, who had numerous contacts with the German resistance, and after the start of the war became one of its fiercest critics, wrote that at least "Goerdeler was prepared to die for his *ceterum censeo* – nobody else was for a decade."[121]

Whether or not Goerdeler's tour was approved by the resistance, he nevertheless travelled without any particular legitimacy. He saw his role within the field of foreign contacts as that of an unofficial mediator with semi-official and secret connections, which at times he exaggerated. He went out on his own and had to rely on private contacts, which he had in abundance. However, the British Foreign Office was puzzled about his accreditation. "He seemed to me an honest fellow," commented Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, when Goerdeler first appeared in London in June 1937, "but I could not make out in whose interests he was traveling or with what precise purpose."[122] Wherever he went, he was received as a person of consequence and given much attention. Sir Orme Sargent, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, guessed that Goerdeler was an "unofficial emissary and representative of the *Reichswehr*."[123] An astonishing number of foreign statesmen received Goerdeler. If there was a common theme to all of his visits abroad, it was to demonstrate to Hitler that he could not achieve any more territorial conquests without a major war.[124] Through his journeys, Goerdeler attempted to warn, to inform, to bargain for guarantees, and

[118] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 80
[119] Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, 512
[120] Ibid., 512
[121] Ibid., 513
[122] Klemperer, *The Search for Allies Abroad*, 92
[123] Ibid., 92
[124] Hoffmann, "Peace Through Coup d'état", 17

to reach out to the world.[125] Within the European context, a majority of Goerdeler's visits were to London and not Paris. He believed, perhaps correctly, that an agreement with Britain would have to be accepted by France as a *fait accompli*. However, the British as well as the French and American governments felt unable to follow up his proposals in any way.[126]

Starting in June 1937, Goerdeler's grand tour took him to Belgium and Britain, and after a brief return to Berlin, to Holland and France and thence in August to Canada and the United States and back to France. A second trip in March and April 1938 led again to France and Britain and a third one, beginning in August 1938 to Switzerland and via Italy to Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria.[127] For each of these journeys, Goerdeler compiled lengthy reports which Klemperer describes as "strikingly urbane and sane documents."[128] The reports were delivered to members of the Nazi Regime, and by 1938 to members of the developing resistance. At a minimum, they were received by Krupp, Bosch, Göring, Schacht, and Generals Fritsch, Beck, Halder, and Thomas.[129] Initially, the reports were sent to the Reich Chancellery, where Hitler's secretary Captain Wiedemann received them and promised to pass them on to the Führer.[130] Prior to his voyage to the United States at the end of 1937, Goerdeler was contacted by Göring to report to him his impressions, and as a result his trip came under the protection of the second most powerful Nazi.[131] The theme present in all the documents was that peace depended mainly on the attitude of the German government.[132]

In June 1937, Goerdeler travelled to London where he was introduced by a mutual friend Dr. Reinhold Schairer, to Arthur Primrose (A.P.) Young, manager of the Rugby works for the Thomson-Houston Company.[133] Sometime in June, Young hosted a dinner at the National Liberal Club in London for Goerdeler to meet Sir Wyndham Deedes, Hugh

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[125] Klemens von Klemperer, Adam von Trott zu Solz and Resistance Foreign Policy. *Central European History* Vol. 14 (1981), 360
[126] Hoffmann, *The History Of Resistance*, 55-56
[127] Klemperer, *The Search for Allies Abroad*, 93 Taking place outside the limits of this thesis, a fourth trip in March and April 1939, took him to France and Algeria, and finally a fifth one, in the spring and summer of 1939, to Britain, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, and Switzerland.
[128] Ibid., 93
[129] Ibid., 93 and Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 83
[130] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 83
[131] Ibid., 82
[132] Ibid., 83
[133] Sidney Aster ed., *A.P. Young The 'X' Document*s (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974), 22

Quigley and Leslie Satchell. Also present was Dr. Schairer.[134] During dinner, held at a table in an alcove, which offered some privacy, Goerdeler impressed everyone with his forceful, humorous, likeable personality and above all his superb moral courage. According to Young's account:

> "He [Goerdeler] pleaded most earnestly for a *firm* policy in dealing with Hitler as being the only one that Hitler would understand aright; and the only policy likely to retard his evil purposes. Any equivocation or appeasement would be interpreted as weakness; would inflame Hitler's megalomaniac propensities; and would discourage the liberal forces inside Germany who had no illusions about the Hitler Regime, and who, as Goerdeler contended, were anxious to co-operate with us to find a solution to the Hitler problem."[135]

As the meeting ended, Young had been fully won over by Goerdeler and would remain a strong supporter of his throughout the entire period.

6.2. The *Langnamverein* Report

Within a few days of the first dinner meeting, Deedes introduced Goerdeler to Sir Robert Vansittart[136] and the two met three times in July 1937, twice at the Foreign Office and once at Denham Place, Sir Robert's home. Vansittart regarded Goerdeler as trustworthy and described him as the only genuine German conspirator,[137] stating that the first meetings between the two were positive.[138] Throughout the three meetings, Goerdeler strongly suggested that British policy towards Germany ought to be firm and clear.[139] "Above all let the world and Germany see that you know the truth. Let them see that your standards of morality, public conduct and respect for law are the old high standards to which the people of Germany still adhere in their inward hearts."[140] Goerdeler stated that nothing could be worse for Germany and Europe in the long run than an artificial Anglo-German

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[134] Ibid., 24
[135] Ibid., 24 [author's emphasis]
[136] Arthur Primrose (A.P) Young, *Across the Years: The Living Testament of an Engineer with a Mission* (London: Charles Knight & Co. Ltd., 1971), 21
[137] Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, 512
[138] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 94
[139] Ibid., 89
[140] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 153

understanding, founded upon illusions.[141] As well, he assured Vansittart that there was no imminent danger of a military adventure.

Vansittart was able to take advantage of his meeting with Goerdeler to present him with a memorandum entitled "The Association of Heavy Industries of the Rhineland and Westfalia on the Economic Potential of Germany and its Programme of Self-Sufficiency, with Particular Emphasis on the Shortcomings of the Four-Year Plan,"[142] commonly abbreviated to *Langnamverein*.[143] The emphasis of the Four Year Plan was to create an autarchic war economy in peacetime Germany, and to prepare the nation for a series of short wars. The memorandum had somehow ended up in the hands of the British Legation in Prague, who submitted it for authentication to the Embassy in Berlin, which assumed it was written by Dr. Schacht, but could not explain its rather rudimentary language.[144] Goerdeler was now able to explain the circumstances surrounding the document and stated that it had been prepared as a simple economic guide for the senior officers of the German General Staff.[145] The following information and estimates were included in the memorandum compiled by the Association of Heavy Industries, which Vansittart held in his hands and Goerdeler had verified:

> "Estimated the deficiency of raw materials at 40-60 per cent of German needs, of food and fodder at 25-30 per cent, and German exports as one-third of the normal figure. The maximum home output in the next four years would not produce more than 50 per cent of iron and steel requirements, 70 per cent of zinc, 45 per cent of lead, and 15 per cent of copper. Home production of raw materials was not more than 25 per cent of Germany's needs. German commerce was taken approximately 50-60 per cent with Government orders. There was a large foreign and internal debt."[146]

In conclusion, the memorandum recommended that the German government should abandon its policy of economic and political isolation, and enter into a system of negotiated international agreements.[147] Such a recommendation essentially meant the abandonment of

[141] Ibid., 154
[142] Ibid., 151
[143] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 102
[144] Colvin, *Vansittart In Office*, 151
[145] Ibid., 151
[146] Ibid., 152-153
[147] Ibid., 153

Hitler's isolationist, aggressive plans and a return to the international community as a normalized actor. It illustrated Hitler's own precarious economic situation.

The final memorandum written by Vansittart, which included information from Goerdeler, the Heavy Industries Report and two appendices, never reached the Cabinet or the Prime Minister. Instead the report was marked across the cover by Vansittart as 'Suppressed by Eden'. After the war, the Foreign Secretary did not recall the memorandum.[148] By 1937 Vansittart's memoranda were deemed overly pessimistic and lengthy.[149] He had been offered the post of ambassador to France three times during a twelve month period but had declined each time, citing Lady Vansittart's declining health. There is evidence that in the early spring of 1937 a general movement in Whitehall attempted to neutralize Vansittart.[150] His replacement had been privately discussed by Eden and Chamberlain in May. However, why Vansittart chose to write 'suppressed' across his memorandum remains a mystery unto which any number of possible explanations appear plausible. It could have been the result of an unrecorded argument between Eden and Vansittart, or the Foreign Secretary may have grown tired of the perception of being controlled by his subordinate.[151] According to Ian Colvin, senior ministers including Chamberlain, Halifax, and Eden were already aware of its contents and did not wish to have the entire Cabinet debating the policy course which had been set towards appeasement.[152] For historian Peter Hoffmann, Chamberlain was already determined on a policy of compromise and used a memorandum from the British Chiefs of Staff to support his belief, which stated that Britain was in no way prepared for war with Germany.[153] In early July, Chamberlain's mind had already been made up. But it was not too late to unmake that decision, to prefer firmer counsels. Vansittart's warnings, which gave a very accurate appreciation of the Hitler government and the economic deficiencies which limited the German ability to wage war, were accordingly disregarded.[154]

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[148] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 105
[149] Norman Rose, *Vansittart Study of a Diplomat* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 200
[150] Ibid., 202
[151] Ian Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet: how the meetings in 10 Downing Street, 1937-9, led to the Second World War; told for the first time from the Cabinet* papers (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1971), 29
[152] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 155
[153] Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance*, 59
[154] Ibid., 59

Yet, despite the claims that the report was suppressed because it did not fit into Chamberlain's policy direction, it should be noted as even appeasement critic Patricia Meehan does, that the report was widely read throughout the second half of 1937.[155] In fact, the memorandum was extensively circulated along with its two secret appendices.[156] The first appendix included extracts from secret monthly reports by General Georg Thomas, Head of the German War Economy and Armaments Office, which detailed the difficulties of obtaining sufficient quantities of war material, a factor which obviously directly limited Hitler's ability to wage war.[157] The second appendix included information from Dr. Aschmann, Head of the Price Department of the Foreign Ministry, which summarized the Hitler-Mussolini talks of September 1937, the main point being that in the event of a Nazi action against Austria, Italy would not intervene despite their commitment to the Stresa Front.[158] Vansittart had no cause to complain that his views were not publicized. The question therefore shifts from whether the report was suppressed to whether it was heeded. Clearly, it was read by many, but few aside from Vansittart put any worth in the report and it disappears from the file on 30 December 1937, without having had an impact on anyone except Sir Robert,[159] who was by then the outgoing Permanent Under-Secretary of State. According to Middlemas, Vansittart's use of the word 'suppressed' may have been hyperbole, but it does clearly illustrate the real limits of the power of any member of the Foreign Office to bring advice or information to Cabinet without the support of the Foreign Secretary.[160] From 1937 onwards, Vansittart's German intelligence network continued to grow steadily in importance in direct relation to the decline of his influence.[161]

7. General Ludwig Beck's First Warnings Abroad

Along with Carl Goerdeler, General Ludwig Beck must be considered one of the most important members of the German resistance. Ludwig August Theodor Beck was born on 29 June 1880 at Biebrich am Rhein, and became an Ensign in the Prussian field artillery a few months prior to his eighteenth birthday and rose steadily through the ranks of the

[155] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 106
[156] Rose, *Vansittart Study of a Diplomat*, 205
[157] Ibid., 205
[158] Ibid., 205
[159] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 107
[160] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 77
[161] Rose, *Vansittart Study of a Diplomat*, 206

German Army.[162] Beck welcomed the voting victories of the National Socialists in the early 1930s and Hitler's assumption of power.[163] While General Beck agreed that revisions of the Treaty of Versailles were necessary, particularly with respect to borders, he insisted that they could only be obtained by peaceful means. As a result, he pushed for defensive rearmament and continued throughout his tenure as Chief of the General Staff of the German Army to oppose any strategy he considered adventurous and any war policy except in a clear case of self-defence.[164] General Beck completely ruled out any plans for an invasion of Czechoslovakia except in a general framework of a defensive operation in the event of an attack by France and her allies.[165] As well, he refused to develop plans for the invasion of Austria, even after he had been initially ordered to do so.

General Beck believed, correctly, that the next European conflict could not remain limited and in time would expand to a total war, which included the legitimization of civilians as targets.[166] Therefore, Beck demanded a policy with a moral basis, which allowed only for defensive operations. He was certainly not a pacifist, but he did attempt to avert Hitler's aggressive war plans.[167] For Beck, war was the *ultima ratio* and not a natural consequence of the nation's struggle for survival as Hitler maintained.[168]

General Beck arrived in Paris on 16 June 1937, and the next day he met with General Gamelin, Commander of the French Army. Following their meeting, Gamelin's colleagues did not view Beck as a representative of militarist or revanchist ideas.[169] General Beck, on an official visit, provided the first direct warnings about Hitler's militaristic plans to the British and French governments. Beck stated that the commanders of the German Army were opposed to any military adventure but that they held little influence over Hitler and would be unable to restrain the dictator.[170] Beck also warned that any limitation of armaments agreement signed with Nazi Germany would surely be broken by Hitler. General

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[162] Nicholas Reynolds, *Treason Was No Crime: Ludwig Beck, Chief of the German General Staff* (London: Kimber, 1976), 17-20
[163] Peter Hoffmann, "Ludwig Beck: Loyalty and Resistance", *Central European History* (1981), 334
[164] Ibid., 349
[165] Ibid., 338
[166] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 76
[167] Otto John, *Twice Through the Lines: The Autobiography of Otto John* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 32
[168] Reynolds, *Treason was no Crime*, 119
[169] Ibid., 113
[170] Hoffmann, "Peace Through Coup D'état", 15

Beck concluded by declaring in front of the various foreign officials that his own leader Adolf Hitler was "pathological and wholly incalculable."[171] The former British Air Attaché in Berlin, now part of Vansittart's intelligence network, Group Captain Malcolm Graham Christie conveyed these warnings to Sir Robert.[172] There is no evidence from Vansittart as to how General Beck's warnings affected policy, yet it is safe to say that it served to give further credibility to Goerdeler's warnings delivered to London at about the same time.

Upon returning to Berlin, General Beck adopted, whether purposefully or not, what was to become the traditional reporting style of the foreign envoys of the German resistance. He repeatedly stated that he had found the French Generals to be very good soldiers with a powerful Army at their disposal.[173] Beck's official report represented a clear attempt at convincing his superiors that France was a strong and dangerous enemy. However, it failed to have the desired effect on Hitler, who showed no greater concern for France as a future opponent.[174]

General Beck's opposition to Hitler's plans slowly turned into outright resistance. Throughout 1938, Beck was opposed to all of Hitler's aggressive plans but some historians have attempted to claim that he was only opposed because he did not believe Germany could be victorious in a general European war. Beck's military arguments against war were the only ones that he believed could possibly affect Hitler. While Beck was morally opposed to offensive war, he could not hope to affect a dictator's policies with such considerations. However, Beck's actions were dictated by his character. Rash action or bold steps were not qualities that the conservative General Staff officer possessed. Perhaps his greatest flaw was his hesitant nature, too considerate to stir men's hearts.[175] He was a man of thought rather than action, carefully weighing every step and often taking too long to make decisions.[176] As a result Beck's opposition began by writing memoranda designed to move Hitler away from his aggressive war policies.

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[171] Hoffmann, "Peace Through Coup D'état", 15
[172] T. Philip Conwell-Evans, *So Blind: A Study of the Crisis Years, 1930-1939* (London, 1947), 91-92
[173] Reynolds, *Treason Was no Crime*, 114
[174] Ibid., 115
[175] Heinrich Fraenkel and Roger Manvell, *The Canaris Conspiracy: The Secret Resistance to Hitler in the German Army (*New York: McKay, 1969), 31
[176] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 75

8. Lord Halifax's Trip to Germany, November 1937

Since becoming Prime Minister in May, Chamberlain firmly believed that an understanding with Germany could be pursued by informal discussions rather than public denunciations.[177] He had eagerly awaited a visit by the German Foreign Minister Konstantin Baron von Neurath, which was cancelled during the summer of 1937. Another opportunity for 'personal diplomacy' presented itself when Lord President of the Council Edward Halifax, at the time also Master of the Middleton Hounds, received an invitation in that capacity, sponsored by Göring to attend a hunting exhibition in Berlin.[178] By November, Eden began to press for a halt in negotiations with Germany until after rearmament had been completed.[179] On the other hand, Chamberlain's belief in personal contacts made him encourage Halifax to visit Hitler with the objective of discovering the true nature of the dictator's demands.[180] For Eden, who was never truly supportive of the trip, the discovery that it had been published in the press and that the meeting with Hitler was now going to occur at Berchtesgaden instead of Berlin caused the Foreign Secretary to voice several concerns.[181] Eden did not believe that it would be beneficial to have Halifax appear to be running after Hitler, and insisted on a twenty-four hour delay and a press release which stated that the Führer had invited the Lord President.[182] But since the report had been published in the press, it was decided that the visit would take place. The Foreign Secretary suspected 'official inspiration' in some of the news stories.[183]

Lord Halifax spoke no German, and Hitler no English. The two men conducted their entire conversation on 19 November 1937 through the dictator's interpreter, Schmidt.[184] The account of the meeting provided by Halifax in his diary entry can be considered accurate. In fact, Baron von Neurath provided Henderson with an unofficial memorandum detailing the conversation as recorded by Schmidt, intended to facilitate Lord Halifax's report.[185] The entire visit was nearly ruined when Halifax took the man who had walked up to the car for a

[177] Neville Chamberlain, *In Search of Peace*(New York: Van Rees Press, 1939), 28
[178] Lord Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, 185
[179] Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler*, 169
[180] Birkenhead, Lord Halifax, 365
[181] Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, 509
[182] Harvey, *Diplomatic Diaries*, 59
[183] Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, 511
[184] Lord Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, 186
[185] *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (*DGFP*), Series D, Volume 1, no.31, p.54

footman who had come to help him out. The Lord President nearly handed the supposed footman his hat when Neurath whispered, "*Der Führer, Der Führer.*"[186] Halifax began his meeting after receiving conflicting advice from Henderson who stressed concessions and Eden who had instructed the Lord President to confine himself to warning comments on Austria and Czechoslovakia.[187] Halifax began by stating that he welcomed the opportunity to bring about a better understanding between England and Germany, by means of a personal conversation.[188] He went on to say that the Prime Minister believed it should be possible to find a solution to our differences by an open exchange of views.[189] During the course of the conversation, Hitler stressed the importance of the colonial question, claiming that it was the only difference between England and Germany.[190] In fact, Hitler did not care about African colonies at all. The most decisive moment occurred when Halifax, technically a representative as the Master of the Middleton Hounds and not the British Government stated:

> "There were no doubt other questions arising out of the Versailles settlement which were capable of causing trouble if they were unwisely handled: - Danzig, Austria, Czechoslovakia. On these matters we were not necessarily concerned to stand for the *status quo* as of today, but we were very much concerned to secure the avoidance of such treatment of them as would be likely to cause trouble. If reasonable settlements could be reached with the free assent of those primarily concerned, we certainly had no desire to block them."[191]

This was not what Eden had in mind when he instructed Halifax to confine himself to warning comments about Austria and Czechoslovakia. He had completely failed to give any warning against aggression, instead discussing possible changes which could be achieved peacefully.[192] In fact, the German memorandum provided by Neurath does not go nearly as far to suggest possible alterations as admitted to by Halifax in his personal diary.[193] Hitler's reply mentioned nothing about Danzig, and regarding Austria "observed that they had their agreements, which were being respected." As well, he hoped that "reasonable elements in Czechoslovakia would make it possible for the Sudeten Deutschen to enjoy a status which

[186] Lord Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, 186
[187] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 369
[188] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.31, p.55
[189] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.31, p.56
[190] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.31, p.62
[191] Lord Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, 188.[Author's emphasis]
[192] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.31, p.64
[193] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.31, p.54-66

would safeguard their position."[194] The meeting concluded as Hitler stated that anyone who had fought in the Great War, as he had, wanted no war.[195] When the Foreign Secretary reviewed the record of Halifax's conversation, he was not pleased, wishing that the Lord President had warned Hitler more strongly against intervention in Central Europe. Peaceful alterations, Eden stated, likely meant one thing to Halifax and something quite different to the Führer.[196] While Halifax carried back to Britain the belief that Germany was concerned with the colonial issue, only General von Blomberg was honest with him, describing it as secondary to European matters.[197] However, von Blomberg's statement was ignored, likely unintentionally, in favour of the chorus of German officials who stressed the colonial issue.

Despite the fact that Eden was clearly unhappy with the contents of the Halifax-Hitler conversation, and had hoped for clearer warnings against adventurous actions in Central Europe, the Prime Minister was delighted with the results. A few days after the Lord President's return, Chamberlain wrote on 26 November 1937 that the German visit was a great success because it achieved its objective, that of creating an atmosphere in which it is possible to discuss with Germany the practical questions in a European settlement.[198] Chamberlain saw Halifax's report and made up his mind, if it was still undecided, in favour of appeasement which would aid the legitimate and ordered fulfilment of Hitler's aims.[199] Chamberlain, Eden and Halifax each saw what they wanted to see in respect to the Lord President's meeting with the Führer.[200] Henderson reported to London that Hitler was impressed with the obvious sincerity, honesty and straight-forwardness of Halifax.[201] In the end, the Lord President's statement to Hitler was extended even further by Chamberlain who privately wrote on 26 November 1937:

> "But I don't see why we shouldn't say to Germany, 'give us satisfactory assurances that you won't use force to deal with the Austrians and Czechoslovakians, and we will give you similar assurances that we won't use force to prevent the changes you want, if you can get them by peaceful means.'"[202]

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[194] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.31, p.64
[195] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.31, p.67
[196] Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, 515
[197] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 373
[198] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 276
[199] Smith, *Neville Chamberlain*, 276
[200] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 99
[201] Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, 96
[202] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 333

As early as 26 November 1937, Chamberlain subscribed to the policy to which he clung tenaciously to throughout the following ten months.

9.1. The Hossbach Conference

Less than two weeks before Halifax's meeting with the Führer at Berchtesgaden, Adolf Hitler conducted one of the most important meetings in the history of the Third Reich. On 5 November 1937, from 4:15 to 8:30 p.m., at the Reich Chancellery, Hitler addressed Field Marshal von Blomberg, War Minister, Colonel General Baron von Fritsch, Commander-in-Chief, Army, Admiral Dr. Raeder, Commander-in-Chief, Navy, Colonel General Hermann Göring, Commander-in-Chief, Luftwaffe, Baron von Neurath, Foreign Minister and Colonel Hossbach, Hitler's adjutant.[203] Colonel Hossbach was responsible for keeping the minutes of the meeting and as a result history has remembered the summit as the Hossbach Conference. Hitler began by stating that the aim of German policy was to secure and to preserve the racial community (*Volksmasse*) and to enlarge it.[204] In essence, the purpose of the summit was to allow Hitler to explain that Germany would soon be heading to war, first by attacking Czechoslovakia, and then Austria, in order to expand their territory at the first opportunity.

Hitler resolved that if he was still alive, it was his unalterable decision to solve Germany's problem of space at the latest by 1943-1945. Yet he acknowledged that external circumstances might force his hand earlier.[205] Hitler envisioned two possibilities which would offer a favorable opportunity prior to 1943. The first, an internal domestic crisis in France and the second, a war in which France and possibly Britain were involved with a third power, presumably Italy.[206] The Führer believed the second case, a Franco-Italian war might emerge quickly, and was resolved to take advantage whenever it happened, even as early as 1938.[207] Then Hitler announced his belief that certainly Britain and probably France had already tacitly written off the Czechs and were reconciled to the fact that this question

[203] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 29
[204] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 29
[205] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 34-35
[206] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 36
[207] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 36

would be cleared up in due course by Germany.[208] That was the vital piece of information which Hitler continued to believe throughout 1938 leading up to the Sudeten Crisis. It was what no member of the German opposition or General Staff could believe. As Hitler listed the reasons for why Britain had made such a decision, he echoed many of the points made by Chamberlain. Difficulties connected with the Empire, a factor mentioned throughout 1938, and the prospect of being entangled in a protracted European war, were decisive factors for likely British non-participation in a war against Germany.[209] Hitler also correctly assumed that the British attitude would have an influence on France.[210]

As Hitler finished speaking on 5 November 1937, he encountered a surprisingly hostile reception to his plans. Field Marshall von Blomberg and Colonel General von Fritsch repeatedly emphasized the necessity of not making Britain and France enemies.[211] Even in the event of a Franco-Italian war, the French would have superiority on the western frontier capable of invading the Rhineland, due to the insignificant German defences.[212] War Minister von Blomberg attempted to draw Hitler's attention to the strength of the Czech fortifications, which were now similar to the French Maginot Line and would greatly hamper a German attack.[213] In response to these criticisms, Hitler repeated his previous statements that he was convinced of Britain's non-participation, and therefore he did not believe in the probability of belligerent action by France against Germany.[214] On 7 November, Neurath and von Fritsch discussed the Hossbach conference with General Beck.[215] Beck acknowledged on 12 November 1937, that Germany had a problem of living space and that something had to be done to solve the Czech problem, but he stated that "this must not be done through war but through negotiation."[216] According to Beck, an isolated conflict with Czechoslovakia without the intervention of Britain and France was impossible. At the same time, it was agreed that von Fritsch would impress upon Hitler the impossibility

[208] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 35
[209] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 35
[210] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 35
[211] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 38
[212] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 38
[213] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 38
[214] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no. 19, p. 38
[215] O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party*, 135
[216] Peter Hoffmann, "Beck, Rommel and the Nazis: The Dilemma of the German Army" *Limits of Loyalty* (Waterloo, 1979), 114

of his military plans at their next encounter.[217] When Hitler met with Halifax on 19 November, the interview was a further confirmation of the dictator's conviction that he had expressed on 5 November.[218] Hitler, now more than ever, firmly believed that Britain would not oppose with force Germany's planned expansion in Central Europe, and without the assurance of British support, France would not fight.[219]

9.2. The Fritsch-Blomberg Affair

For Hitler, the Hossbach Conference was not a success; his military commanders, particularly von Blomberg and von Fritsch, and Foreign Minister Neurath had expressed doubts about the possibility of his plans. Von Blomberg was forced to resign as a result of his marriage on 10 January 1938, a wedding at which Hitler was a witness, to a woman who had formerly been a prostitute.[220] The War Ministry was in effect turned into the OKW (Armed Forces High Command), commanded directly by Hitler through General Wilhelm Keitel.[221]

In mid-January 1938, Goerdeler had a long talk with Generals Beck and von Fritsch, and learned of the Hossbach Conference. Goerdeler then warned von Fritsch that the next stroke of the Gestapo would be against the Army.[222] It was through Goerdeler during a trip to London in March 1938 that the British were given information concerning what had occurred at the Hossbach Conference. The British largely misunderstood what Goerdeler was trying to tell them.[223] Two weeks after his warning to Beck and von Fritsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army was under investigation for purported homosexual conduct. The trumped-up evidence against von Fritsch had been presented to Hitler before in August 1936 by the head of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) Heinrich Himmler, but the dictator refused to consider it and even ordered its destruction; at the time von Fritsch was too valuable.[224] By January 1938, he had become an obstacle to Hitler's plans, and von Fritsch was confronted by an alleged witness, a professional criminal by the name of Otto Schmidt,

[217] O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party*, 135
[218] John Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich: Prologue to Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 21
[219] Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich*, 21
[220] Hoffmann, *History of the German Resistance*, 39
[221] O'Neil, *The German Army and the Nazi Party*, 142
[222] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 82
[223] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 173
[224] Reynolds, *Treason Was No Crime*, 125

in front of Hitler at the Reich Chancellery.[225] Colonel Hans Oster, working from inside the *Abwehr*, had served under von Fritsch in the 1920s,[226] and correctly understood, unlike most, that Hitler was trying to gain control of the Army by replacing the Commander-in-Chief. Oster proposed a meeting of the Generals *(Generalität)* where von Fritsch could explain his innocence.[227] Thereby, if Hitler refused to reinstate von Fritsch, Oster hoped that the Generals would call out the Army and resist with force.[228] Unfortunately, von Fritsch was unwilling to wage the kind of political war which was being conducted against him. Within a week, he was replaced by General Walther von Brauchitsch, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Von Brauchitsch received financial assistance from Hitler to facilitate his divorce, and remarriage to Frau Charlotte Schmidt, an ardent Nazi.[229]

Neurath claimed years later that he had asked Hitler on 14 January 1938, to be relieved from his post, at which point the dictator mentioned that he would never make Joachim von Ribbentrop Foreign Minister.[230] On 2 February 1938, Neurath celebrated his sixty-fifth birthday, and fortieth anniversary of his career in the public service. Forty-eight hours later he was removed from his post, replaced by Ribbentrop who willingly encouraged Hitler.[231] Simultaneously, Dr. Schacht was replaced as were a number of ambassadors in important posts, including Ulrich von Hassell in Rome.[232] On 4 February, the German Cabinet held its last meeting, according to Dr. Schacht, and its sole feature was to inform the ministers that von Fritsch had been discharged. There was no debate.[233] Three months after Hitler's strategy had been poorly received at the Hossbach Conference, he had succeeded in replacing those critical of his plans with men who would obey him unquestioningly.[234]

The replacement of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and War Minister could not be hidden from the world, yet it was generally misinterpreted by British officials.

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[225] Hoffmann, *History of the German Resistance*, 38-39
[226] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 26
[227] Ibid., 27
[228] Ibid., 27
[229] Hoffmann, *History of the German Resistance*, 44
[230] Paul Seabury, *The Wihelmstrasse: A Study of German Diplomats Under the Nazi Regime* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), 42
[231] Ibid., 42
[232] Reynolds, *Treason was no Crime*, 137
[233] Hjalmar Schacht, *My First 76 Years*. Translated by Diana Pyke (London: Allan Wingate, 1955), 391
[234] Reynolds, *Treason was no Crime*, 137

Ambassador Henderson described the von Blomberg incident as something which Hitler desired to forget, and provided some insight by stating that the dictator needed a striking external success.[235] Oliver Harvey incorrectly saw the expulsion of von Blomberg and other Generals as an uneasy compromise between the party leaders and the Army.[236] Sir Alexander Cadogan, newly named Permanent Under-Secretary of State, accurately viewed the Fritsch-Blomberg crisis as a victory for the Nazi Party.[237]

Following the dismissal of Generals von Fritsch and von Blomberg, there began to develop for the first time an organized resistance within Germany. With respect to the intrigue surrounding von Fritsch's alleged homosexuality, there was an attempt to set in motion some counteraction, but those involved were not prepared to act with the necessary energy. According to Professor Hoffmann, such discussions hardly merit the use of the term 'plans for a coup.'[238] On the morning of 31 January, General Beck and his subordinate General Franz Halder had a heated encounter. Halder stated that the Commander-in-Chief had been deposed, which now made Beck the de facto leader of the Army and that the time had come to march on the Gestapo Headquarters.[239] In response, Beck famously replied that what Halder was seeking was revolution and mutiny, and "these words were not in the vocabulary of a German officer."[240] Dr. Schacht, who had been recently relieved of his duties as President of the *Reichsbank* by Hitler, met with several senior commanders following von Fritsch's removal in a vain attempt to incite them to action.[241]

The crisis clearly illustrated a symptomatic problem which plagued the German military resistance.[242] Practical plans were in fact out of the question. If there was a benefit to the Fritsch-Blomberg crisis, it was the enlargement of the resistance within military circles. In particular, Colonel Hans Oster became a trusted adviser to the non-Nazi Generals.[243] He was primarily responsible for enlisting General Beck into the Resistance.[244]

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[235] Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, 110
[236] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 84
[237] Alexander Cadogan, *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945*, David Dilks ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 44
[238] Hoffmann, *History of the German Resistance*, 44
[239] Reynolds, *Treason was no Crime*, 135
[240] Ibid., 135
[241] Schacht, *My First 76 Years*, 388
[242] Hoffmann, *History of the German Resistance*, 45
[243] Allen Dulles, *Germany's Underground*.(New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 76

Oster hoped to organize a unified army action on the part of the generals led by Beck to oppose Hitler's aggressive foreign policy. Throughout the rest of 1938, and certainly up until 1 October, the resistance's efforts were amplified in direct relation to Hitler's increasingly provocative war policy.

10. Changes at Whitehall

1937 ended with Chamberlain and Eden in, according to Oliver Harvey, absolute agreement about Germany.[245] By December, it had been agreed that Vansittart would be replaced as Permanent Under-Secretary of State, by someone Eden hoped would be able to make more of an impact on Whitehall.[246] Vansittart, according to Lord Jebb Gladwyn, clearly understood the intentions of Hitler, but often denounced the dictator in such unmeasured, if elliptical terms, that he failed to get his message across.[247] By 18 December 1937, it was agreed that Vansittart would be 'promoted' to the post of Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the Government, and retain his senior status to the new Permanent Under-Secretary Alexander Cadogan, but without any executive functions or powers.[248] Vansittart's new post had never existed before and has not since. As one of the principal anti-appeasers, his transfer decreased his participation in, and influence on, foreign policy.[249] He could only review documents after the fact, when decisions had already been made, and his ability to instruct and interview ambassadors was removed from his power.[250] The German ambassador, Joachim von Ribbentrop, saw Vansittart's appointment as a promotion, while the German *Chargé d'Affaires* Ernst Woermann more accurately described the situation. According to him, Vansittart's one-sided French orientation of British Foreign Policy did not fit into Chamberlain's overall policy.[251] Vansittart's replacement, Alexander Cadogan, was certainly a good man; to some, he was the very antithesis of his predecessor: careful, cautious but nevertheless a man of intelligence.[252]

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[244] Klemperer, *The Search for Allies Abroad*, 24
[245] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 63
[246] Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, 521
[247] Lord Jebb Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), 59
[248] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 64
[249] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 114
[250] Rose, *Vansittart Study of a Diplomat*, 209
[251] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.101, p.177
[252] Lord Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn*, 70

Vansittart's replacement had been a joint decision by Chamberlain and Eden. When the Foreign Secretary left for holiday, he believed that he was in close agreement with the Prime Minister over foreign affairs.[253] Yet, a disagreement occurred when a telegram arrived in London from the President of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt describing a plan for a peace conference. Chamberlain rejected the offer, after meeting with Chief Industrial Advisor Sir Horace Wilson and Cadogan, but without consulting the Foreign Secretary who was away on vacation.[254] As early as February 1938, Wilson was recognized by the German Embassy in London as having a predominant influence on Chamberlain, as his closest adviser who was also decidedly pro-German.[255] According to Eden, "Cadogan intended to forward the drafted response to me but the Prime Minister refused and sent his reply without consulting me or any other member of the Cabinet."[256]As a result of the fiasco over the President's proposal, for the first time the relationship between Eden and Chamberlain was seriously strained. It was certainly not repaired when Wilson was sent to speak to Eden, appealing for a more understanding attitude with the dictators. Eden's response, "if I had to deal with an industrial problem, I knew where to look for advice", was indicative of the growing rift between Foreign Office experts whom the Prime Minister largely ignored and amateurs like Wilson.[257]

However much Eden might have resented the actions surrounding the rejection of the American President's offer, he could not publically resign over a secret overture.[258] Chamberlain was anxious to begin negotiations with Italy and had actually been passing messages back and forth with Signor Mussolini through Lady Chamberlain, the Prime Minister's brother's widow.[259] Eden complained to Chamberlain on 8 February about how such unofficial diplomacy made it impossible for the Foreign Secretary to properly do his job. Privately, Eden spoke of the constant obstruction and even double-crossing that he was forced to endure.[260] The Italians were presently interested in opening talks, which

[253] Avon, *Facing the Dictator*, 547
[254] Ibid., 547
[255] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.128, p. 224-225
[256] Avon, *Facing the Dictator*, 547
[257] Ibid., 556
[258] Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), 265
[259] *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (*DBFP*), Second Series, Volume 19, Appendix I, p.1140-41
[260] Harvey, *Diplomatic Diaries*, 86

Chamberlain was eager to pursue, to the point of open disagreement with Eden.[261] The Foreign Secretary pushed for a commitment to withdraw Italian volunteers from the Spanish Civil War before opening discussions, while the Prime Minister simply hoped to begin formal dialogue. When Eden and Chamberlain met with the Italian ambassador Count Grandi on 18 February, the two British officials hardly presented a united front, openly disagreeing in front of their guest. After lunch while the meeting was still adjourned, Chamberlain told Grandi clearly that he intended to override Eden's objections and, subject to Cabinet approval immediately begin conversations in Rome.[262] The next day, Eden resigned as Foreign Secretary, stating that "I could not agree to a policy which I was absolutely convinced was wrong and would lead nowhere."[263]

In the end, Eden had little choice. Chamberlain was resolved to negotiate with the dictators, if necessary behind the Foreign Secretary's back.[264] Eden's departure affected people in a variety of ways. Harvey may have been overstating the case when he wrote that the immediate effect of Eden's resignation had been rejoicing of every dictator, and dismay in every democracy.[265] The German *Chargé d'Affaires* Ernst Woermann correctly understood, and wrote to Berlin, that a profound difference of opinion between Chamberlain and Eden existed in relation to Germany.[266] Eden's replacement as Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, had actually been offered the position before, in 1931 by Ramsay MacDonald, and had been suggested by Eden prior to his acceptance of the portfolio in 1935.[267] Halifax was certainly a more acceptable colleague than Eden for Chamberlain. However, the new Foreign Secretary was not as pliant and docile as later literature has suggested.[268] Yet it should be noted that as a Peer, Halifax could not speak in the House of Commons, which meant that the defence of Foreign Policy would fall to the Prime Minister.[269] By the middle of February 1938, the diplomatic board of Britain and Germany had taken shape. Vansittart and Eden, anti-appeasers, had been replaced by Cadogan and Halifax. On 4 February,

[261] Cadogan, *Diaries of Alexander Cadogan*, 40
[262] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 378
[263] Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, 594
[264] Lord Jebb Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn*, 72
[265] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 103
[266] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.120, p. 208
[267] Gilbert and Gott, *Appeasers*, 71
[268] Douglas, *In the Year of Munich*, 15
[269] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.120, p. 209

Ribbentrop became the new German Foreign Secretary. By the 17th, Theodor Kordt was transferred from Athens to London as the new German *Chargé d'Affaires* and a few weeks later Ernst Freiherr von Weizsäcker became the new German State Secretary.[270]

11. Who Will Fight For Austria?

Since Chamberlain had become Prime Minister, he regarded the possibility of returning some of Germany's former colonies as an integral part of any general settlement. The return of some colonial possessions were held out, again and again, as a kind of cure all solution to the problems which affected British-German relations. Hitler had stated on 20 January 1937 in the Reichstag that Germany's demand for colonies would be put forward again and again.[271] As late as 2 March 1938, the British Cabinet continued to believe that the most difficult question affecting Anglo-German relations was that of colonies.[272] When Henderson finally met with Hitler the next day, the ambassador presented the British offer of limited colonial returns,[273] but the Führer claimed he could wait ten years and did not want third parties interfering with German policy.[274] With respect to Austria and Czechoslovakia, Hitler warned that if internal explosions occurred in these countries, Germany would not remain neutral, but would act with lightning speed.[275] At the same time, he mentioned that as a politician he had been forced to talk a good deal, and therefore some might believe that his words need not be taken too seriously. He then stated that those who believed his public statements considering Central Europe were rhetoric would be, "very cruelly disappointed."[276] Hitler promised to respond to Henderson's colonial offer but the ambassador left Germany at the start of the war and had yet to receive an answer.[277] Despite this rebuff, the British were still trying to figure out a colonial return as a part of a general settlement with Germany on 10 March 1938.[278] The German occupation of Austria forty-eight hours later temporarily ended those plans. However, according to Harvey, the issue of

[270] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 114
[271] Gilbert and Gott, *Appeasers*, 99
[272] Douglas, *In the Year of Munich*, 17
[273] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.138, p. 242
[274] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.138, p. 247
[275] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.138, p. 247
[276] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.138, p. 247
[277] Henderson, *Failure of A Mission*, 117
[278] Gilbert and Gott, *Appeasers*, 107

a limited return of colonies as part of a general settlement remained active until the anti-Jewish pogrom of November forced it aside.[279]

Following his second meeting with Hitler in May 1937, Lord Lothian who was a staunch appeaser at the time wrote that he believed Germany was dissatisfied and sought adjustments in Eastern Europe including union with Austria.[280] It should be noted that France, Britain, and Italy, among others, were committed on paper to upholding the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which specifically prohibited the union of Austria and Germany. On the morning of 10 March 1938, Chief of the German General Staff Beck and his Chief of Operations Erich von Manstein were summoned to the Chancellery by Hitler who asked what they would recommend for the military occupation of Austria.[281] Beck had previously been ordered to draw up plans which he refused to do. He told Hitler that few troops were available and no preparations had been made.[282] It was not until he threatened to use the *Sturmabteilung* and *Schutzstaffel* instead of the Army that Beck agreed to make the necessary preparations which were largely improvised.[283] Generals Beck and von Brauchitsch had warned Hitler of the high likelihood of Western intervention if Hitler marched troops into Austria. However, his guess had once again proven correct and he reinforced his status at the expense of the Army leadership.[284]

From nearly every historical account left by members of the British Foreign Office and Government, the verdict on the Anschluss is the same, albeit varying in tone. According to ambassador Henderson writing from Berlin, the British Government was not in a position to have saved Austria, and the only thing that could have, was a war in which, he believed, the majority of Austrian youth would have fought on Germany's side.[285] At least he correctly stated that "it was clearly not colonies which interested Hitler."[286]Alexander Cadogan writing prior to German action stated that "personally I wish Germany would

[279] Harvey, *Diplomatic Diaries*, 220
[280] Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 218
[281] O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party*, 151
[282] Ibid., 151
[283] Reynolds, *Treason Was no Crime*, 143
[284] O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party*, 152
[285] Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, 124-126
[286] Ibid., 115

swallow Austria and get it over with."[287] After the Anschluss, he wrote that it was no good shouting about Austria since we cannot stop it, it was not our business and we have no feelings for them.[288] Harvey's analysis was strikingly similar: no one would fight for Austria. However, he also expected on 15 March, that this rebuff of the government's policy would force a reversal of the current trends.[289] Writing from London on 10 March, the German Foreign Minister stated that the present British Government undoubtedly wanted no war. Ribbentrop was convinced, correctly, that England of her own accord would do nothing in regard to the settlement of the Austrian question. [290]

Chamberlain stated that the Austrian-German situation was a matter of internal affairs, and that there was nothing which could have been done unless Britain had been prepared to use force.[291] The Prime Minister clearly was not, and on 15 March during a rare meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee, Chamberlain stated that the Anschluss had confirmed that his policy was correct.[292] The display of German force and aggression had only suggested to Chamberlain and Halifax that the British Government should have made a greater effort to agree to terms with the dictators.[293] Woermann correctly reported to Berlin that the action against Austria had not resulted in any threats or demands for a reversal of the new situation and while use of German force was sharply condemned, the general impression was one of resignation.[294] It is not remarkable that Chamberlain was unwilling to fight a war over the union of Germany and Austria. Any military action would have been difficult, with Italy currently at odds and France without a government on the day of the Anschluss.[295] The Stresa Front was a mere illusion. Lloyd George had predicted in 1936 that Britain would never march in an Austrian quarrel, and no British Government had for years denied that in some form a closer union between Germany and Austria was inevitable.[296] By 22 April, the German Embassy in London was informed that the events in Austria had not

[287] Cadogan, *The Diaries of Alexander Cadogan*, 47
[288] Ibid., 48, 70
[289] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 117
[290] DGFP, Series D, Volume 1, no.146, p.263
[291] Chamberlain, *In Search of Peace*, 71, 76
[292] Taylor, *Munich: The Prince of Peace*, 579
[293] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 132
[294] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.359, p.580-581
[295] Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich*, 24
[296] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 341

altered Chamberlain and Halifax's hope for a real understanding with Germany.[297] The Anschluss provided a perfect moment for Chamberlain to reflect on the success, or lack thereof, of his appeasement policy, and instead of altering it, the Prime Minister decided to redouble his efforts.[298]

12. Dr. Carl Goerdeler, 1938

For Carl Goerdeler, 1938 was supposed to begin with a planned meeting with British engineer A.P. Young, whom he had met while in London the previous year. Goerdeler was set to meet with Young while he was in Berlin on a business trip but the German resister never showed up at the hotel.[299] It was not until a few months later while Goerdeler was in London, that he explained to Young why he had missed the intended meeting. There had been significant turmoil following Hitler's dismissal of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army von Fritsch, and it would have been far too dangerous to meet in public.[300] Goerdeler was certainly highly committed to his task, perhaps always overly optimistic and at times not as discreet as someone engaged in a life and death struggle with a tyrannical regime should be.

A great deal of effort went into organizing a sufficiently impressive cover story for Goerdeler's return trip to London at the end of April 1938. A friend of Young, Frederic Leggett, agreed to arrange with the Institute of Public Administration a formal invitation for Goerdeler to deliver a lecture.[301] He arrived in London with his wife and one of his daughters, and met with Young prior to his lecture. During their conversation, Goerdeler, who was holding a newspaper article with a speech by Chamberlain, fervently denounced the Prime Minister's rhetoric. According to Goerdeler, Hitler was bluffing, and he said that the dictator would interpret this message as weakness.[302] It must, the resister concluded, be made crystal clear that Britain was prepared to oppose force with force if necessary to hold the peace.[303] Unfortunately, however well intentioned Goerdeler's warnings and suggestions

[297] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.750, p.1092
[298] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 180
[299] Young, *Across the Years*, 21
[300] Ibid., 21
[301] Ibid., 23
[302] Ibid., 23
[303] Ibid., 23

were, it should be noted that Hitler was not bluffing, he fully intended to settle the Sudeten question through the use of force as long as it appeared clear to him that the British and French would not intervene. On 20 April 1938, Hitler had ordered General Keitel to head up General Staff preparations for the occupation of Czechoslovakia.[304] Goerdeler was accurate when he predicted that a dictator like Hitler must always be "bringing along for breakfast a new kill if he is to thrive and survive. This time it was Austria, next time it will be Czechoslovakia and so on."[305]

While Goerdeler was in London in late April 1938, he met with Vansittart twice, as he had the previous year. At the first meeting, Goerdeler suggested that Czechoslovakia should cede to Germany the territories with a Sudeten German majority, roughly defined as the Sudetenland. That statement resulted in a rift between the two men, as Vansittart had difficulty in seeing the difference between the territorial demands of Hitler and those of the opposition.[306] Sir Robert replied that Britain would, at most, concede local autonomy to the Sudeten Germans.[307] The demand of cession was not even advocated by the Sudeten Germans leaders at the time.[308] At their next meeting, when Goerdeler began to speak honestly of the hostility of the senior Generals to Hitler, Vansittart was in no mood to listen, attached little importance to the resister's statements and instead labeled it 'treasonable talk'.[309]

Despite the obvious disagreement between Vansittart and Goerdeler, preparations were made to send someone to visit the resister and collect information should he deem it necessary.[310] In July 1938, Young received a call from Robert Stopford and the two arranged a dinner at the United University Club. Stopford explained that he was supposed to visit Goerdeler, according to the preparations which had been made in April.[311] However, Stopford had been assigned as an adviser to accompany Lord Runciman on his trip to Czechoslovakia. After discussing the matter with Vansittart, it was decided that Young

[304] Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 63
[305] Aster ed., *'X' Documents*, 43
[306] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 205
[307] Ibid., 206
[308] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 95
[309] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 206
[310] Young, *Across the Years*, 24
[311] Ibid., 24

should be asked to go and meet Goerdeler instead.[312] Young agreed, and the result of that preliminary trip was the 'X' Document Number 1, the first in a six-part series.

Carl Goerdeler warned Young on 6 and 7 August 1938 that Hitler was determined to wage war and all attempts at a peaceful settlement would fail.[313] According to Goerdeler, a strong statement from the British government would have a restraining effect on Hitler and would strengthen the position of the German Generals, who were already opposed to his plans.[314] Goerdeler urged Young to report that an open pronouncement broadcasted over radio would have two benefits. Firstly, it would give impetus to the wave of feeling among the German population against war and secondly, it would strengthen the position of the Generals whose view was now opposed to Hitler.[315] As well, Goerdeler attempted to impress upon Young the ongoing persecution of the Jews, and stated that the British should be more forceful in expressing their disgust.[316] Upon returning to London, Young completed his report, known as The 'X' Document Number 1. This was done to protect Goerdeler's identity, since he was referred as 'X' throughout. In a summary of the report, Young repeated Goerdeler's statements "that Hitler is now determined on war,[…] he now feels he is a god, […] is mad [insane], and the forces against Hitler are the Generals, Industrialists and ultimately the people."[317]

Once back in London, Young immediately conferred with Vansittart and delivered a copy of 'X' Document Number 1. The Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the Government read the report in front of Young and stated, "you confirm other information we already have."[318] Vansittart promised to give the report to Chamberlain and Halifax as soon as they returned to London at the end of the week.[319] Young asked if it was acceptable to deliver the report to other official personages, such as Eden. Sir Robert replied, "you are one of the few people who know the truth, and you are a British subject: it is your stuff so you can do what you

[312] Young, *Across the Years*, 24
[313] Aster ed., *'X' Documents*, 50
[314] Ibid., 50-55
[315] Ibid., 50
[316] Ibid., 59
[317] Ibid., 55
[318] Young, *Across the Years*, 30
[319] Ibid., 30

like with it."[320] Following his meeting, Young attempted unsuccessfully to telephone Eden, who was in Northern Ireland on holiday, but he was able to send him a copy of the report.[321] Eden was sent all future reports 'X' Documents and according to Young appeared very interested but did not translate that interest into any action. Nowhere in the former Foreign Secretary's memoirs is there any mention of Goerdeler's information.[322] As well, there is no mention of this exchange, or of any other 'X' Documents, among Vansittart's papers. Within official circles in London, Goerdeler's document was overtaken by the news, and debate surrounding another member of the resistance's visit in mid-August.

Despite the complete lack of success following the first 'X' document to effect any change in British policy, Goerdeler and Young met again on 11 September 1938 in Zurich.[323] From Young's perspective, that was the most important of all the meetings for it took place at the most critical moment of all. The meeting resulted in the second 'X' Document, which restated much of what already had been said, but with an added sense of urgency; as in Goerdeler's words, "the sands are fast running out."[324] Goerdeler stated that Hitler was still determined on aggression because he believed that Britain and France would not fight.[325] What was gravely important according to Goerdeler was that the British should make a firm pronouncement, the result of which could either be that Hitler would abandon his present plan, or otherwise if he was still determined on war, then the Generals would stop him, presumably through a coup.[326] Upon returning to London, Young presented the report to Vansittart and then took a taxi to Anthony Eden's house on Fitzhardinge Street. At the end of his meeting with Eden, Young felt that while the former Foreign Secretary was charming, certainly gifted, and an able diplomat, he lacked the moral courage to effect change at this vital moment.[327]

By mid-September 1938, it had become clear to Young that if any change in British policy was to be achieved, he would have to contact someone with direct access and

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[320] Young, *Across the Years*, 30
[321] Ibid., 31
[322] Ibid., 31
[323] Aster ed., *'X' Documents*, 75
[324] Ibid., 75
[325] Ibid., 75
[326] Ibid., 82
[327] Ibid., 38

influence on Chamberlain. Eden, having resigned from Cabinet seven months earlier, and Vansittart, largely discredited and rarely listened to, were too remote from the actual centre of British policy making to effect any change in this critical period. Therefore, Young decided on 14 September to write to Sir Horace Wilson. For Young, writing to Wilson was tantamount to writing to the Prime Minister himself.[328] Wilson received the letter on the day before Chamberlain left for Berchtesgaden, but it could be said that the Prime Minister's mind and policy course had been firmly decided. Young's letter was formally acknowledged at once. In fact, the reply was curiously typed on the Prime Minister's personal writing paper, signed by Wilson's secretary. It briefly thanked Young and said nothing more; he never heard from Wilson again on the matter.[329] It can be proven that the first two 'X' Documents arrived at 10 Downing Street. However, it is unclear if they were ever read.[330] At the same time, there is no evidence that either of the first two 'X' Documents, prepared before the conclusion of the Sudeten crisis at the Munich Conference, had any effect on official British policy. Goerdeler's warnings were not heeded or openly discussed in Cabinet at any point.

During the September crisis, Goerdeler wrote Young four additional letters from Zurich, where he was staying. For security's sake, he signed them all U.L. Rich, derived from his wife's maiden name of Ulrich.[331] By 21 September, the day before the Bad Godesberg meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain, Goerdeler wrote that concessions alone would never satisfy dictators; on the contrary, they made them more hungry.[332] He ended the letter with a warning: "you will see this in the next time."[333] His prediction was accurate as after Chamberlain had satisfied all of Hitler's demands from the week before, the Führer soon declared them useless and deemed them insufficient. Goerdeler's final verdict of the Prime Minister's appeasement policy after Munich was that "while Mr. Chamberlain shrank from a minor danger he made war inevitable. The peoples of Britain and France will have to defend their freedom in arms or be enslaved and in the future they will have to fight

[328] Young, *Across the Years*, 39
[329] Ibid., 39
[330] Aster ed., *'X' Documents*, 102
[331] Young, *Across the Years*, 40
[332] Ibid., 40
[333] Ibid., 40

under very much more difficult conditions."[334] Unfortunately for Goerdeler and the rest of the German resistance, while they saw little risk in threatening war, the British saw an unacceptable danger in such a policy. Chamberlain, unlike Goerdeler, had correctly understood that Hitler when threatening war over the Sudetenland was not bluffing. The British felt unprepared and unable to enter into a general European war over Czechoslovakia. Hitler was right to believe in the relative helplessness of the Western democracies and their resistance to military conflict at this moment.[335] The British and French did eventually threaten military intervention in the final days of September 1938. However, according to the evidence available and collected for this thesis such a decision was not the result of any information received from the resistance.

By the time Young's fourth 'X' document was being prepared in early November, the first three had been checked by the Secret Intelligent Service and found to be reliable, which led the Foreign Office to take Goerdeler more seriously.[336] It should be noted that in the years prior to the start of the Second World War, several different bodies within the structure of the British Government shared the responsibility for intelligence gathering. Without a single organization, or supervision, the Foreign Office had no regular arrangements for comparing and collating its own conclusions with other Ministries.[337] This must be viewed as a grave error, in particular the lack of communication with the Service Ministries which could have benefited from the intelligence the Foreign Office was able to gather from German sources.[338]

Following Young's return to Britain with the fourth 'X' Document, he was approached by Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, the Economic Counselor in the Foreign Office. Young was happy to be contacted since it proved to the engineer that at least one person in the Foreign Office was taking the initiative.[339] Ashton-Gwatkin asked Young to meet with Goerdeler and obtain conditions which Germany would desire for close collaboration with

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[334] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 114
[335] Ibid., 93
[336] Aster ed., *'X' Documents*, 142
[337] Francis Harry Hinsley ed., *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3
[338] Ibid., 5
[339] Young, *Across the Years*, 44

Britain in a post-Hitler state.[340] On 4 December, Goerdeler and Young met again, this time in a Zurich hotel, where Goerdeler wrote a draft of conditions in response to Ashton-Gwatkin's question.[341] On 6 December, Young handed the document to Ashton-Gwatkin. The draft proposal suggested the elimination of the Polish Corridor, colonial possessions for Germany, and an interest-free loan. From Goerdeler's point of view, these were modest proposals, designed to address major grievances arising from the Treaty of Versailles, and could form the foundations of a lasting peace.[342] However, the British response was completely negative. On 10 December, Alexander Cadogan was shown Goerdeler's proposal which the British Permanent Under-Secretary described as "too much like Mein Kampf."[343] Vansittart's conclusion was equally negative, stating that "I really don't think we can have anything to do with this [Goerdeler's proposal]."[344] On 11 December 1938, Cadogan visited the Prime Minister to discuss Goerdeler's memorandum. Chamberlain would have none of it, and Cadogan commented that he thought it was the right decision: "these people must do their own jobs."[345]

Instead of being taken seriously, Goerdeler's information was termed 'alarmist' and 'overdrawn.' The fact that little was known about him inside the Foreign Office and that the motives for his visit appeared unclear proved to be the main stumbling blocks to a fair appreciation of his information.[346] Perhaps the belief of Lord Gladwyn was more accurate when he stated that he was impressed by the earnest and sincere Goerdeler, but that if the German General Staff were convinced of the criminal lunacy of Hitler, there was nothing to prevent them from overthrowing him.[347] The information which passed from Goerdeler to Young throughout the pre-war period could have drastically affected the course of British policy away from appeasement and towards firm pronouncements. While the British did in the final hours of the Sudeten crisis threaten intervention by mobilizing their Fleet, there is no evidence to suggest that such action was connected to any information received from Goerdeler or any other resistor.

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[340] Aster ed., *'X' Document*, 148
[341] Hoffmann, "Question of Western Allied Co-Operation", 439
[342] Hoffmann, "The Anti-Nazi Conspiracy", 440
[343] Cadogan, *The Diaries of Alexander Cadogan*, 128
[344] Ibid., 129
[345] Ibid., 129
[346] Aster ed., *'X' Documents*, 211
[347] Lord Jebb Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Jebb Gladwyn*, 87

13.1. The Development of a Czechoslovakian Policy, March-April 1938

On 14 March 1938 following the Anschluss, Winston Churchill, member of the Conservative Party who had not sat in Cabinet for over a decade, rose to deliver a speech in the House of Commons:

> "The gravity of the event of March 12 cannot be exaggerated. Europe is confronted with a programme of aggression, nicely calculated and timed. […]If we go on waiting upon events, how much shall we throw away of resources now available for our security and the maintenance of peace? […] To English ears the name of Czechoslovakia sounds outlandish. No doubt they are only a small democratic state, no doubt they have an army only two or three times as large as ours, no doubt they have a munitions supply only three times as great as that of Italy, but still they are a virile people, they have their rights, they have their treaty rights, they have a line of fortresses, and they have a strongly manifested will to live, a will to live freely."[348]

His words were prophetic, yet no one paid attention. Instead the government's policy with respect to the looming crisis over the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia was developed from 15 to 24 March 1938.[349] According to historian John Wheeler-Bennett, few countries have appeared on paper to be more completely and impregnably protected against aggression than Czechoslovakia in the spring of that year.[350] It had signed a treaty of mutual assistance with France in December 1925, which pledged that each would immediately come to support the other in the event of an unprovoked aggression on the part of Germany. Ten years later, the Soviet Union concluded a similar treaty in May 1935, which pledged the Soviets to come to the aid of Czechoslovakia if the pact with France ever went into operation.[351]

Since Hitler had come to power, the majority German population living in what was termed the Sudetenland began to press for greater rights and equal participation and looked towards Nazi Germany as their defender. Germans living in the Sudetenland had never been included within the German Reich, aside from a period during the Holy Roman Empire.[352] The existing frontier of Czechoslovakia had endured for over two hundred years and many of the Germans living in the Sudetenland had moved there from across the border.[353] The Czechoslovakian Austrian border was largely undefended in the spring of 1938, and the

[348] Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 272-273
[349] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 618
[350] Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich*, 27
[351] Ibid., 28 (Appendix A and B)
[352] Ibid., *Munich*, 30.
[353] Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, 109

German seizure of Austria had seriously weakened the strategic position of Czechoslovakia which had an impressive series of fortifications along her border with Germany.[354] Neurath, under orders from Ribbentrop, spoke with the Czechoslovak Government on 12 March to state that the Führer hoped that relations between the two countries would improve.[355]

The British Foreign Policy Committee and the Foreign Office were set to work following the Anschluss on determining a policy course with respect to the looming crisis over Czechoslovakia. Three possibilities were presented by Foreign Office officials: a Grand Alliance with the old partners of the Great War including the Soviet Union. Next, a new commitment to France for assistance should Germany attack her during the course of a German-Czechoslovak war.[356] Finally, the refusal to undertake any new military commitments, and instead to persuade Czechoslovakia to negotiate with the Sudeten Germans while still in a favorable position to do so.[357] On 16 March, Cadogan sat down with the three options his officials had presented him and started to work on his own memorandum. In the end, he decided against a guarantee to Czechoslovakia for several reasons including that Britain should not go to war to preserve Czech sovereignty over the Sudetenland, and that war was intrinsically useless, referring to the British experience in the Great War.[358] During a critical meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee on 18 March, Chamberlain and Halifax vehemently opposed a commitment to Czechoslovakia. The Prime Minister stressed that "no effective help could be swiftly brought to Czechoslovakia and therefore all we could do would be to make war on Germany, but we were in no position from the armament point of view."[359] The day before the meeting, Chamberlain wrote a long letter to his sister Ida, which provides insight into the Prime Minister's thinking at the time:

> "Therefore we could not help Czechoslovakia - she would simply be a pretext for going to war with Germany. That we could not think of unless we had a reasonable prospect of being able to beat her to her knees in a reasonable time, and of that I see no sign. I have therefore abandoned the idea of giving guarantees to Czechoslovakia, or the French in connection with her obligations to that country."[360]

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[354] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 381
[355] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.78, p. 162
[356] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 623
[357] Ibid., 624
[358] Ibid., 625
[359] Ibid., 627
[360] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 348

Virtually every decision between 17 March and the Munich Conference is explicable, and indeed inevitable, considering what Chamberlain wrote to his sister.

On 21 March, the Chiefs of Staff submitted their report on 'Military Implications of German Aggression against Czechoslovakia'. The critical decision, to make no commitment, had been made prior to the Chief's report, which served only to convince doubters and provide justification for the course already selected.[361] The report concluded that nothing could be done to protect Czechoslovakia from defeat and dismemberment, and added the prediction that in the event of war, "both Italy and Japan would seize the opportunity to further their own ends, and that in consequence the problem we have to envisage is not that of a limited European war only, but of a world war."[362] It should be noted that the Chiefs were asked specifically by the Prime Minister to consider their scenario which would include the neutrality of the United States and the Soviet Union, and that Italy and Japan would join in the war against Britain and France.[363] Such a scenario could not be completely discounted. Yet, it is highly questionable that Chamberlain had not asked the Chiefs how Britain and France would stand in relation to Germany once Czechoslovakia in its military capacity, had been eliminated.[364] It is true that the Czechoslovakian Army was well-trained and properly equipped, yet its military capacity was never a factor in British decision making. At the same time throughout 1938, the British had received conflicting reports of Czechoslovakian strength. Some historians have since attempted to argue that Czechoslovakia would have been a more formidable ally militarily in 1938 than Poland would be in the following year. Yet in the end, the issue was largely ignored.

On 22 March, Chamberlain's plan, without any guarantees, was submitted to the entire Cabinet. Despite some initial protests, the considerations were generally accepted, and the majority felt that most Britons would be opposed to any new commitments, as would the Dominions.[365] Duff Cooper suggested a more friendly gesture to France.[366] He did not favor a guarantee for Czechoslovakia, but believed that Britain could not stand aside in a war in

[361] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 138
[362] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 632
[363] Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy*, 88
[364] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 632
[365] Ibid., 634
[366] Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1954), 218

which France became involved with Germany, and therefore Chamberlain should clearly say so.[367] The next day, 24 March, the Prime Minister rose in the House of Commons and delivered one of the most effective speeches of his career.[368] He stated that while British 'vital interests' were not concerned in Czechoslovakia, this did not mean Britain would not intervene. He continued:

> "Where peace and war are concerned, legal obligations are not alone involved, and, if war broke out, it would be unlikely to be confined to those who have assumed such obligations[…] The inexorable pressure of facts might well prove more powerful than formal pronouncements, and in that event it would be well within the bounds of probability that other countries, besides those which were parties to the original dispute, would almost immediately become involved. This is especially true in the case of two countries like Great Britain and France, with long associations of friendship, with interests closely interwoven, devoted to the same ideals of democratic liberty, and determined to uphold them."[369]

That was as far a warning as Chamberlain was willing to give at the moment. Soon afterwards in April, when Goerdeler met with Young, the resister claimed that Hitler would interpret the message as weakness. In fact, the German *Chargé d'Affaires* Ernst Woermann indicated in his official report that the Prime Minister's statements continued to indicate "as highly probable that Britain would in any event take part in a war arising over Czechoslovakia if France were to intervene in fulfillment of her treaty obligations."[370] However, Woermann did end with a statement that the British, influenced by the Dominions, might remain apart from a conflict, or at least not immediately intervene.[371] In fact, the Prime Minister's private position had completely removed the possibility of going to war over the Sudetenland. The formulation of British policy in March 1938 was accomplished without prior consultations of either the French or the Czechoslovakian governments.[372]

Following 24 March, the British Government had three concurrent aims: to complete the Anglo-Italian Agreement which was concluded soon afterwards, to accelerate rearmament towards defence, which was proceeding slowly, and to solve the Sudeten

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[367] Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 218
[368] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 635
[369] Ibid., 635
[370] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.104, p.193
[371] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.104, p.193
[372] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 650

question and achieve a general Anglo-German settlement.[373] On 21 April, discussions between Hitler and General Keitel had produced a set of conditions for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. It was decided that an attack without cause or justification had to be rejected because of the hostile world reaction which would result from such an invasion.[374] Therefore, it was agreed that two possibilities remained: firstly, action after a period of diplomatic discussions which gradually led to a crisis and to war, and secondly, lightning action based on an incident.[375] Interestingly enough, the incident imagined was the possible assassination of the German Minister in Prague, a fact unbeknownst to him at the time.[376] Quick success, in what was known as Operation Green (*Fall Grün*), was perceived as critical since it would convince foreign powers "of the hopelessness of military intervention."[377] The key to such a scenario was surprise; if the Czech Army mobilized, victory would still be more than likely over Czechoslovakia, but it would not occur within the time frame necessary to ensure the neutrality of the Western Powers.

At the end of April, the French leaders arrived in London to discuss joint policy in relation to Czechoslovakia. The overall impression gained by the French during their trip was that under no circumstances would Britain give immediate support in the event of an attack by Germany on Czechoslovakia.[378] The British could only promise, which they did not, to send two divisions to aid France in a war against Germany.[379] With no military commitment, it was agreed on 28 April 1938, firstly to have both France and Britain urge the Czechoslovakian government to make the greatest possible concessions, and secondly to have Britain attempt to restrain Berlin.[380] Chamberlain had successfully convinced the French to press the Czechoslovakian Government into making concessions to the Sudeten leaders by threatening not to support them militarily in the event of a German invasion.[381] The fact that nothing had been agreed to with respect to military talks was openly shared with the German Government. Lord Halifax, before the French had even left London, spoke

[373] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 209
[374] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.132, p.239
[375] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.132, p.239
[376] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.132, p.239
[377] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.132, p.239
[378] Wheeler-Bennett, *Munic*h, 50
[379] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 132
[380] Ibid., 132
[381] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 1, no.164, p.198-234

with Theodor Kordt, the new German *Chargé d'Affaires*, to inform him that no further commitments or obligations had been made during negotiations with France.[382] The purpose of the meetings after all, from the British standpoint, was to create an Anglo-French policy that would prevent the French obligation to Czechoslovakia from being activated, by ensuring that she would provide sufficient concessions so that Germany would not attack.[383]

13.2. The May Crisis

On 7 May 1938, the British and French Ministers in Prague made their formal requests to the Czechoslovakian government to make a supreme effort to reach a comprehensive and lasting settlement with the Sudeten Germans.[384] On 11 May, Henderson met with Ribbentrop to inform him that the British had undertaken an energetic demarche in Prague, with the goal of bringing about a peaceful settlement of the Sudeten German question.[385] Little more than a week later, what became known as the May Crisis occurred when the Czechoslovakian government ordered a partial mobilization of its Army prior to local elections in the Sudetenland, believing wrongly that German troop movements indicated an immediate invasion.[386] During the crisis on 21 May, Henderson delivered a British warning to Ribbentrop: "if a conflict really were to break out, the dangers would be incalculable. France would be compelled to intervene in case of German aggression and, even without any treaty commitment, England might be forced in by circumstances, or by political necessity."[387] Since Germany had in fact not planned any offensive at this point, it appeared to the world that she had backed down following threats of intervention by Britain. On 22 May, Lord Halifax delivered through Henderson a message of warning: "If a resort is had to forcible measures, it is quite impossible for me or for him [Hitler] to foretell the results that may follow, and I would beg him [Hitler] not to count on this country's being able to stand aside if, from any precipitate action, there should start a European conflagration."[388]

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[382] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.139, p.246
[383] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 652
[384] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 1, no. 171, p.87
[385] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.154, p.269
[386] Goldstein and Lukes, *The Munich Crisis*, 133
[387] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.186, p. 315-16
[388] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.189, p.320

It had been a month since Hitler ordered General Keitel to create military plans for the destruction of Czechoslovakia at the most opportune moment. A surprise attack had been ruled out since it could not be justified before world opinion. The May Crisis resulted in the complete alteration of such plans as Hitler was now bent on the immediate destruction of Czechoslovakia. On 28 May 1938, Hitler called a meeting in the winter garden of the Reich Chancellery. Among others, Generals Keitel, von Brauchitsch and Beck were present. During the course of his speech, Hitler declared: "It is my unshakable will that Czechoslovakia shall be wiped off the map."[389] Two days later, the Führer signed the revised order for Operation Green. It stated "it is my unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future. It is the business of the political leadership to await or bring about the suitable moment from a political and military point of view."[390] General Keitel signed the covering letter which stated that the plan "must be assured by October 1, 1938, at the latest."[391] It is certain that Hitler would have found some other excuse for his war, but it can be stated with some assurance that the Czech mobilization, and the diplomatic and press reaction were the immediate causes of his change in plans.[392]

Much like the Anschluss, two months earlier, the May Crisis provided an opportunity for British officials to reconsider their policies. The lesson for Chamberlain was that only active appeasement and not resistance could result in a peaceful solution, which was always the Prime Minister's first priority.[393] The British and particularly Chamberlain had been scared during the May crisis that their bluff of intervention might have been called by Hitler. Chamberlain redoubled his efforts at appeasement as an attempt to avoid having to bluff again, until which time British rearmament was sufficiently advanced, presumably in 1939. The day after Halifax had delivered the British warning to Henderson, 21 May, he sent a separate telegram to Paris, warning the French not to be under any illusion about the likelihood of British assistance "to preserve Czechoslovakia against German aggression."[394] Chamberlain understood that war was most likely to involve Britain if France came to the

[389] Wheeler Bennett, *Munich*, 48
[390] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no. 221, p. 358
[391] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no. 221, p. 358
[392] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 395
[393] Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy*, 98
[394] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 655

support of Czechoslovakia. Therefore, he wanted officials in Paris to understand that immediate military support would not be forthcoming.

As the tension subsided, the British returned to promoting an internal solution between the Prague Government and the *Sudeten Deutsche Partei* (SDP) represented primarily by Konrad Henlein. British policy in the summer of 1938 rested on the assumption that Henlein would work towards an agreement, if one could be fairly reached.[395] This basic assumption proved completely incorrect. In fact, it was only at the urging of the Nazis that the SDP specified its demands at all. Without formal demands the Germans feared that Britain would believe the Czech claim that the Sudeten leaders did not want a negotiated solution, but desired to disrupt the situation until an invasion.[396] Two weeks after they were instructed to release a plan, Henlein announced eight demands at the SDP Congress at Karlsbad. Known to history as the Karlsbad demands, they included the building up of Sudeten German self-government, legal protections for their minority status, and the removal of the wrongs done since 1918.[397] When Henlein spoke at Karlsbad he did not at any point mention inclusion into the Reich.[398] He had managed to successfully convince the British of his status as a moderate, and Vansittart after meeting with Henlein on 12-13 May 1938, called the SDP leader a wise and reasonable man.[399]A massive flaw in British intelligence gathering was that no one apparently grasped that Henlein was in essence Hitler's pawn. Having decided upon military conquest at the end of May 1938, there was no hope for a negotiated settlement between Prague and the SDP leaders. Even Vansittart's secret 'detective' agency did not suspect how close Henlein's relationship with Hitler was.

As the summer of 1938 proceeded, it was evident to the British that left to themselves the Prague Government and the SDP would get nowhere in their negotiations.[400] Following the May crisis, the full Cabinet was not kept closely informed of the plans for Czechoslovakia. The Foreign Policy Committee met for the last time on 16 June, and it

[395] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 146
[396] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.129, p.236
[397] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.135, p.242
[398] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.135, p.242
[399] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 232
[400] Wheeler Bennett, *Munich*, 70

would not reconvene until after the Munich agreement was signed.[401] However, it must be recorded that the dissenters to Chamberlain's policy did not outwardly protest aside from Vansittart, and only their memoirs foster the idea of an opposition excluded and dominated by a Prime Minister who controlled policy in a dictatorial fashion.[402] Yet, it is true that from June onwards, British foreign policy was increasingly controlled by the Prime Minister, with few dissenting opinions.[403]Just prior to the summer recess, at the end of July, it was decided by Chamberlain that an advisor should be sent to Czechoslovakia to enable progress.[404] After all, Britain was heavily vested in achieving an agreement insofar as it would not require the activation of France's military commitments. Chamberlain selected Lord Runciman, a man with nearly forty years experience in government, to go to Prague and investigate the Sudeten problem. Both Chamberlain and Halifax hoped that by sending a British mediator to investigate, Hitler would be forced to be patient and not use force before the visit was concluded.[405] The Cabinet met on 27 July 1938, for the last time officially until September. By the middle of August, Lord Runciman, having been pushed out into the ocean in a dinghy as he described it, had achieved nothing.[406]

14. General Ludwig Beck, May-August 1938

Following Hitler's declaration of his intention to smash Czechoslovakia by 1 October 1938, on 28 May, General Beck began writing what would become a series of memoranda designed to alter the Führer's course away from aggressive war. Throughout the summer of 1938 Beck's chief weapon was reason,[407] which had no effect on Hitler. Throughout June and July, Beck produced a flurry of memoranda which all attempted to show that a war against Czechoslovakia would not remain isolated and therefore could not be won. General Beck hoped that by restricting his objections to strictly military matters, they would not be ignored. In his most important memorandum, that of 16 July 1938, Beck wrote:

> "To express the urgent request that the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces be induced to shelve the war preparations ordered by him and to postpone the plan

[401] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 263
[402] Ibid., 316
[403] Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy*, 100
[404] *DBFP*. Third Series, Volume 2, no.541, p.3-4
[405] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.546, p.7-8
[406] Wheeler Bennett, *Munich*, 82
[407] Fraenkel and Manvell, *The Canaris Conspiracy*, 16

> for a forcible solution of the Czech question until the military prerequisites for it have basically changed. At present I consider them unpromising, and my view is shared by all head quartermasters and branch chiefs of the General staff ."[408]

From this point onwards, Beck's notes and memoranda contain more than a hint of insurrection. On 19 July, Beck had another interview with von Brauchitsch. In his briefing notes, he reiterates his call for a coup d'état:

> "Probably for the last time, fate offers the opportunity to free the German nation and the Führer himself from the nightmare of a Cheka and from the manifestations of party bigwigism […] There can and must be no doubt that this struggle is conducted for the Führer. There must not arise even the slightest suspicion of a plot and yet the most senior military leaders must stand united behind this step under all circumstances."[409]

Beck was essentially suggesting a coup d'état, because this theoretical confrontation with the *Schutzstaffel* would deprive the Nazis of their main instrument of power.[410] Only gradually did the would-be struggle for Hitler turn into open struggle against him.

By the end of July, Beck's tone had decidedly changed as he urged direct action as opposed to simply countering Hitler's arguments in memoranda. As a result, von Brauchitsch convened Army Group and Corps Commanders in Berlin on 4 August.[411] It was the first, and only time, in the history of the Third Reich that the *Generalität* met without having been summoned by the Führer.[412] Von Brauchitsch read Beck's memorandum of 16 July and despite some opposition, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army declared unanimity. However, nothing was said about a collective protest and the threat of resignation, or the obvious possible consequences of such an action.[413] The unity of the Generals only lasted a few hours as Hitler had quickly learned of what happened at the *Generalität* thanks to General Reichenau, one of the two dissenters.[414] Hitler's first reaction was to invite the Chiefs of Staff and other senior commanders to the Berghof on 10 August 1938, at which point he denounced Beck's interpretation and restated his intention to smash

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[408] Erich Zimmerman and Hans Adolf Jacobsen, eds, *Germans Against Hitler, July 20, 1944*, (Germany: Bonn, 1964), 46-7
[409] Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance* , 75
[410] Ibid., 75
[411] Ibid., 78
[412] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 64
[413] Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance*, 78
[414] O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party*, 159

Czechoslovakia.[415] As well, the day after Reichenau informed Hitler, he decided on 5 August to formally rehabilitate General von Fritsch, in an attempt to secure the support of some of the Generals who were clearly still upset over the former Commander-in-Chief's abrupt dismissal.[416]

Without honest support from von Brauchitsch and unable to alter Hitler's plans for war, General Beck delivered his resignation on 18 August 1938. He had little hope that this last step would prevent war, but he could not share the responsibility of carrying out Hitler's directives. Colonel Hans Oster supported Beck's decision to resign because he believed that such a dramatic act would shake the Generals from their course of inaction, which it ultimately failed to do.[417] Unfortunately, the effect of his resignation was muted by the fact that Beck was asked and agreed not to make his decision public in order to maintain a united front for the outside world. Despite this fact, by the first week of September the British had learned of Beck's replacement from resistance sources.[418] On 28 August, Beck ordered that an addendum be attached to his memorandum of 16 July: "In order to make our position clear to historians in the future and in order to protect the reputation of the high command, I, as Chief of the General Staff, would like to record the fact that I refused to countenance any adventuresome National Socialist wars."[419] Beck's journey from dissent to revolt was prototypical for other senior officers, who could only begin to consider a putsch when all attempts to influence Hitler had failed.[420]

15. Ewald von Kleist-Schemzin

A few days before General Beck resigned, he enlisted the help of Ewald von Kleist-Schemzin to deliver a message to the British. Kleist was a conservative landowner who from the beginning understood the threat that Hitler posed. Shortly before 1933, he published an article entitled "National Socialism-A Danger."[421] In August 1938, Kleist travelled to

[415] O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party*, 159
[416] Ibid., 159
[417] Gisevius, *To The Bitter End*, 281
[418] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, No. 775, p. 242
[419] Reynolds, *Treason was no Crime*, 168
[420] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 78
[421] Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *The Secret War Against Hitler* (New York : Pitman Pub. Corp.1965), 40

London as the first official envoy of what could now be called the German resistance.[422] In fact, he had been meeting with British journalist Ian Colvin from the spring of 1938. Kleist informed Colvin as early as April while meeting at the Casino Club in Berlin, that foreign powers must come to the aid of Germany if war was to be avoided.[423] Kleist described to Colvin the difficulty of dealing through the British embassy which besides being accredited to the Reich, regularly transmitted messages that were intercepted and decoded.[424] By early May, Kleist was informed by Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and Oster of the actual state of secret policy which he repeated to Colvin. England, Canaris said, must lend us a sea anchor if we are to ride out this storm.[425] For Canaris and Kleist, that sea anchor was a firm commitment which would enable the resistance to act should Hitler ignore the obvious implications of invading Czechoslovakia. Throughout the summer, Kleist continued to transmit information from senior members of the resistance to Colvin. Beck knew and trusted Kleist who was an obvious choice as envoy. Speaking with him in his office, Beck concluded that if the British government yielded to Hitler it would lose its two main allies: the German General Staff and the German People. General Beck then asked Kleist to "bring me back certain proof that Britain will make war if we invade Czechoslovakia, and I will make an end of this Regime."[426] Kleist asked what he regarded as firm proof to which Beck replied "an open pledge to assist Czechoslovakia in the event of war."[427]

On 11 August with Chamberlain in agreement, Halifax sent Henderson a warning and direct appeal to Hitler asking him to desist from military operations which might threaten the peace.[428] The message was not conveyed through the German Foreign Ministry and instead sent directly through the Chancery,[429] a fact which enraged Ribbentrop. Its attempt to draw Hitler's attention to the inevitable apprehension, which was arising due to abnormal German military preparations, fell on deaf ears.[430] Hitler never replied. On 15 August 1938 at Jüterbog, Hitler reiterated to his Generals his intention to attack

[422] Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis of Power*, 410
[423] Ian Colvin, *Chief of Intelligence* (Paulton and London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1951), 53
[424] Ibid., 54
[425] Ibid., 55
[426] Ibid., 62
[427] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 223 and Colvin, *Chief of Intelligence*, 54
[428] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 608, p.78-80
[429] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 608, p.78-80
[430] Wheeler Bennett, *Munich*, 85

Czechoslovakia.[431] London apparently had learnt of that meeting prior to Kleist's visit; as on 17 August, the British Military Attaché in Berlin had reported that in an address to his Generals, Hitler had announced that the invasion of Bohemia would begin at the end of September.[432] However, Henderson referred to such information, and the unnamed informant as "clearly biased and largely propaganda."[433]

Colvin readily agreed to provide Kleist with a letter of introduction which was received by Lord Lloyd and passed on to Vansittart. In the letter, Colvin referred to Kleist as "a courageous and upright gentleman although suspect to the Nazis. […] I think that pains should be taken to supply him with support for his opinions."[434] On 16 August, Henderson telegraphed London, announcing Kleist's visit, but typically misrepresented its true nature.[435] Henderson stated he believed it would be unwise for Kleist to be received in official quarters.[436] The Embassy in Berlin was not well informed in 1938 of the conspiracy against Hitler which was developing.[437] Kleist's visit to London, beginning on 17 August, was not a simple matter. A fake passport had to be prepared and British pound notes issued. At Hansa Airlines, at Tempelhof aerodrome on 17 August, each German traveler had to be officially sponsored.[438] Each person had to produce a passport, with their allowance of foreign money stamped and approved by the *Reichsbank*, and show their specific invitation.[439] However, with the aircraft filling up, a military car drove onto the runway, bypassing customs and passport control. A General Kleist, a kinsman in uniform, escorted Ewald von Kleist aboard, and under such circumstances there was no question of interference from customs or the police.[440] After Kleist landed at Croyden, the British Intelligence Service were informed, and he travelled to the Park Lane Hotel when Lord Lloyd of Dolobran arrived to take him to dinner in a private room at Claridges.[441]

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[431] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 137
[432] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 658, p.125-126
[433] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 658, p.126
[434] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 221
[435] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, Appendix IV, p.683
[436] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, Appendix IV, p. 683
[437] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 222
[438] Colvin, *Chief of Intelligence*, 63
[439] Ibid., 63
[440] Ibid., 63
[441] Ibid., 64

Kleist as an old conservative and an unwavering opponent of Hitler was equal to the task of discussing affairs with British conservatives.[442] Equally important for his mission was the fact that he was charming, honest and deeply sincere.[443] It should be noted that Lloyd spoke no German and Kleist no English but the two managed well enough speaking in French.[444] During the course of their talk, Kleist exclaimed that mobilization plans were complete and the zero day was fixed to run according to plan at the end of September. No one could stop it, according to Kleist, unless Britain made an open warning to Hitler.[445]After the meeting ended, Lord Lloyd went to see the Foreign Secretary and Kleist was given an appointment with Vansittart.[446]

Kleist's and Vansittart's visit as recorded by Sir Robert's report went over many of the same points discussed the night before with Lord Lloyd. Kleist stated that he had come out of Germany with a rope around his neck, and that all the Generals were dead against war, but they would not have the power to stop it unless they got encouragement and help from outside.[447] Kleist also provided an estimated date of attack, stating that after 27 September, it would be too late. He repeated the request for a leading British statesmen to make a speech which would appeal to the German people and Generals, emphasizing the horrors of war and the inevitable general catastrophe which would result.[448] Vansittart replied that such a speech would have the opposite effect Kleist intended, that of unifying the German people as a result of a foreigner overtly attempting to divide their country.[449] He concluded that "there was no prospect whatever of any reasonable policy being followed by Germany so long as Hitler was at the head of affairs."[450] Years later, Vansittart spoke with Colvin and told him that of all the Germans, Kleist had the stuff in him for revolution against Hitler; however he wanted the Polish Corridor, a fact which cannot be confirmed from Sir Robert's own record in the Foreign Office documents.[451]

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[442] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 141
[443] Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power*, 410
[444] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 71
[445] Colvin, *Chief of Intelligence*, 64
[446] Ibid., 65
[447] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 8520/1941/18], p. 684
[448] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 8520/1941/18], p. 685
[449] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 8520/1941/18], p. 685
[450] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 8520/1941/18], p. 685
[451] Colvin, *Chief of Intelligence*, 64

On 19 August, Chamberlain received an urgent call from Major-General Lord Hutchison of Montrose, who informed the Prime Minister of reports from an informant close to the German Generals. Hutchison stated that it was the view of his contact, that Hitler had not made up his mind, and it was not too late to intervene, prior to his speech at Nuremberg.[452] Such a view neatly coincided with Chamberlain's. As he read over Vansittart's report, the Prime Minister now had two courses of action, with conflicting advice. One which agreed with what he believed and the other which requested a complete reversal of British Foreign Policy. Chamberlain replied to Halifax "I take it that Von Kleist is violently anti-Hitler and is extremely anxious to stir up his friends in Germany to make an attempt at its overthrow. He reminds me of the Jacobites at the Court of France in King's William's time and I think we must discount a good deal of what he says."[453] Chamberlain had sadly missed the point entirely of Kleist's visit. The German resistance, unlike the Jacobites, was never primarily interested in its own power or position but in the maintenance of peace.[454] Nevertheless, Chamberlain continued, "I don't feel sure that we ought not to do something."[455]

It was decided that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Simon, would give a public address, known as the Lanark speech of 27 August in which he reiterated what had already been said by the Prime Minister on 24 March. Simon emphasized that Chamberlain's speech continued to hold true, stating that "there is nothing to add or to vary in its content."[456] It is of singular importance that the speech certainly did not meet the opposition's request for a firm statement.[457] Kleist had directly told Vansittart that the warning of 24 March was not enough.[458] Chamberlain firmly believed that no state, certainly no democratic state, ought to threaten war unless it was both ready to carry it out and prepared to do so. Since war in present conditions was not a prospect which the Defence Ministry viewed with great confidence, Chamberlain saw his course as set.[459] At the same

[452] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 8520/1941/18], p. 686
[453] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 8520/1941/18], p. 686
[454] Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance*, 58
[455] Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, 139
[456] DBFP, Third Series, Volume 2, no.704 p. 172
[457] Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, 140
[458] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 8520/1941/18], p. 685
[459] Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, 143

time, he ordered the summoning of the British ambassador in Berlin, for talks on the 'Czecho' question.[460]

Following his meeting with Vansittart, and Chamberlain's decisions on 19 August, Kleist met with Winston Churchill. The meeting produced the only success of Kleist's trip, a letter from Churchill which stated his personal opinion that,

> "I am as certain as I was at the end of July 1914 that England will march with France and certainly the United States is now strongly anti-Nazi. […] Such a war, once started, would be fought out like the last to the bitter end and one must consider not what might happen in the first few months, but where we should all be at the end of the third or fourth year.[...] His Lordship [Lord Halifax] asks me to say on his behalf that the position of His Majesty's Government in relation to Czecho-Slovakia is defined by the Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons on March 24, 1938. The speech must be read as a whole, and I have no authority to select any particular sentence out of its context; but I must draw your attention to the final passage on this subject."[461]

Churchill's letter arrived in Berlin in a diplomatic pouch where it was collected by Fabian von Schlabrendorff and passed back to Kleist.[462] Presented to senior members of the resistance, excerpts from Churchill's letter ended up in a report prepared by von Weizsäcker on 6 September concerning the likely response of foreign powers in the event of aggressive action against Czechoslovakia.[463] On 24 August, Kleist left London as quietly as he had arrived. Henderson was recalled and arrived in London on the 26th at which point he stressed that there was no use in hoping for any opposition to Hitler.[464] In Berlin, Kleist told Colvin and Canaris that he found no one in London who was prepared to wage a preventive war.[465]

16.1. Erich and Theodor Kordt, August-September 1938

Theodor Kordt, the German *Chargé d'Affaires* in London, had met Sir Horace Wilson, Chief Industrial Advisor to the British Government and one of Chamberlain's most trusted foreign policy advisors, on 23 August at the home of T. Philip Conwell-Evans.[466] That same day, Lord Jebb Gladwyn of the British Foreign Office, concluded a memorandum

[460] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 8520/1941/18], p. 686
[461] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 8520/1941/18], p. 688
[462] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 145
[463] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, No. 436
[464] Colvin, *Chief of Intelligence*, 64
[465] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 234
[466] Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance*, 66

by saying that "we have not as a nation at present the strength and determination [and] that I have endeavored to examine the situation on the assumption that when the crisis comes, we shall in effect allow Hitler to swallow the Czechs."[467] The German resistance believed throughout the September Plot that the British would never stand aside and allow Hitler to conquer Czechoslovakia. In early August, Theodor met Conwell-Evans at the Rotary Club and told him that Henlein would never accept an offer from Czechoslovakia, no matter how generous it was.[468] Meanwhile in Berlin during the night of 3-4 September, Theodor's brother Erich Kordt, the Director of Ribbentrop's office, was meeting with von Weizsäcker drafting a message calling for the British Government to take a firm stance against Hitler.[469] Von Weizsäcker described Erich Kordt as "his closest confidant in the Foreign Office," who had a special way of warning the British of Hitler's intentions through his brother.[470] It was largely Erich Kordt who was responsible for the organization and maintenance of the Foreign Office opposition in Berlin.[471] The purpose of the warning to the British was twofold: to urge a continued effort to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Sudeten question, but at the same time to express in unambiguous language the British intention to oppose any attempt to use force.[472] Von Weizsäcker continued that if such a message was made, Hitler would retreat.[473] Along with von Weizsäcker, Hans Oster, and recently resigned General Ludwig Beck, each had some input into the nature of Erich Kordt's warning message.

With a warning in hand, Erich Kordt had to decide how to safely transmit the message to his brother in Britain. Ultimately, his cousin Susanne Simonis, who had planned a trip to London was asked to memorize the message and deliver it to Theodor upon her arrival on 5 September.[474] The message was simple, a call for an unequivocal stand on the part of the British that, in turn, would allow the opposition to act against the Regime should Hitler decide to invade.[475] The next day, Theodor Kordt contacted Sir Horace Wilson, who

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[467] Lord Jebb Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Jebb Gladwyn*, 81
[468] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 66
[469] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad* , 102
[470] Ernst von Weizsäcker, *Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker* Translated by John Andrews. (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1951), 145
[471] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 27
[472] Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*,145
[473] Ibid.,145
[474] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 97
[475] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 102

after a two-hour conversation arranged for a meeting on 7 September between Kordt and Lord Halifax at 10 Downing Street. After meeting with Kordt, Wilson returned to the Foreign Office and discussed the matter briefly with Sir Alexander Cadogan. He had been in favor, as of 4 September, of sending a private warning to Hitler that Britain would come to the protection of France. Cadogan reasoned that the Führer had likely been convinced that "our March and May statements were bluffs."[476] According to Cadogan, Wilson was told by Kordt that Hitler had made the decision to invade by 19 or 20 September. It was then decided that a request should be made to have the Prime Minister return to London as soon as possible.[477]

Theodor Kordt was not, like Kleist, a reminder of the Jacobites, but an accredited member of the German Embassy, and his advice created a dilemma for Chamberlain since it added another and more authoritative voice to those calling for a firm policy.[478] To avoid publicity, Theodor was asked to approach through the garden entrance on 7 September for his meeting with Lord Halifax. Theodor identified himself explicitly not as the German *Chargé d'Affaires*, but as a spokesperson for political and military circles in Berlin which wanted to prevent a war by any and all means. At this point, Theodor Kordt had clearly exceeded the instructions of von Weizsäcker, but he did so with the apparent blessing of General Beck and certainly the support of Colonel Oster.[479] By saying that a statement should be issued causing the Army leaders to act against Hitler's policy, Kordt had outlined the existence of a conspiracy more clearly than any other representative.[480] He asked for a public declaration to the German people by means of a radio broadcast to enable the leaders of the Army to move against Hitler's policies by force of arms. As Kordt slipped out again through the garden, he took with him the impression that at last the unequivocal statement the resistance had hoped for would be forthcoming.[481] For Cadogan, the suggestion of a

[476] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 94
[477] Ibid., 95
[478] Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, 147
[479] Klemperer *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 102
[480] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 100
[481] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 154, Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance*, 67

public declaration to the German nation was fatal, and even made him doubt Kordt, whom he referred to as Mr. X throughout his diary.[482]

In performing his official duties, Kordt returned reports to Berlin which strongly suggested the British possessed more hawkish attitudes than actually existed.[483] Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the meeting with Halifax produced little. British policy had been set for months and as recently as 30 August, the Foreign Secretary clearly expressed the British attitude towards the German opposition during a meeting of the Ministers:

> "Many moderate Germans are pressing us to go even further than the Prime Minister's speech of 24th March and that if we do so the Nazi Regime would crack. He [Halifax] received these messages with reserve. He [Halifax] did not believe the internal Regime of one country was destroyed as a result of action taken by some other countries."[484]

Even prior to that meeting, Chamberlain had decided that at a critical moment, if negotiations were breaking down, he would personally travel to Germany and meet with Hitler. Chamberlain had developed Plan Z according to historian Donald Cameron Watt, after a visit with Wilson, whose advice the Prime Minister valued more than anyone else's.[485] In general, Chamberlain treated the news received from Kordt with the same skepticism he had shown towards Kleist's pleas two weeks earlier.[486] In fact, soon after the Munich Conference, Lord Halifax mentioned to Theodor Kordt that "we were not able to be as frank with you as you were with us. At the time that you gave us your message, we were already considering sending Chamberlain to Germany."[487]

16.2. Ernst Freiherr von Weizsäcker

Following the failure of Kleist's and Theodor Kordt's missions in Britain, a renewed attempt was undertaken by Ernst von Weizsäcker, Secretary of State in the Foreign Office. The goal of all of von Weizsäcker's resistance activities was to maintain the peace between Germany and Great Britain. Since 1945, von Weizsäcker has become one of the most

[482] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 95
[483] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 151
[484] Ibid., 147
[485] Watt, *How War Came*, 395
[486] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 306
[487] Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance*, 67

controversial resisters. Sir Lewis Namier's *In the Nazi Era* attacks von Weizsäcker's memoirs as "teeming with absurdities, distortions, and untruths. Fit to deceive only those who wish to be deceived."[488] Klemens von Klemperer, generally supportive of the efforts of the opposition, wrote that von Weizsäcker's resistance was "above all that of a tired servant of the old school rather than of an outraged man of principle. It was resistance devoid of firm resolve and conviction."[489] The German Foreign Office, like the Army, was able to remain an area of state power relatively free from Nazi interference, as many senior officials as late as 1937 still considered their role to be non-political.[490] In any event, von Weizsäcker's primary goal was the preservation of peace, and not necessarily the removal of Hitler, particularly in the pre-war period. However, similar to Admiral Canaris and the *Abwehr*, von Weizsäcker was able to provide protection for a circle of resisters around him whose goals and actions often extended past what the Secretary of State would have generally accepted.

Along with Kordt's warning, von Weizsäcker took it upon himself to act. He had long worked for the maintenance of peace between Germany and Great Britain, stating prior to Lord Halifax's visit in November 1937 in an official memorandum. "What we want from England we cannot obtain by force, but must obtain by negotiations. From England, we want colonies and freedom of action in the East, from us England wants military quiescence, particularly in the West. These wishes are not completely irreconcilable."[491] Von Weizsäcker ordered German ambassadors in the major capitals to confirm that they did not believe the Western democracies could stand aside in the event of German action against Czechoslovakia.[492] He believed that the statements made by the British were too ambiguous and therefore decided to contact a longtime friend Professor Carl J. Burckhardt, the League of Nations Commissioner in Danzig.[493] According to Professor Burckhardt, von Weizsäcker asked him to deliver the message that

> "Something must be done. We are on the very brink. The British must send somebody as quickly as possible so that one can talk, not a personality too high in

[488] Namier, *In the Nazi Era*, 82
[489] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 26
[490] Seabury, *The Wihelmstrasse*, 43,81
[491] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 1, no.21, p.40
[492] Hohne, *Canaris*, 300
[493] Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 146

> rank. No Prime Minister; none of these all-too-polite Englishmen of the old School. If Chamberlain comes, these louts will triumph and proclaim that some Englishman has taken his cue and come to heel […] they should send an energetic military man who, if necessary, can shout and hit the table with a riding crop, a marshal with many decorations and scars, a man without too much consideration […] Unless negotiations are conducted we risk his [Hitler] bombarding Prague and invading Bohemia."[494]

Burckhardt drove straight to Berne in one day, over nine hundred kilometers. Upon arriving at the British Legation, he got the Minister, Sir George Warner, out of bed, who was sick at the time.[495] Warner's telegram did not accurately reflect the tone of von Weizsäcker's message.[496] Warner's report to London did include the fact that General Beck had resigned and that the invasion of Czechoslovakia would occur in six weeks,[497] but it failed to state what von Weizsäcker had mostly intended. As well, Burckhardt decided to speak directly with the British Minister of State, R.A. Butler, and repeated the contents of von Weizsäcker's message. A day or two later, Burckhardt contacted a League of Nations colleague from Britain, Shrine Stevenson, who reported the contents of their meeting to William Strang of the Foreign Office.[498] Stevenson reported that General Beck had resigned and repeated von Weizsäcker's request, made through Burckhardt, for a personal letter from the Prime Minister to Hitler. The fact that von Weizsäcker had urged the British not to consider sending Chamberlain to Germany does not appear to have been a factor in the development of Plan Z. By 8 September, Lord Halifax had two sources, seemingly independent from one another, urging a firmer warning to Hitler.

17.1. The Development of Plan Z

The first half of September 1938 was taken up with debate on a further warning to Germany, and the presentation of Chamberlain's Plan Z. The previous month had been, much like July 1914, a Parliamentary holiday, which saw most of the senior British officials on vacation. Kleist's visit to London had been unable to stir any firm action out of the British. In theory, at least, the two-pronged approach of British policy designed to prevent a war with Germany involved threatening the possibility of military action and an attempt to

[494] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 154 quoting *Case XI*, Doc. Book 1a, Burckhardt affidavit.
[495] Gilbert and Gott, *Appeasers*, 144
[496] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.775 p.242
[497] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.775 p.242
[498] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, [C 9525/1941/18], p. 689

peacefully solve the Sudeten question in a manner satisfactory to all parties.[499] In practice, Chamberlain feared that stern warnings would make it impossible to peacefully solve the crisis. Between Kleist's and Kordt's attempt to secure firm commitments, Chamberlain had developed his own radical solution. It remains a mystery as to when Chamberlain came to the conclusion to travel to Germany and meet with Hitler in an attempt to settle the crisis. It appears likely that Chamberlain's plan, known as Z, was developed after Kleist had departed from London, 24 August, and a day or two before the Meeting of Ministers held on 30 August.

It was not until 28 August at the earliest that Chamberlain came to the idea of visiting Hitler himself.[500] According to Sir Horace Wilson, he was informed of Plan Z by Chamberlain while meeting at 10 Downing Street with Henderson on either 29 or 30 August.[501] Henderson was currently in London as a result of Kleist's visit and had already urged, as of 27 August, that only genuine autonomy for the Sudetenland could prevent Hitler from taking offensive action.[502] Chamberlain believed that an important part of his Plan Z was surprise, and did not give any hint at that meeting of what he was thinking.[503] In fact, it was not until the beginning of September that the first evidence of Plan Z appears in Chamberlain's papers, and even at that point the plan is not clearly explained. Chamberlain privately wrote on 3 September: "I thought of one [a plan] so unconventional and daring that it rather took Halifax's breath away. But since Henderson thought it might save the situation at the eleventh hour, I haven't abandoned it, though I hope all the time that it won't be necessary to try it."[504] It appears that at no point did Chamberlain consult with any Foreign Official or expert, aside from Henderson, whose pro-appeasement policy views were routinely denounced in the Foreign Office. The plan was presented as final, and not a developing idea, to Lord Halifax, and eventually the rest of the Cabinet.[505]

Leading up to the activation of Chamberlain's Plan Z on 13 September, British Foreign Policy had been completely removed from the traditional officials and instead

[499] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 154
[500] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 668 and Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 154
[501] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 232
[502] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.701, p.170
[503] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 232
[504] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 357
[505] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 232

placed in the hands of a select four, Chamberlain, Halifax, Simon, and Samuel Hoare, after his return to London on 10 September.[506] Chamberlain's mind had been firmly made up in favor of utilizing his Plan Z as an attempt to prevent war. Therefore, any policies which might hasten the prospect of an armed conflict, such as a firm warning, were dismissed. However, Halifax was torn between issuing another warning and supporting Chamberlain's personal plan. On 4 September, the day after the Prime Minister had informed Halifax of Plan Z, he supported a further private warning to Hitler.[507] Vansittart had pushed for a clear warning since the first week of August, but had been unable to find any support. By the end of August 1938, the conflicting groups within the Foreign Office had been shaped into two distinct positions; keeping Germany guessing had disappeared, while the remainder were divided roughly for and against a tough line with respect to Germany. In September, Cadogan joined Vansittart and Sargent in advocating a renewed warning to Germany while Chamberlain, Henderson, Harvey, Strang, and the unofficial diplomat Wilson continued to support appeasement.[508] Halifax shifted between the two groups throughout the month.

17.2. A Further Warning to Germany

Theodor Kordt's warnings to Halifax on 7 September added another element to the debate for a further warning to Germany. The next day, a meeting was held between Chamberlain, Halifax, Simon, Wilson, Cadogan and on the suggestion of the Foreign Secretary, Vansittart was included. Chamberlain did not believe a warning message would do much good, and he thought he should go to Germany himself.[509] Vansittart was opposed to Chamberlain's Plan Z, but while he spoke, the Prime Minister apparently put his head between his hands and never said a word.[510] Vansittart claimed "It was like Henry IV going to Canossa again" and on the day Chamberlain left for Germany, the Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the Government was deliberately excluded from a Foreign Office meeting.[511]

[506] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 671
[507] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 94
[508] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 296
[509] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 95
[510] Colvin, *Vansittart In Office*, 237
[511] Rose, *Vansittart: Study of a Diplomat*, 228-229

Despite Chamberlain's cool reception to the idea of a further warning, Vansittart and Cadogan were able to complete a draft copy that night.[512]

Lord Halifax, along with having seen Theodor Kordt on 7 September, had met with several other British officials who supported of a further warning. On 31 August, Churchill wrote to Halifax that two deterrents to war, a joint note between Britain, France and Russia, as well as fleet movements, should be undertaken.[513] On 9 September, Eden met with Halifax and urged him to issue a further communication to the German Government which would include a tougher stance.[514] As well, von Weizsäcker's message, transmitted through Carl Burckhardt had added another voice to those calling for a message of warning. Finally, with the consent of the Prime Minister, Lord Halifax sent a message to the German government on 9 September, reflecting at least somewhat the posture urged on Whitehall by the conspirators and anti-appeasers. Although the moment called for something simpler and more forceful, couched in less diplomatic language and addressed directly to Hitler himself, the note nevertheless would be impossible to ignore.[515] Telegraphed to Berlin, the message was sent by train to Nuremberg for Henderson who was at the Nazi Party Rally. The warning stated that if France went to war in fulfillment of her obligation to Czechoslovakia, "it seems to His Majesty's Government inevitable that the sequence of events must result in a general conflict from which Great Britain could not stand aside."[516]

However, Sir Nevile Henderson flatly refused to deliver a message so clearly out of step with the official conciliatory approach.[517] At the same time, he believed that the British position, recounted in the warning, was already clear to the German officials who, according to the ambassador, mattered most.[518] Henderson's official reply, delivered by airplane and arriving in London at about 4 p.m. on 10 September, stated that he was violently against a warning.[519] Henderson reported that "[it was] my conviction […] that in the unbalanced state of mind in which I think [Hitler] is, any solemn warning [….] will drive him to the

[512] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 95
[513] Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 293
[514] Earl of Avon, *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, The Reckoning* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Com., 1965), 21
[515] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 165
[516] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.815 p.278
[517] Hoffmann, "The Anti-Nazi Conspiracy", 439
[518] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.819 p. 280
[519] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.819 no.823 p.278,p.283-4

very action which we seek to prevent."[520] The ambassador believed that repeated British warnings backed by military unpreparedness had little effect.[521] Henderson, who has been harshly judged by history, may have been right when he wrote that "I can't warn the Führer and talk policy with him at a party occasion. […] It would have the wrong effect and send him off the deep end."[522] As we know now, Hitler was not bluffing, for he fully planned to invade Czechoslovakia as long as it appeared clear that Britain and France would not intervene. Henderson's statement that he was satisfied that all the important people around Hitler understood Britain's position was a compelling argument.[523]

On 11 September, Eden met with Halifax and stated that he saw the point of not sending a warning in view of Henderson's advice, but that he mistrusted the ambassador's judgment.[524] At the same time, Henderson had simply refused to present the warning, yet had the Prime Minister ordered him, he would have had no choice but to do so. Chamberlain's heart was never in favor of a warning strategy, since he disliked the idea of an automatic obligation to Czechoslovakia, and Henderson's objection was accepted.[525] Lord Halifax informed Henderson that in light of his communications that the substance of the warning had been understood by the German officials, there was no need to proceed any further.[526] On 10 September, in a statement to the press, the British government denied all reports of an intention to dispatch a diplomatic note to the German government.[527] On 12 September, Duff Cooper privately wrote that Henderson did not want to deliver the note of warning and the government accepted. By government, Cooper sarcastically stated that this no longer meant the full apparatus of the British state, but only Chamberlain, Simon, Halifax, and Hoare.[528] At no point was the Cabinet included in the discussions over a warning, or Henderson's refusal to deliver it. The moment when it appeared that the resistance's requests for a further warning had been granted was derailed by the judgment of the British ambassador. Since the end of August, the firm line of the Foreign Office had

[520] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.825 p.285
[521] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.823 p.284
[522] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 239
[523] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 174
[524] Ibid., 175
[525] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 674
[526] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.823 p. 284
[527] Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance*, 67
[528] Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 226

been cast aside, devalued by Chamberlain's persistently hostile attitude to most of the professional diplomats.[529]

17.3. Negotiations in Czechoslovakia Break Down

Hitler's speech at the Nazi Party Congress at Nuremberg on 12 September was full of menace particularly directed towards the Czechoslovakian President Edvard Beneš, but it according to Cadogan "pulled no trigger."[530] At this point, a brief summary of the negotiations between the Czechoslovakian President and the SDP leaders is necessary. After months, and with a German military threat looming, President Beneš summoned the SDP leaders Ernst Kundt and Wilhelm Sebekovsky to the Hradschin Palace on 4 September. Beneš pushed a blank sheet of paper in front of his guests and promised in advance to grant their full demands.[531] Kundt and Sebekovsky were dumbstruck, and when they did not start writing, Beneš took the paper back and offered to record what they said. When the SDP leaders were finished talking, Beneš accepted all the demands, aside from a request for Czechoslovakia to reorient her foreign policy.[532] The final document, known as the Fourth Plan, embodied almost all of the Karlsbad Points established in April. In a telegram to the German Foreign Ministry, it was admitted by the SDP leaders that the new government bill dealt with all essential demands which were raised at Karlsbad.[533] However, Beneš did not believe it would lead to a solution since it was well-known, except in London, that the German government would not allow the SDP leaders to accept any settlement.[534]

On 5 September, SDP deputy leader Karl Frank fled for Germany and the order was issued for a revolt at the first excuse. Two days later, a SDP deputy was allegedly struck by the riding whip of a mounted Czechoslovakian policeman, which was apparently sufficient cause for the rupture of negotiations.[535] That same day, 7 September, *The Times* in London published a front page story suggesting the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany. Such a demand had yet to be made by any of the parties involved. There continues to be debate

[529] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 309
[530] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 97
[531] Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich*, 90
[532] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 391
[533] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.442, p.721
[534] Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich*, 91
[535] Ibid., 92

about whether the report was 'officially inspired.' The British government at once denied any connection with the policy, but it undoubtedly diverted from any serious consideration of the generous Fourth Plan.[536] Theodor Kordt telegraphed the German Foreign Ministry that the report was inspired by the Government.[537]

During the night of 9-10 September, Hitler, Generals von Brauchitsch, Halder, and Keitel met to discuss the preparations and plans for Operation Green.[538] Following the conclusion of Hitler's speech on 12 September, the Prime Minister began to put into action Plan Z. The next day, the Czech government implemented martial law in several of the frontier districts of the Sudetenland.[539] It appeared to the British that the situation was quickly spiraling out of control. By midday on 13 September, Lord Halifax received a telegram from Sir Eric Phipps, the ambassador in Paris, who reported that the French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet "feels that the whole question of peace or war may now only be a matter of minutes instead of days."[540] Henderson, from Berlin, sent a similar report to London which stated that Hitler was prepared to launch an attack on Czechoslovakia at any time.[541] He suggested that if some justification was needed to explain the apparent British surrender to German claims, it could be found in the consistent adherence to the principle of self-determination. [542]

On 13 September, at 10 p.m., Chamberlain met with Halifax, Cadogan, and Wilson and it was agreed that the moment had arrived to launch Plan Z. As a result, the Prime Minister wrote to Adolf Hitler,

> "In view of increasingly critical situation, I propose to come over at once to see you with a view to trying to find peaceful solution. I propose to come across by air and am ready to start to-tomorrow. Please indicate earliest time at which you can see me and suggest place of meeting. Should be grateful for very early reply."[543]

[536] Smith, *Neville Chamberlain*, 313
[537] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.443, p.722-723
[538] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.448, p.727-730
[539] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.844, p.304
[540] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.848, p.306
[541] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.849, p.306-07
[542] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.849, p.306-07
[543] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.862, p.314

Cadogan's diary memorably noted on 14 September, "Cabinet – to be told what has been done!"[544] The Cabinet was informed of Chamberlain's action on 14 September, and there is no clear reason why the Prime Minister could not have waited the extra day to seek approval from his Ministers since Hitler had yet to reply when the meeting was adjourned.[545] Regardless, Cabinet approval was unanimous and enthusiastic.[546] Yet, despite having formulated Plan Z over two weeks before, there is little evidence as to what Chamberlain actually planned to say to Hitler. The Prime Minister claimed that the point was to "find out in personal conversation [with Hitler] whether there was any hope of saving the peace."[547] Even still, on 14 September, Vansittart reiterated his request for a final warning, and maintained that all moderate opinion in Germany wanted the British to give them something to enable them to stop Hitler.[548] For Chamberlain to support an unknown group against Hitler, which might result in the direct war with Germany, that the whole British policy was designed to prevent, was out of the question.[549] For the rest of September, the full Cabinet was reduced to a ratifying role and Parliament did not reassemble until the last week of September. The fate of Britain, eerily similarly to that of Germany, now rested in the hands of one man.

18. The September Plot

Following General Beck's resignation, Colonel Oster took over control of the resistance movement.[550] Throughout September as coup preparations intensified, Beck largely remained apart from the planning.[551] Oster was among those primarily responsible for securing the support of General Franz Halder, Beck's replacement as Chief of the General Staff, and his agreement for a military coup d'état. Oster correctly understood that Hitler was impervious to rational arguments.[552] Such a realization was an important step forward at the time. For much of the previous year, Beck had produced several memoranda. Each contained a similar message, that war was inadvisable unless the current military

[544] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 98
[545] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 680
[546] Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 228
[547] Taylor, *Munich: Price of Peace*, 733
[548] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 179
[549] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 277
[550] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 79
[551] Reynolds, *Treason was no Crime*, 172
[552] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 78

situation change. Beck's arguments were perfectly rational, and since he believed that the military situation would never change, the undercurrent was that Hitler should indefinitely postpone any offensive action. Oster correctly understood in August 1938 that the only hope of saving the peace was a coup d'état which would eliminate Hitler.[553] This represented a critical step forward in the thinking of the organized military resistance. Action for the most part was now aimed not at dissuading Hitler but rather at eliminating him.

In September 1938, the possibility of war hung heavily in the air as Hitler planned the invasion of Czechoslovakia. It was during this period that the so-called Oster Study (*Studie Oster*), a detailed plan for the takeover of Germany following Hitler's removal, was created by Oster under the supervision of Beck.[554] The attempt itself was to take place between the Western powers' declaration of intervention and Hitler's order to attack Czechoslovakia, at which point the Führer would have revealed himself as the criminal that Halder considered him to be.[555] The plan rested entirely on the belief that the British, and therefore the French, would never abandon Czechoslovakia. As one of his first moves, General Halder summoned Oster, on 27 August, and questioned him on potential plans for a coup, of which the new Chief of Staff appeared to be supportive.[556] Oster's next step was to enlist the support of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army General Walther von Brauchitsch. As emissary, Oster picked Erich Kordt, who it was hoped would be able to convince the General of the seriousness of British and French intentions to act should Hitler attack Czechoslovakia. However, Kordt was unable to secure any firm commitments from von Brauchitsch, a fact he dutifully reported back to Oster. Without the support of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, the coup would now have to rely on willing commanders. The most important was General Erwin von Witzleben, commander of the Berlin *Wehrkreis*. His troops would have to seize and secure key points in and around Berlin.[557] Having gained the support of von Witzleben, Oster and Hans Gisevius were able

[553] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 78
[554] Harold Deutsch, *The Conspiracy Against Hitler in the Twilight War* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1968), 36
[555] Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 87
[556] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 82
[557] Ibid, 103

to turn their attention to securing the active cooperation, or at least neutrality of the Berlin regular police which they did by 10 September.[558]

On 4 September, General Halder met with Dr. Hjalmar Schacht who agreed to become provisional head of a new Government in the event of a successful coup.[559] Goerdeler, the other obvious option, was out of the country at the time and did not return to Germany before the conclusion of the Munich Crisis. As plans for the coup were solidified by the second week of September, the conspirators had specifically chosen not to trouble themselves with political details.[560] As well, the issue of what was to be done with Hitler proved divisive and was largely left unresolved for the time being. News of Chamberlain's first visit stopped coup preparations in their tracks. It should be noted that Oster would have been willing to initiate the coup regardless of Britain's position as would von Witzleben; however Halder continued to refuse to act unless the British stood up to Hitler.[561] Therefore, if Oster wished to keep Halder, which was a prerequisite to the possibility of success, he would have to bend to his superior's wishes.[562]

On the morning of 15 September, members of the resistance discovered that Chamberlain was going to be meeting Hitler in person. At the time, Gisevius believed that it was merely a tactical gesture, designed to show the world that Hitler was wrong and unwilling to negotiate.[563] The news of Chamberlain's trip to Berchtesgaden had essentially drawn the plans to a complete halt.[564] However, from Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, and the only other person present during the Führer's and Prime Minister's meeting at Berchtesgaden, the resistance was informed of what had transpired.[565] Schmidt truthfully informed the conspirators that Hitler had stated he would not shrink from another world war.[566] While news of Chamberlain's visit in mid-September struck the resistance as a

[558] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 108
[559] Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 88
[560] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 110
[561] Ibid., 126
[562] Ibid., 126
[563] Gisevius, *To The Bitter End*, 321
[564] Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 94
[565] Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, 106
[566] Ibid., 106

complete surprise, hope was renewed when the Prime Minister returned home without reaching a settlement.[567] As a result, preparations continued.

On 20 September, the inner circle of the conspiracy met together at Oster's apartment. Despite the fact that political plans had never been the chief concern of the conspirators, they did endorse a revival of the monarchy under Prince Wilhelm, who would govern under a democratic political constitution.[568] The plan at the time called for the arrest of Hitler with a commando-type force under the control of Captain Heinz.[569] It was originally specified that Hitler was to be arrested, tried, and sentenced. Some conspirators such as Beck, Goerdeler, and Canaris were unwilling to support Hitler's outright assassination at this time.[570] Oster could not risk the destruction of the plan over any issue, much less about what was to be done with Hitler. After the meeting, Oster and Heinz stayed behind and agreed that Hitler needed to be killed.[571] Without informing some of their superiors within the conspiracy, it was agreed that Hitler would be shot while trying to escape, a common Nazi tactic.[572] Oster correctly understood that as long as Hitler remained alive, he was a threat.[573] Too many soldiers took their oath of loyalty to the Führer seriously to be spurred to action against the Nazi Regime as long as he lived. Once killed, the Army would be freed from its pledge of obedience. With the agreement of Oster and Heinz, there now existed a conspiracy within a conspiracy.

Plans for the coup were kept active due to Hitler's refusal to accept Chamberlain's generous terms. It should be noted that the September plot was dependant on Hitler being present in Berlin since the resisters could only secure troops for action within and around the capital city. Hitler's location from one day to the next was largely unknown. It was not until 24 September that he returned to Berlin and came within reach of the resisters, following his meeting with Chamberlain at Bad Godesberg.[574] In the intervening days between Godesberg

[567] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 132
[568] Ibid., 132
[569] Deutsch, *The Conspiracy*, 36
[570] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 133
[571] Manvell and Fraenkel, *The Canaris Conspiracy*, 42
[572] Deutsch, *The Conspiracy*, 36
[573] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 134
[574] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 866

and 28 September, the situation was as ideally suited as it ever would be for a successful coup d'état.

The conspirators still hoped that Hitler might be foolish enough to rebuff the British, which in turn would have allowed the coup to proceed. By 27 September, Captain Heinz had assembled his raiding party and sequestered them in several apartments in central Berlin.[575] More so than at any point in the future, everything was ready. Hitler's deadline for the British to secure his demands at Godesberg had been set for 2 p.m. on 28 September. It appeared that war would begin soon afterwards. At noon, General von Witzleben arrived at Halder's office to wait for the orders to start the putsch. However, in the middle of their conversation, word arrived that a conference between Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier and Mussolini had been proposed.[576] The conspirators felt completely defeated.[577] Had Chamberlain not reached his infamous agreement, and Hitler decided to attack Czechoslovakia, Oster's coup might have been able to overthrow the Nazi Regime.[578] A few days after the Munich Conference had concluded, Oster and Schacht sat around General von Witzleben's fireplace and burnt the plans.[579]

It should be noted that success of the coup was far from assured. During questioning, following the war, General Halder was asked about the possibility of a successful action in 1938. He responded that all he could say was that a coup attempt would have been executed.[580] Successful or not, an attempted putsch would have certainly shown the world that Hitler's position within Germany was not secure. In the end, for defenders of the German resistance, Hans Gisevius may have been accurate when he stated that "Chamberlain saved Hitler."[581] However, the British had only been told of the September plot in very general terms during Theodor Kordt's meeting with Halifax, at which point no details or dates were mentioned. Generally, Chamberlain treated the news with skepticism.[582] What little the British knew of the September plot, and it is clear that at best

[575] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 160
[576] Dulles, *Germany's Underground*, 46
[577] Gisevius, *To The Bitter End*, 326
[578] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 184
[579] Gisevius, *To The Bitter End*, 326
[580] Dulles, *Germany's Underground*, 49
[581] Gisevius, *To The Bitter End*, 326
[582] Colvin, *Vansittart In Office*, 306

they were vaguely informed, it did not affect British policy making. In sum, there is no evidence to suggest that it ever entered into Chamberlain's mind, or that of any other British statesmen, during the Munich Crisis. If he did save Hitler as Gisevius suggested, Chamberlain did so unwittingly.

19.1. Berchtesgaden

As Chamberlain stepped onto the plane on 15 September bound for Germany, it was the first time he had been on an extended flight. Some of the first news that he received upon landing in Germany was a radio broadcast demanding the annexation of the Sudeten areas to the Reich, a completely new demand.[583] Soon afterwards, the British Prime Minister inspected an honor guard, the "Death's Head Corps", according to Wilson, who were actually Totenkopf Concentration Camp guards.[584] On the way to the train station, now accompanied by Henderson, Chamberlain was delighted by the enthusiastic welcome of the crowds who gave him the Nazi salute and shouted '*Heil*!'[585] At Berchtesgaden, the Prime Minister reviewed another SS honor guard, this time the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, and then proceeded briefly to the Grand Hotel before being driven up to the Berghof.[586] After exchanging a few pleasantries in which Chamberlain expressed his desire to have Hitler visit England, to which the dictator wryly replied that he would be received with demonstrations of disapproval, the two leaders proceeded upstairs to talk, *Tête-à-tête*.[587] Chamberlain spoke no German, and Hitler no English, and as a result the conversation was translated through the Führer's interpreter Schmidt. Consequently, he is responsible for the only official transcript of the encounter, which was denied to the British following the conclusion of the summit.[588]

Chamberlain had come to Germany without a plan of action aside from a desire to meet Hitler and understand what he wanted. It had only been the day before, 14 September, that Henlein had declared that the Karlsbad points would no longer suffice, and only self-

[583] Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 300
[584] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 738
[585] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 366. Quoting Chamberlain Diary 19 September 1938
[586] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 738
[587] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.895, p.338
[588] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 739

determination would do.[589] The next day, an announcement of the SDP leaders' desire to be incorporated into the Reich was proclaimed.[590] A return to Germany had never been a demand of even the Nazi officials, who long envisioned 'home rule' within the Czechoslovakian state.[591]

Hitler's primary demand at the Berghof was self-determination for the Sudetenland; if Chamberlain accepted that principle, the Führer was prepared to discuss ways and means. If not, according to Hitler, then there was no reason to continue the conversation.[592] Self-determination was a powerful argument, since it was a principle that the British had accepted in the past. Chamberlain's personal opinion, which he conveyed to Hitler, was favorable to the principle of self-determination, and cession of the Sudetenland.[593] By the end of the Berchtesgaden talks, the Prime Minister had abandoned proposing any British plans and agreed to a solution of self-determination, either by plebiscite or outright cession.[594] As well, he believed during the meeting that the situation was much more critical than he had anticipated, and that rapid decisions would have to be taken if the situation was to be saved.[595] Hitler stated, honestly, that he would "face any war, and even the risk of a world war for this [the incorporation of three million ethnic Germans to the Reich]."[596] As the meeting concluded, Hitler promised Chamberlain not to march until a possible second meeting between the two leaders, assuming that the Czechoslovakian government accepted the Führer's demands. As the Prime Minister departed, he remarked privately that "I had established a certain confidence, which was my aim, and on my side, in spite of the hardness and ruthlessness I thought I saw in his face, I got the impression that here was a man who could be relied upon when he had given his word."[597] The single point which Hitler yielded, to hold his troops for the time being, until a further meeting could settle the dispute,[598] was actually no concession at all since the Army could not launch Operation Green until 1

[589] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.880, p.327
[590] Douglas, *In the Year of Munich*, 33
[591] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no. 106, p.197
[592] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.487, p. 796
[593] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 895, p. 341
[594] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 752
[595] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 367. Quoting Chamberlain Diary 19 September 1938
[596] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.487, p. 790
[597] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 367. Quoting Chamberlain Diary 19 September 1938
[598] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.487, p. 797

October. However, Chamberlain correctly understood that the dictator was not bluffing. He fully planned to invade Czechoslovakia. There is absolutely no evidence that Chamberlain's visit to the Berghof resulted in any slowdown in the pace of preparations for Operation Green.[599]

At Heston Airport, on 16 September, Chamberlain was greeted by Halifax and a general crowd of several hundred people. The Prime Minister went straight to 10 Downing Street and at 6 p.m., he met with the 'Inner Cabinet', Halifax, Simon and Hoare, as well as Vansittart, Cadogan, and Wilson.[600] Chamberlain arrived with two conclusions. Firstly, he believed that he had held Hitler for the moment and secondly, that nothing but self-determination for the Sudeten Germans would maintain the peace.[601] The next day, the full Cabinet met during which Lord Runciman recounted his experiences in Czechoslovakia, which Cooper described as "interesting of course, but quite unhelpful as he was unable to suggest any plan or policy."[602] Chamberlain then went on to describe Hitler as 'the commonest little dog he had ever seen,' but was nevertheless pleased with the good impression he had made on the dictator.[603] Up to this point no information concerning the Berghof conference had yet been given to their closest ally the French, and when this was pointed out on the afternoon of 17 September, Halifax remarked, "oh yes, the French of course; tell them to come at once."[604]

Throughout 18 September, the British and French leaders met, and argued over what should be done.[605] In the end, the French were willing to follow the British lead in respect to self-determination, which would now be managed through an International Commission, in exchange for a territorial guarantee for the remainder of Czechoslovakia.[606] The result of the series of meetings was the Anglo-French proposals. Sent to Czechoslovakia which had not been consulted at all, it stated that" In the light of these considerations both Governments have been compelled to the conclusion that the maintenance of peace and the safety of

[599] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 746
[600] Ibid., 747
[601] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 99
[602] Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 229
[603] Ibid., 229
[604] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 776
[605] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 928, p.373-400
[606] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 776

Czechoslovakia's vital interests cannot effectively be assured unless these areas are now transferred to the Reich."[607] Other terms included:

> plebiscite or barring the difficulty of that direct transfer of territory with over 50% German inhabitants administered by an International Body which would include a Czechoslovakian representative, and an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak State against unprovoked aggression, signed by His Majesty's Government. [608]

The provisions represented the complete destruction of the Czechoslovak state as it had existed since the Treaty of Versailles, and provided for the cession of territory to Germany that had never been part of the Reich. The terms concluded with a request for a reply at the earliest possible moment, since the Prime Minister wanted to resume his conversation with Hitler no later than 21 September.[609] After reviewing the Anglo-French proposals, the Czechoslovakian government on 20 September at 8 p.m. refused to comply with the terms.[610] Their response was a proposal for arbitration under the Czech-German Treaty of 1926. The Czechoslovakian government was not convinced that the mandated terms would bring peace.[611] The Anglo-French response was essentially an ultimatum, which promised that:

> "In rejecting the Franco-British proposition the Government of Czechoslovakia takes responsibility for bringing about Germany's recourse to force. [….] Czechoslovakia thus assumes a risk which we have consciously guarded against. Czechoslovakia ought herself to understand the conclusions which France could justifiably draw if the Franco-British proposal is not immediately accepted."[612]

The intent was clear: if Czechoslovakia rejected the terms, she would have to face Germany alone. By 5 p.m. on 21 September, the Czechoslovakian government had 'sadly' accepted the proposals under the 'unheard-of pressure' of the communications of the French and British Governments.[613] The Prime Minister now began to prepare for his second visit to Germany to tell the Führer the 'good news.'

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[607] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 937, p.405
[608] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 937, p.405
[609] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 937, p.405
[610] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 189
[611] Ibid., 189
[612] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 978, p.424
[613] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 1002, p.445

19.2. Bad Godesberg

As Chamberlain travelled once again to Germany, this time to Bad Godesberg on 22 September, he confidently believed that peace had been assured. As the meeting began, Chamberlain answered Hitler's question by asserting that the Anglo-French proposal had been accepted by the Czechs.[614] However, Hitler had already been informed of the Czechoslovakian acceptance and he quickly retorted that "I am very sorry but that is no longer any use."[615] It had been agreed at Cabinet that if Hitler demanded secession for the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia, then the Prime Minister would end the conversation and return home.[616] However, when such a demand was made, which was seen by Cabinet as a test of Hitler's good faith, Chamberlain instead engaged in a day and a half series of letters sent back and forth across the Rhine with the Führer. According to von Weizsäcker, Chamberlain made no use of tricks during the negotiations; he behaved like a businessman with legal training, and spoke in a parliamentary style.[617] For all his professionalism, or perhaps because of it, the Prime Minister was unable to wrestle even the slightest of concessions from Hitler by the end of 23 September. Meanwhile in London, Halifax was dealing with a request by the Czech Government that the British government agree to the mobilization of the Czechoslovakian armed forces. Mobilization had already been delayed once due to an order from Chamberlain from Germany.[618] Eventually at 4 p.m. on 23 September, Halifax gave British consent to Czech mobilization.[619]

Throughout Chamberlain's negotiations with Hitler, British officials in London were barely informed of the progress, or lack thereof, due to the infrequent updates from Sir Horace Wilson.[620] His telephone conversations with London are not part of the official Foreign Office archives.[621] During the course of the day, Chamberlain had requested a document from the Führer which clearly stated the German position.[622] At around ten thirty at night on 23 September, Ribbentrop, along with Hitler, presented the document to the

[614] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.562, p.870
[615] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.562, p.873
[616] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 191
[617] Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 152
[618] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 1031, p.462
[619] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no. 1049, p.483
[620] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*,194
[621] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1031, p.462
[622] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.574, p.892

British. Written entirely in German, it contained essentially the ideas and demands which Hitler had already stated in the course of previous conversations, and predicted that an agreement "might well be regarded as a turning point in Anglo-German relations."[623] As Ivone Kirkpatrick hurriedly translated the document into English for the Prime Minister, its central point was that the Sudetenland must be evacuated by Czech forces and handed over to German occupation by 26 September.[624] Following further talks, which had yet to produce any concessions on Hitler's part, Chamberlain remarked that the document was "an ultimatum and not a negotiation", to which the Führer retorted that it was entitled "Memorandum."[625] The concession Chamberlain was eventually able to extract from Hitler was a change in the time schedule from 26 September to 1 October. The Führer added that the Prime Minister was "one of the few" or "the only man" to whom he had ever made a concession.[626] In fact, the change in date was meaningless, since the German Army would not have been ready to march until 1 October.

At one thirty in the morning on 24 September, the meeting ended. Chamberlain and Hitler briefly spoke about the prospect of a general Anglo-German settlement and the two parted.[627] What became known as the Godesberg Terms were essentially what Chamberlain had found unacceptable the previous day with two minor revisions, and a seventy-two hour extension to 1 October for the Czechs to complete their evacuation of the Sudetenland.[628] While von Weizsäcker described Hitler's tactic at Godesberg as "bluffing,"[629] Chamberlain was correctly convinced that the Führer was not, and that an immediate invasion was being prepared.[630] The Prime Minister agreed to transmit the Godesberg Terms to Prague, without stating whether or not he supported the plan. The version that the British Minister in Prague, Basil Newton, gave to the Czechs included an error as the withdrawal date was marked 13 October instead of 1 October as previously agreed.[631] Once Chamberlain had arrived back in

[623] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.573, p.889
[624] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.583, p.904
[625] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1073, p. 504
[626] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.584, p.909
[627] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.583, p.907
[628] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 816
[629] Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 152
[630] Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich*, 110
[631] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1088, p.516

London, on 24 September, he met with the 'Inner Cabinet' which now included as advisors Vansittart, Cadogan, Wilson and Strang. That night Cadogan wrote in his diary:

> "Hitler's memo now in. It's awful. A week ago when we moved (or pushed) from 'autonomy' to cession, many of us found great difficulty in the idea of ceding people to Nazi Germany. We salved our consciences (at least I did) by stipulating it must be an 'orderly' cession-i.e. under international supervision, with safeguards for exchange of populations, compensation, &c. Now Hitler says he must march into the whole area *at once* (to keep order!) and the safeguards - and plebiscites! can be held *after!* This is throwing away every last safeguard that we had. P.M. is transmitting this 'proposal' to Prague. Thank God he hasn't yet recommended it for acceptance…"[632]

Cadogan, who had been supportive of the Prime Minister's policy of appeasement was to become clearly representative of a change in the prevailing mood of many.

During a Cabinet meeting on 25 September, Chamberlain suffered a major setback as Lord Halifax openly stated that his mind had begun to change and he thought that Britain could not advise the Czechs to accept Hitler's ultimatum. As well, if France was engaged in a war with Germany, Britain should help her ally.[633] Halifax credited, or blamed, his change in attitude on Cadogan, who had driven him home the night before in an attempt to stir some opposition to the Godesberg Terms out of the Foreign Secretary. Halifax told Cadogan on the morning of 25 September that "I'm very angry with you. You gave me a sleepless night. I woke at 1[a.m.] and never got to sleep again. But I came to the conclusion you were right, and at the Cabinet, when P.M. asked me to lead off, I plumped for refusal of Hitler's terms."[634] The central issue of Halifax's opposition was whether the British should press the Czechoslovakian government to agree to the Godesberg Terms, something which the Foreign Secretary felt unable to coerce them into accepting.[635] However, he would have been content had the Czechs chosen of their own free will to accept.[636] 25 September marked as far as the Cabinet was willing to allow Chamberlain to go in making concessions to Hitler,[637] and while the Godesberg Terms had already been sent to the Czechs, the Prime Minister was not allowed to insist on their acceptance. By 8 p.m. on 25 September, the Czechoslovakian Government had promised to abide by the pre-Godesberg, Anglo-French

[632] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 103 [Author's emphasis]
[633] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 261
[634] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 400
[635] Ibid., 401
[636] Ibid., 401
[637] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 105

proposals but would go no further. Shortly before their meeting with the French was supposed to begin, Chamberlain and Halifax received the official Czechoslovakian refusal of the Godesberg Terms.[638]

Since returning from Bad Godesberg, little had gone right for Chamberlain; he now faced serious opposition from one of his most trusted colleagues, Lord Halifax, which only served to embolden members who had already opposed the Prime Minister's efforts. As the meeting between French and British Ministers began at 10 Downing Street on the night of 25 September, it is clear that Chamberlain's aim was to destroy a French desire to wage an offensive war if one ever existed.[639] Prime Minister Daladier allowed himself to be essentially cross-examined by Sir John Simon as to what the French were committed to doing in the event of war.[640] Simon pressed Daladier for details in the event of a war; would French troops simply man the Maginot Line or take offensive action?[641] Following the meeting with the French, Chamberlain returned to Cabinet and presented an alternate plan. Another letter was to be prepared for the Führer, which described the Czech refusal and asked for patience, as a settlement by negotiation still remained a possibility if talks continued.[642] If the letter failed, Wilson, who had been chosen to deliver the message, was to give a further warning from the Prime Minister to the effect that "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."[643] Chamberlain had selected as messenger his strongest supporter, who was not a diplomat nor an expert in foreign affairs and spoke no German.[644]

At the same time as Wilson was travelling to Berlin, Churchill was received by the Prime Minister and Halifax in the Cabinet Room. Churchill suggested a declaration showing the unity of sentiment and purpose between Britain, France and Russia.[645] Following his

[638] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1092, p.518-519
[639] Gilbert and Gott, *Appeasers*, 161
[640] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1093, p.520-535
[641] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1093, p.527
[642] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1097, p.542
[643] Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace*, 874
[644] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 261
[645] Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 308

meeting, he spent most of the afternoon working on the approved press release with Reginald Leeper. The telegram which for the first time included a mention of Russia was one of the strongest warnings to date. Approved by Lord Halifax and released to the press at 8 p.m., it stated:

> "The German claim to the transfer of the Sudeten area has clearly been conceded by the French, British and Czechoslovak 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."[646]

It is unlikely that Chamberlain would have used such strong language. The Prime Minister reproached the Foreign Secretary for releasing the communiqué without first submitting it to him.[647] As well, the inclusion of Russia was done without prior consultation of the Soviet government.[648]

By the time Wilson arrived in Germany, he was greeted with news from Halifax that the French had definitely stated their intention of supporting Czechoslovakia by offensive measures if she were attacked. Such action would inevitably involve Britain in a general European war.[649] When Wilson finally arrived to meet with the Führer, Hitler was preparing to deliver a speech in the *Sportspalast*. The encounter did not go well. A professional civil servant, Sir Horace Wilson was no match for Adolf Hitler. Wilson's attempt to read Chamberlain's letter to the Führer barely succeeded as he got up and left the room, and after being persuaded to listen continually interrupted his guest.[650] Hitler demanded an affirmative reply from the Czechs to the terms established at Godesberg by 28 September at 2 p.m., less than two days away.[651] Otherwise, the Führer declared that he would smash Czechoslovakia.[652] In light of the situation, Wilson decided that "in view of intense emotion and frequent references to tonight's speech, it seemed better not to deliver [the] special message."[653]

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[646] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1111, p.550
[647] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*,150
[648] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 403
[649] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1111, p.550
[650] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1118, p.554-557
[651] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1118, p.557
[652] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1115, p.552-3
[653] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1116, p.552-3

Chamberlain reacted to Hitler's speech which declared that the cession of the Sudetenland was his last territorial demand, by stating "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."[654] Wilson did deliver the warning message the following morning, 27 September, but it was obviously too late to affect Hitler's speech of the night before which staked his own prestige on taking the Sudetenland by 1 October.[655] In response to the warning, Hitler stated that "he could not believe that Germany and England could find themselves at war, and he urged the Prime Minister to do all he could to induce Czechoslovakia to accept his memorandum."[656] Hitler said that he had no further message for the Prime Minister beyond his sincere thanks once again for his efforts to maintain peace.[657] Wilson reported to London and suggested that the Czech government should simply retreat past the line previously agreed to and allow German troops to occupy the Sudetenland.[658]

Hope for a peaceful settlement had not completely disappeared, and at roughly 7 p.m., Chamberlain sent Henderson a plan offering a new timetable for occupation, in individual steps to be completed by the end of October.[659]An hour later, Chamberlain announced in a public broadcast,

> "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here, because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing. It seems still more impossible that a quarrel which has already been settled in principle, should be the subject of war."[660]

Chamberlain's position at this late moment was exactly in step with everything he had pursued since his accession to the post of Prime Minister in May 1937. Certainly since March 1938, Chamberlain was unwilling to commit Britain to a war which he did not believe it could win to protect interests which were indefensible according to his Military

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[654] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.618, p.943
[655] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 263
[656] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1129, p.556-557
[657] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no. 634, p.963
[658] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1127, p.563
[659] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1140, p.572-573
[660] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 372

Chiefs. Yet, it should be noted that during the final two weeks of September there was no concerted effort to make a military view heard.[661]

On his own initiative, Duff Cooper mobilized the British Fleet, during Chamberlain's speech, and informed the Cabinet after the broadcast.[662] The mobilization of the Fleet was much more effective than any of the previous warnings, particularly Wilson's, at showing that Britain was prepared to support France should Germany attack Czechoslovakia.[663] According to Conwell-Evans, a member of the German Foreign Office reported to him that "the mobilization of the British Fleet was one of the decisive factors which prevented the attack on the Czechs."[664] Faced with mounting pressure from military leaders such as Göring, Raeder, von Brauchitsch and Halder, and the news of the British Fleet's mobilization, caused Hitler to waver late at night on 27 September.[665] Chamberlain, along with Wilson, drafted a message for Hitler and Mussolini. To Hitler, the Prime Minister wrote that he was ready to come to Berlin at once to discuss arrangements for the transfer of the Sudetenland, in a conference which would include Czechoslovakia, France and Italy.[666] A similar message was delivered to Rome, which requested that Mussolini inform Hitler of his willingness to be represented at such a conference.[667]

19.3. Munich

The idea of a conference had been mentioned several times over the previous six months and while Chamberlain had proposed the idea the day before, it was Hitler who invited him on 28 September to a meeting at Munich. Hitler's message of acceptance of a conference at Munich arrived in London as Chamberlain was speaking to the House of Commons, which had recently been reconvened. His speech which had gone on for over an hour was a sad recounting of the events which appeared to be leading to war, when he was

[661] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 345
[662] Gilbert and Gott, *Appeasers*, 171
[663] Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, 166
[664] Conwell-Evans, *None So Blind*, 148
[665] Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 314
[666] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1158 p.587
[667] *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1159 p.587

interrupted by a note from Sir John Simon.[668] After asking Sir John if he should announce publically the note's contents, he informed the House that

> "Signor Mussolini has accepted, and I have no doubt M. Daladier will also accept. I need not say what my answer will be. Mr. Speaker, I cannot say any more. I am sure that the House will be ready to release me now, to go and see what I can make of this last effort."[669]

The House erupted with emotion, relief, and wild cheering as it appeared that war had been averted.[670] The next day as Chamberlain left for his third trip to Germany in as many weeks, he was greeted by the entire Cabinet at Heston Airport, a demonstration orchestrated by Simon.[671] Throughout nearly all the memoirs and diaries of the men who participated in Munich, there is a sense of an anticlimax at the actual conference, the previous forty-eight hours had been the most tense. Duff Cooper remarked slightly laconically that after the Prime Minister left, he returned to war preparations in which decisions that normally took months were made in minutes, should Chamberlain fail to secure the peace.[672]

The British Prime Minister, once master of his policy of appeasement had by the time of the Munich Conference largely become a prisoner of his desire to prevent war.[673] Once at Munich, there was no attempt to return to the Anglo-French proposal, which had been accepted by the Czechs, nor formulate a new plan.[674] In reality, the Munich Conference was nothing more than a ceremony, the official representation of the abandonment of Czechoslovakia, to avoid a war in October 1938.[675] The four leaders, Chamberlain, Daladier, Mussolini and Hitler, debated a memorandum presented by the Italian leader. In fact, the accord had been written by von Weizsäcker, Neurath and Göring and accepted by Hitler before being presented to Mussolini.[676] Once again, the Czechs were not represented or consulted. In the end, the terms agreed to at Munich represented the acceptance of the Godesberg ultimatum,[677] whatever improvements such as the International Commission

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[668] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 374
[669] Ibid., 374
[670] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 403
[671] Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 241
[672] Ibid., 241
[673] Goldstein and Lukes, eds., *The Munich Crisis*, 290
[674] Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich*, 173
[675] Ibid., 173
[676] Gilbert and Gott, *Appeasers*, 178
[677] Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 317

would actually result in Czechoslovakia having to concede more territory. Oliver Harvey, wrote on 29 September, that the whole question was whether Chamberlain and Daladier would stand up to Hitler and Mussolini. Harvey doubted such a possibility, and continued that the Prime Minister had cut loose from his Cabinet, proper advisors, and never thought to take Halifax with him. If Chamberlain went too far, Harvey guessed that the result could be another Hoare-Laval pact.[678]

The terms of the Munich agreement were based completely on the document presented by Mussolini aside from a refusal on the part of Chamberlain to allow Poland and Hungary to claim areas where their minorities lived within Czechoslovakia.[679] Agreement had been reached by midnight but the copies of the papers were not ready for the Leaders signatures until 2 a.m. At which point, it was discovered that the grand inkwell contained no ink.[680] With that eventually resolved, Chamberlain asked Hitler for a further meeting on 30 September, and began preparing a document on Anglo-German relations.[681] It had been Chamberlain's goal since his accession to the Office of Prime Minister to achieve a general settlement with Germany which could assure the peace of Europe. When Chamberlain met Hitler on 30 September, for the last time, in the dictator's apartment, the Prime Minister produced a document on Anglo-German relations which Hitler readily agreed to sign. It stated:

> "We, The German Führer and Chancellor and the British Prime Minister, have had a further meeting to-day, and are agreed in recognising 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 symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.
>
> We are resolved that the method of consultation shall be the method adopted to deal with any other questions that may concern our two countries, and we are determined to continue our efforts to remove possible sources of difference, and thus to contribute to assure the peace of Europe."[682]

[678] Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries*, 201
[679] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.675, p.1014-1017
[680] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 403
[681] Ibid., 403
[682] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.676, p.1017 and *DBFP*, Third Series, Volume 2, no.1228, p.640

It was that piece of paper which Chamberlain waved in celebration at Heston Airport upon his return to Britain. Eleven months later Germany and Britain were engaged in the Second World War.

The exact motives behind Chamberlain's pursuit of Hitler's signature on an Anglo-German accord which promised that their respective countries would never go to war with each other remains unclear. Certainly the British Prime Minister hoped that Hitler would abide by the accord, but if he broke it, Chamberlain would have proof. With paper in hand, Chamberlain arrived at Heston Airport where a large crowd awaited his return. Duff Cooper, the only Minister to resign as a result of the Munich Accord apparently made the decision after he had seen the reports of the agreement in the papers on 30 September.[683] For Cooper, it was not just the Munich Agreement which angered him but the Anglo-German accord which was signed without consulting the Cabinet, Foreign Office experts or anybody for that matter. To Cooper that was not the way the Foreign Affairs of the British Empire ought to be conducted.[684]

Upon Chamberlain's return to London, the Prime Minister received a welcome normally reserved for conquering heroes. When he leaned out the window at 10 Downing Street, he had not previously planned on delivering a speech but did so in order to help disperse the huge crowd which had gathered.[685] Such was the mood when he uttered the now famous "This is the second time in our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honor. I believe it is peace for our time."[686] Soon afterwards, Chamberlain regretted his statement; less than a week later in the House of Commons, he asked people not to read into his words "used in a moment of some emotion, after a long and exhausting day, after I had driven through miles of excited, enthusiastic, cheering people."[687] In the end, perhaps more so than anything else, people have chosen to remember Chamberlain as the man who returned to London from Germany and proclaimed peace in our time. Whatever else can be said about Chamberlain, it cannot be argued that he was foolish enough to believe he had achieved permanent peace. He did believe that he had

[683] Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 246
[684] Ibid., 247
[685] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 381
[686] Ibid., 381
[687] Chamberlain, *In Search of Peace*, 217

made a good start towards reaching such a goal. Like Chamberlain when French Prime Minister Daladier arrived home, he was welcomed by a large cheering crowd, yet he had expected to be booed. Apparently while standing at the door of the plane while acknowledging and referring to the crowd, Daladier turned to his aide Alexis Léger and whispered, "those bloody fools."[688]

20. Conclusion

It was clear that the Munich Agreement was not an ideal solution to the Sudeten crisis. Ernst von Weizsäcker described it as the last happy day of his life, but went on to say that there were many in the opposition who saw the agreement as the second best solution, Hitler's removal being preferable to some.[689] According to Keith Feiling, Chamberlain disliked several aspects of the terms but felt that due to the extended Czech resistance to negotiations they were partly responsible for their fate.[690] The fact is that the German resistance had no impact upon the debate which preceded Munich, their recommendations having been neglected throughout the previous six months. When it appeared that a resistance request of a further warning was being heeded, ambassador Henderson refused to deliver the note and the matter was dropped. Clearly, for Chamberlain, Munich was never the success he hoped it to be. However, the agreement did not please Hitler either. There is strong evidence to suggest that he would have attacked regardless of the concessions, had not the British mobilized its Fleet and the French called up reservists, showing that they might fight during the evening of 27 September. As late as 1 p.m. on 27 September, Hitler had ordered seven divisions to be ready for action in accordance with Operation Green as soon as 30 September.[691] In the end, the British Foreign Office could report that Hitler had been encouraged and infuriated by Munich which had deprived him of a quick war, and he was focusing his anger on Prime Minister Chamberlain.[692]

[688] Gilbert and Gott, *Appeasers*, 180
[689] Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 157-158
[690] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 375
[691] *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 2, no.654, p.985
[692] Lord Jebb Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Jebb Gladwyn*, 86

The cession of the Sudetenland represented the absolute limit of what was tolerable to British statesmen and the public. Anything further threatened to split the government.[693] Cadogan described British policy following Chamberlain's return from Munich as "hoping for the best while preparing for the worst."[694] Lord Halifax referred to Munich as a horrible and wretched business, but the lesser of two evils.[695] For Halifax, and most others, if the only two options were between the Munich Accord and a general European War, the choice was nearly exclusively in favor of the settlement. As for the actual agreement, the Munich Accord did represent a technical improvement over the Godesberg Terms, but it also resulted in over seven hundred thousand ethnic Czechs being transferred to the German Reich.[696] Interestingly enough, it appears that the British lost their signed copy of the Munich agreement, a fact only discovered at the end of 1938 when an American magazine requested a picture for their year-end issue. Officials claimed that they had never received one, but following the conclusion of the war, within the captured German Foreign Documents, a copy of the agreement was found, along with a statement that one had been given to the British.[697]

This thesis began with the goal of reviewing the foreign contacts of the German resistance with the British Government in the hopes of discovering what, if any, effect the information provided by the resisters had on Chamberlain's policy culminating at Munich on 30 September 1938. It must be stated that there is no published British document which contains discussions surrounding the prospects for a successful coup d'état against Hitler in the period under discussion.[698] Simply put, there is no evidence that a possible putsch against Hitler ever entered into the Prime Minister's mind as he pursued his policy of appeasement. In the following year the situation would drastically change. However, it had been largely decided by early 1937 as to what policy course he would pursue in an attempt to secure a general settlement with Germany throughout 1938. Colvin noted that when Chamberlain's mind was made up, the British Prime Minister could be as hard in pursuit of

[693] Douglas, *In the Year of Munich*, 53
[694] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 93
[695] Birkenhead, *Lord Halifax*, 407
[696] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, 405
[697] Meehan, *The Unnecessary War*, 183
[698] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 272

his aims as any dictator.[699] However, while he might have been firm in his conviction of the correctness of appeasement, by the end of September 1938, he was hostage to his deep commitment to avoid war. The price Hitler demanded, the cession of the Sudetenland to the Reich, was acceptable to Chamberlain;[700] after all it was the Czechs and not the British who suffered first and foremost from the accord. The warnings that Britain, and France, might suffer later from the loss of an ally in Czechoslovakia had little impact and could not compare with the argument against a general European War. In a sense, most German resistance envoys arrived far too late to have any effect on Chamberlain's policy which had been set, with respect to Czechoslovakia by March 1938 at the latest.

It is important to remember what exactly the German resistance was asking the British to do. Unfortunately, the tactics the opposition had adopted were the exact opposite of the British, for they sought confrontation where Chamberlain had hoped to avoid it.[701] To support a group of resisters against an established dictator could result in the war with Germany which the entire British plan was designed to prevent.[702] British foreign policy was based on what was believed to be the most sensible path open and was built upon the opinions, views, and desires of numerous members of the British Foreign Office as well as the Prime Minister. However, there was a surprising lack of consideration of Germany's potential weaknesses. What government on earth would abandon their policy course based on the statements and opinions of vaguely defined resisters? At the same time, the majority of the resistance envoys attempted to alter British policy at a point in time when Chamberlain had already decided upon personal diplomacy to solve the conflict.[703]

One of the most important problems that the resistance envoys encountered while abroad was the inability, and at times unwillingness, of British officials to distinguish between Hitler's and the resistance's goals. Vansittart and his colleagues did not understand that German Conservatives and nationalists, who made up the majority of the resistance, could be moral and religious men who were appalled by the lawlessness, brutality and

[699] Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, 261
[700] Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy*, 125
[701] Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 78
[702] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 277
[703] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 75

illegality of the Nazis.[704] There was a great deal of British suspicion that the conservative, and monarchist, Goerdeler differed from the Nazis perhaps in method but not in aim. Therefore, in 1938, the resistance did not constitute a credible substitute to Hitler whose true nature had yet to fully reveal itself.[705] It should be remembered that many of the British officials had lived and worked through a war against Imperial Germany only twenty years earlier and surely the prospect of a new government composed of Generals, nationalists and monarchists was no more pleasing than Hitler's Reich. After all, the Foreign Office and certainly Chamberlain, must have hoped throughout 1938 that Hitler might yet be reasonable. At the same time, Chamberlain had worked hard to build up his credibility, through two years worth of concessions which would be completely lost if there was a putsch.[706]

The British had difficulty in distinguishing between Hitler and his self-described opponents. Such was certainly the problem which developed between Goerdeler and Vansittart after April 1938 when the resister suggested that Czechoslovakia should cede her Sudeten-German territories to Germany. By emphasizing German territorial claims instead of, or at the very least, along with basic morality, the envoys of the resistance, particularly Goerdeler, miscalculated.[707] In the end, many in Britain could hardly distinguish between Hitler and his self-described opponents who endorsed so many of the Führer's demands.[708]

However distasteful it might appear today, the logic in 1938 was relatively simple: why support an opposition group that made the same requests as the current Regime? In the end, for Whitehall, the Nazis appeared to be a preferable risk compared to a German government led by nationalist Generals.[709] The resistance's territorial demands did not impress the British as Cadogan once referred to one of Goerdeler's proposals as 'too much like *Mein Kampf*.'[710] As Professor Hoffmann has stated, "distasteful as dictators were, they held power and represented reality, conspirators were wild cards at best."[711] It would have

[704] Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy*, 76
[705] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 21
[706] Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusions*, 168
[707] Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 78
[708] Ibid., 78
[709] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 108
[710] Cadogan, *Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 128
[711] Hoffmann, "Question of Western Allied Cooperation", 440

been a staggering step to support an internal coup against an established, and apparently legally elected Regime. This was a move which the British were not willing to make. After all, the form of government in Germany was an internal question. The British technically had no right to intervene.[712]

The Prime Minister, and especially Henderson, feared that working with, and even receiving, German resistance emissaries could compromise relations with the Nazis with whom the British had regular diplomatic relations.[713] Along with resistance envoys, the Prime Minister listened to the supposedly expert advice of his ambassador in Berlin. Henderson influenced September 1938 in three distinct ways. He was against and ultimately succeeded in rejecting another warning on 9 September, he was involved in the evolution of Plan Z, and he advised Chamberlain not to be swayed by the claims of so-called members of the German opposition like Goerdeler and Kleist.[714] While it can be argued that it was not Henderson's job to assist the opposition,[715] his advice was a strong voice against the German resistance which served to reinforce Chamberlain's belief in the correctness of his policy.

The British often politely received the resisters and regarded them as possible informants but never treated them as allies and viewed them with constant suspicion. In the end, British national interests needed peace more than an alliance with an uncertain and vaguely defined resistance group, of which little was known.[716] British national self-interest and the desire to keep the dominions united were important factors which demanded peace more than possible regime change in Germany. With hindsight, a different case can be made. However, Chamberlain could not predict the future. He believed Britain was not prepared for war, and could not risk it by listening to self-proclaimed resisters who, aside from Goerdeler, suddenly appeared at the height of an international crisis.

It can be safely said that Chamberlain was probably as vital to appeasement as Hitler was to Nazism.[717] Whether appeasement was the correct policy in 1938 will continue to be debated far into the future, but it can be said that Chamberlain should not be severely judged

[712] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 113
[713] Neville, *Appeasing Hitler*, 83
[714] Ibid., 95
[715] Ibid., 83
[716] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 110
[717] Rock, *British Appeasement*, 55

for his unwillingness to heed the German resistance in the final weeks before Munich. Some have argued that appeasement was the only option open to him upon his becoming Prime Minister, and the events leading to Munich were inevitable. Others believe that the Prime Minister made choices to follow a path of appeasement among alternative policies.[718] It can be said that Chamberlain's personal beliefs led him to pursue appeasement while neglecting other policy courses. However, the majority of his colleagues in Cabinet were generally supportive, aside from rare moments of independence. Chamberlain's personality, his belief in irregular solutions and his tendency to treat Cabinet and particularly Parliament as an afterthought has enhanced the criticism of appeasement.[719] From June 1938 onwards, the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee, which Chamberlain was responsible for creating, did not meet once until after Munich as decisions came to rest entirely in the hands of the Prime Minister. When Chamberlain chose to consult those around him, he turned towards the Inner Cabinet, a group of individuals entirely supportive of his plans. For Ian Colvin, the real issue throughout the summer of 1938 was not what the Prime Minister wanted to do, but the way he did it. Without assistance or support from anyone else, the final outcome at Munich was exclusively due to Chamberlain.[720]

The history of the German resistance, and particularly its foreign contacts, is without a doubt a history of failure.[721] The British government was not deterred from its official policy of appeasement culminating at the Munich Conference. However, that failure should in no way detract from the nobility of the resisters' actions, or reduce the importance of their attempts at preventing the Second World War. Their failure cannot be completely attributed to their actions. The policies of the British government, typified by appeasement, were created over several years, slow to respond to changes and energetically led by Chamberlain. Government policy is rarely ideally suited to be quickly altered, particularly as a result of messages received clandestinely from figures claiming to be resisters. With respect to foreign contacts, the inability of the resistance to secure British support must at the very least be regarded as a joint failure; unfortunately, it was predictable.

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[718] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 347
[719] Rock, *British Appeasement*, 84
[720] Colvin, *Vansittart In Office*, 285
[721] Klemperer, *The Search For Allies Abroad*, 6

Less than a year later, on 3 September 1939 as war on Germany was declared, Chamberlain told the House of Commons that "Everything I have worked for, everything I have hoped for, everything I have believed in during my public life, has crashed into ruins.[…] I trust that I may live to see the day when Hitlerism has been destroyed, and a liberated Europe has been re-established."[722] Chamberlain died a little more than a year later, now out of office, replaced by Winston Churchill, one of the staunchest anti-appeasers. It would take over four more years of war, and millions of lives to achieve the destruction of the Third Reich. In the end, it may be said that Chamberlain's attempt to preserve the peace in Europe was futile. Yet, his failure should not detract from an honorable objective.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9)

[722] Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 416

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