Opponents of Hitler in search of foreign support: the foreign contacts of Carl Goerdeler, Ludwig Beck, Ernst von Weizsäcker and Adam von Trott zu Solz, 1937-1940

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Abstract

This thesis examines the attempts made by Carl Goerdeler, Ludwig Beck, Ernst von Weizsäcker and Adam von Trott zu Solz to obtain the support of the British government in their effort to overthrow the Nazi regime between 1937 and 1940. The circumstances surrounding each mission are detailed, including the degree of readiness on the part of the German opposition for a coup d'état and the particular form of support sought from the British to increase the chance of success in each case. Consideration is given to the factors which conditioned the British reaction to the resistance emissaries, including the British foreign policy imperatives of the moment, important events in European relations and the attitude and degree of influence wielded by the statesmen to whom the German resistance emissaries addressed themselves.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine les tentatives de Carl Goerdeler, Ludwig Beck, Ernst von Weizsäcker et Adam von Trott zu Solz d'obtenir, entre les années 1937 à 1940, le soutien du gouvernement britannique afin de renverser le régime nazi. Les circonstances de chaque mission sont exposées en détail, y compris la disposition de la résistance allemande à effectuer un coup d'état et le genre précis de soutien demandé aux Britanniques pour augmenter les chances de succès des missions respectives. Une attention particulière est prêtée aux facteurs qui ont influencé la réaction des Britanniques aux émissaires de la résistance, dont les lignes directrices de la politique étrangère britannique de l'époque, les événements fondamentaux des relations européennes, et les comportements des chefs d'état contactés par la résistance ainsi que leur influence.

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Introduction

From the time of Adolf Hitler's seizure of power in January 1933, there were individuals within the German state apparatus who opposed his rule and engaged in activities aimed at bringing about the end of the Nazi dictatorship. By the later 1930s, these individuals had coalesced to form a resistance movement[1] whose objective was the overthrow of the Nazi state. Between 1937 and 1940, members of this resistance movement attempted on numerous different occasions to secure foreign support, especially that of the British government, in their bid to remove Hitler from power.

The primary objective of the German opposition was the preservation of peace in Europe, an aim that stood counter to Hitler's decision to expand German territory by military conquest. Having determined that Hitler posed a serious threat to peace, order, stability and sound government both in Germany and in Europe, the German resisters resolved to remove him from power. They sought to obtain foreign co-operation, particularly that of the British government, to improve their chances of effecting a successful coup d'état.

The motivations and goals which prompted the German resistance to seek the support of the British government varied between 1937 and 1940 according to the German domestic situation, the readiness of the opposition to launch a coup, the string of crises which then characterised international relations in Europe and the evolution of British foreign policy. During the Sudeten crisis of 1938, the emissaries of the German resistance tried to persuade the British government to adopt an uncompromising position vis à vis Hitler's territorial demands in

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[1] It should be noted that under the conditions of extreme oppression which existed in Nazi Germany, resistance to the régime may be defined as any statement or action which indicated disagreement with or criticism of the policies and practices of the government. Resistance may have involved any action the objective of which was to obstruct the aims of the régime. For the purpose of this study, however, I will employ *German resistance movement* to mean those who actively engaged in the attempt to bring down the state in an organised fashion. Examples of decrees introduced by the Nazis which were designed to suppress all criticism of the state include *Decree of the Reich President against Treason toward the German People and Against High Treasonous Machinations*, dated 28 February 1933. This decree made the communication of statements of fact to foreign governments punishable by imprisonment, regardless of whether the information reported was true or false and regardless of whether the particular foreign government was already aware of the information. *Reichgesetzblatt I, 1933*, 85-7.
The *Decree of the Reich President for Defence against Insidious Attacks against the Government of the National Resurgence*, dated 21 March 1933, made uttering a factually untrue statement which could cause harm to state interests or to the stature of the government a crime punishable by three years to life in prison if the statement was intended to cause a disturbance among the German people. In certain cases, the punishment could be execution. *Reichgesetzblatt I, 1933*, 135.
The *Decree of the Reich Government for the Constitution of Special Courts*, issued on 21 March 1933, provided for the establishment of special courts (*Sondergerichte*). These special courts were invested with the authority to arrest and imprison suspects for unlimited periods of time. The special courts were authorised to maintain concentration camps. The judge in such a court could render a decision without hearing evidence. *Reichgesetzblatt, I, 1933*, 136.

the hope that such a stance would discourage the dictator and save the peace. Emissaries of the resistance movement continued to initiate contact after the Sudeten crisis, although with diminished hope of persuading the British government to stand firm. After the outbreak of war in September 1939, the principal aim of the resisters was to obtain favourable conditions from the British for a post-Hitler government of the resistance, which would be installed following the overthrow of the Nazi régime.

There were, then, several underlying aims that were common to all the contacts initiated by the German resistance. The preservation or restoration of peace was the first priority. Before September 1939, German resisters sought to avert war by warning the British of Hitler's bellicose intentions. After the war had begun, the resisters hoped to restore peace by launching a coup d'état against the Nazi régime with the approval or support of the British government.[2]

In approaching the British government, members of the German resistance also sought to signal the uninterrupted existence of the 'other' Germany who abhorred the ideology and practices of the Nazi régime and who remained committed to the principles of justice and freedom. The resisters sought to establish a connection with a government that continued to uphold the same values that they were struggling to restore in Germany. Finally, they sought to obtain basic assurances from the British that would serve to support and strengthen the resolve of those within Germany who were determined to vanquish the Nazi régime. Specifically, the German resistance wanted to secure some assurance from British statesmen that they would recognise a post-Hitler government as legitimate and would not capitalise on the period of internal weakness that would inevitably follow the dissolution of the state. Second, the resisters hoped to obtain some settlement regarding frontiers. In trying to secure these assurances, the resisters sought to ensure the political stability of Germany after the removal of Hitler from power. Members of the resistance knew that a post-Hitler government which had compromised Germany's political independence or territorial integrity would have little chance of success and the country would thus be left vulnerable to chaos. Further, while many members of the German opposition were prepared to take action against the Nazi régime regardless of any assurances which the British might offer, most of the senior military commanders, whose participation was

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[2] With reference to the winter of 1939-40, Permanent Undersecretary of State (*Staatssekretär*) in the German Foreign Office, Ernst von Weizsäcker writes: "[I]ch hatte nichts im Sinn als Frieden. Hitler wäre vor, in oder nach dem Friedensschluß abzuschütteln gewesen, so wie die Umstände es am ehesten gestatteten." Ernst von Weizsäcker, *Erinnerungen* (München, 1950), 272. In the English translation: "[M]y only idea was peace. Hitler, I thought, could be shaken off before, during or after the conclusion of peace, just as circumstances permitted." Ernst von Weizsäcker, *Memoirs of Ernst Weizsäcker* (Chicago, 1951), 219

crucial to the success of a coup d'état, were not willing to act before having such guarantees in hand.

The German resistance did not succeed in securing the co-operation of the British government. A number of factors must be included in an assessment of the reasons for this outcome. Political, diplomatic and military considerations affected the British response to each German emissary. The evolution of British foreign policy was a particularly important determinant in the reaction of the nation's statesmen to approaches by the German resistance. Opposition emissaries attempted at certain points to steer the course of British diplomacy in directions that ran counter to the government's foreign policy. During the 1938 Sudeten crisis, for instance, although the aims of the German opposition and the British government converged on their mutual desire for peace, their proposed methods differed. Emissaries of the German resistance movement sought to obtain from the British government a firm commitment to defend Czechoslovakia in the event of a German invasion. They believed that a firm and preferably public declaration that Britain and France would go to war against Germany if she attacked Czechoslovakia would stop Hitler from pursuing his belligerent plans. This request contravened the policy of appeasement that the British had adopted towards Hitler, which was designed to avoid war at all costs.

A conciliatory policy vis à vis the Nazi dictatorship was regarded in Britain as both necessary and desirable. This belief arose from a particular reading of the limits of British power, which was seen as being circumscribed by the economic and military weaknesses of the country and by the diversion of resources necessary to finance overseas commitments.[3] Further, Britain was a war-weary nation whose most ardent desire since the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 had been the maintenance of peace on the European continent. Finally, the conviction that Germany harboured legitimate grievances arising from the Treaty of Versailles had considerable currency in Britain and further inclined British statesmen to accommodate Hitler. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain believed that through negotiation, conciliation and compromise, he could induce Hitler to curtail his territorial ambitions and to pursue limited aims peacefully. Consequently, Chamberlain balked at issuing a declaration which could lead to Britain's involvement in a military conflagration. The resisters' proposals would have entailed a reversal of the direction of British foreign policy. They thus had little hope of success in persuading the British government to adopt the alternative policy that they proposed.

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[3] *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (*DBFP*), Second Series, Vol. 19, No. 316, p. 513

Relations between the German opposition and the British government were further complicated by the official positions of many of those who belonged to the resistance movement. To attempt to subvert the Nazi régime from outside the power structures of the state would have been virtually futile. The hope of bringing down the system from within prompted many resisters to remain in their positions. Of necessity, they operated under the guise of officials loyal to the state, remaining in positions that they had held prior to Hitler's seizure of power, in, for example, the *Auswärtiges Amt* (Foreign Office) and the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht / Amt Ausland / Abwehr* (Military Intelligence).[4] The continued service to the Nazi state of many resisters made it difficult at times for their British contacts to untangle the loyalties and objectives of the German emissaries, to trace the messages back to their sources, to differentiate between the duplicitous and the genuine opponent of Hitler, to distinguish the resister from the official title which he bore in order to pursue treasonous activities. The reaction of British statesmen to German resisters thus ranged from extreme caution to scepticism to distrust to outright disbelief and unequivocal dismissal and further reduced the chances of reaching a mutually acceptable agreement.

Finally, the German resistance was composed of several disparate groups and individuals working in isolation and sometimes in ignorance of each other's existence. Resistance cells were often unaware of the initiatives undertaken by other resisters. While co-operation increased among the branches of the resistance, complete co-ordination never existed.[5] The British government was thus confronted with numerous messages from different groups, sometimes containing conflicting information or divergent requests, thereby further complicating the relations between the resisters and their British contacts.

I will detail the contacts initiated by Dr Carl Goerdeler, General Ludwig Beck, Ernst von Weizsäcker, Drs Theodor and Erich Kordt and Dr Adam von Trott zu Solz. The approaches

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[4] Erich Kordt accepted the position of head of the Ministerial Bureau in the German Foreign Ministry on 5 February 1938 with great hesitation. He describes the decision-making process which led him to take up the appointment: "My brother [Theodor, Chargé d'Affaires at the German Embassy in London] and I seriously considered to leave Germany as all opposition inside of Germany had ignominiously failed. A friend of mine, in Geneva, Max Beer, a journalist and an immigrant of the early days of the Nazi-régime, who openly agitated against Hitler, strongly advised me against such a course. He convinced me that it was pointless to try to work against Hitler from outside of Germany as long as I had an opportunity to oppose the party from within the machinery of the Foreign Office." Supporting Memorandum to the curriculum vitae of Dr. Erich Kordt, p. 1, Kordt Papers, 157/30, Institut für Zeitgeschichte (IfZ)

[5] Helmuth James Graf von Moltke commented in a letter of March 1943 to his friend Lionel Curtis on the "lack of unity, lack of men, lack of communications" which hindered the resistance movement. Letter from Helmuth von Moltke to Lionel Curtis, Stockholm, 25 March 1943 in Michael Balfour and Julian Frisby, *Helmuth von Moltke: A Leader Against Hitler* (London, 1972), 216, 220

made by Ewald von Kleist Schmenzin and Dr Josef Müller, which will also be detailed in this thesis, were orchestrated by Beck. I will describe the circumstances surrounding each mission, including the degree of readiness on the part of the German opposition for a coup and the particular form of support sought from the British to increase the chance of success in each case. I will devote consideration to the factors that conditioned the British reaction to the resistance emissaries, including the foreign policy imperatives of the moment, important events in European relations and the attitude and degree of influence wielded by the particular statesman to whom the emissary addressed himself.

The British foreign policy decision to accommodate Hitler was an important factor which undermined the possibilities for the conclusion of an agreement between the German resistance and the British government. I will therefore describe and assess the policy of appeasement in some detail, with the aim of showing how this policy hindered the efforts of the resisters. The time period under examination will be divided into four main periods. Prior to the Munich Agreement at the end of September 1938, British foreign policy was firmly set on the course of appeasement, with a varying, but fairly high degree of support across a wide swath of British society, among Cabinet Ministers, the Conservative Party, the Foreign Office, the military and the British public. After the Sudeten crisis, and especially after the German occupation of Prague in March 1939, as Hitler showed himself to be increasingly belligerent and unreasonable, opposition to appeasement rose in Britain and opinion in the Cabinet, in Parliament and among the public shifted in favour of a firm stance vis à vis Nazi Germany. Chamberlain, however, was not to be diverted from his pursuit of peace through compromise, believing that threats of force and defensive alliances would only provoke Hitler to aggression. He refused to abandon appeasement altogether, on occasion circumventing his Cabinet and the Foreign Office in pursuit of his policy and thereby undermining his government's official policy. Chamberlain's stalwart championing of the policy of appeasement was a significant obstacle for the German resisters in their bid to obtain a firm threat of British military intervention on behalf of Czechoslovakia.

During the summer of 1939, emissaries of the resistance urged the British government to pre-empt Hitler and conclude an agreement with the Soviet Union in order to stall Hitler's war plans and to give the resistance movement time to recreate the necessary conditions for a coup. Now, the resisters were confronted by British reluctance to enter into an alliance with the Soviet Union. Finally, after the outbreak of war, the British government was eager to end hostilities as quickly as possible. At the same time, however, the British were also beginning to formulate war

aims that precluded the possibility of reaching an agreement with the German resistance movement.

Chapter 1: Historiography

1.1 Historiography of Appeasement

Historical interpretation concerning the wisdom of the policy of appeasement may be divided into three broad categories. In the years immediately following the outbreak of the war, the works that delivered unequivocal denunciations of Chamberlain's policy held sway.[6] Such works tended to be highly polemical and did not offer balanced judgements and rational, detached analyses of the events in question. The 1940 publication of *Guilty Men* by CATO, a pseudonym for Frank Owen, Michael Foot and Peter Howard, exemplified the literature that condemned appeasement as a fatally misguided, irresponsible policy, the result of which had been to drag Britain and the world into another devastating war. The authors of *Guilty Men* level a litany of accusations against British leaders who followed the policy of accommodating Hitler, while failing to recognise the looming threat of German aggression and neglecting to arm Britain with adequate defences to meet the ever-increasing likelihood of that threat. The authors employ a hyperbolic tone saturated in moral outrage guaranteed to rouse the fury and indignation of their readership. According to the authors, Britain's leaders had thrust the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) into a doomed military contest against the vastly superior German Armed Forces.[7]

Other works appeared in the months following the Munich Agreement and during the war that judged the pursuit of the policy of appeasement to have been a grave error. These works include Simon Haxey's *England's Money Lords, Tory M.P.*, Steven Macgregor's *Truth and Mr. Chamberlain*, R.W. Seton-Watson's *From Munich to Danzig*, Sir Norman Angell's *For What Do We Fight?* and Hubert Ripka's *Munich: Before and After*, all published in 1939.

These condemnatory works were countered by the literature generated by Chamberlain's adherents, which was equally polemical and unbalanced in its analysis of events. Stuart Hodgson's *The Man Who Made the Peace: Neville Chamberlain* (1938), Duncan Keith Shaw's *Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain* (1939) and Derek Walker-Smith's *Neville Chamberlain: Man of Peace* (1940) all praised Chamberlain's personal style of diplomacy and his commitment to

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[6] Patrick Finney, "Introduction," in *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1997), 12; Frank McDonough, *Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Road to War* (New York, 1998), 2-3; Robert Caputi, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (London, 2000), 17

[7] CATO [pseudonym for Frank Owen, Michael Foot, Peter Howard], *Guilty Men* (London, 1940), 10, 14 and *passim*

avoiding war. Chamberlain, argued his supporters, could not be faulted because Hitler had not bargained in good faith.[8]

Sir Keith Feiling published his biography of Chamberlain in 1946. Feiling portrayed his subject in sympathetic terms, arguing that Chamberlain harboured a passionate hatred for war and that all of his policy initiatives had been directed at preventing the outbreak of armed hostilities.[9] In Feiling's view, Chamberlain believed that he had achieved the first step on the road to an enduring European peace with the signing of the Munich Agreement. Unlike other writers, who have castigated Chamberlain's conclusion as an example of utter stupidity, Feiling strikes an apologetic note, insisting that Chamberlain deserves no blame for expecting all statesmen to ardently desire peace. "Chamberlain made himself the champion of a common humanity;" writes Feiling. "Believing that all men in all nations must desire peace, he took too large comfort from every token that reached him, and failed by a noble infirmity, of hoping too much from human nature."[10] Thus, according to Feiling, Chamberlain was the victim of Hitler's mendacity and depravity, rather than the perpetrator of ill-considered policies.

Winston Churchill published the first volume of his *History of the Second World War* in 1948. *The Gathering Storm* tipped the balance decisively in the debate concerning the wisdom of the policy of appeasement. Churchill was widely regarded as the man who had successfully navigated the nation through the war to victory and renewed peace, a feat that automatically lent great weight to his conclusions for readers in the immediate post-war era.[11] Churchill's negative assessment of Chamberlain's policy was to set the tone for the historical literature concerning appeasement until the middle of the 1960s. Churchill's work was buttressed by the memoirs of a number of his colleagues, including Anthony Eden, Alfred Duff Cooper, Leo Amery and Robert Boothby, all of whom expressed sharp criticisms regarding the policy of appeasement.[12]

Churchill portrays Chamberlain as relentlessly and foolishly pursuing what he perceived to be the correct course of action in undertaking negotiations with Hitler. In Churchill's view,

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[8] Stuart Hodgson, *The Man Who Made the Peace: Neville Chamberlain: A Study* (New York, 1938), 133; Derek Walker-Smith, *Neville Chamberlain: Man of Peace* (London, 1940), 318-19; Duncan Keith Shaw, *Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1939), 3

[9] Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946), 321

[10] Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 360

[11] Caputi, *Chamberlain*, 51

[12] The memoirs of Anthony Eden (1st Earl of Avon) were published in two volumes: T*he Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon: Facing the Dictators* and *The Reckoning* published in 1962 and 1965 respectively. Alfred Duff Cooper's memoir, *Old Men Forget*, was published in 1954. *The Unforgiving Years, 1929-1940*, the third volume of Leo Amery's memoirs, *My Political Life*, was published in 1955. Robert Boothby's memoir, *I Fight to Live*, was published in 1947.

Chamberlain was far too confident in his ability to impose his will on Hitler. Chamberlain also exhibited a critical lack of flexibility, being incapable of reviewing the situation in realistic terms and pursuing an alternative policy once his strategy of accommodation had clearly failed. Chamberlain, writes Churchill, "had formed decided judgements about all the political figures of the day [. . .] and felt himself capable of dealing with them. His all-pervading hope was to go down to history as the Great Peacemaker; and for this he was prepared to strive continually in the teeth of facts, and face great risks for himself and his country."[13] Churchill states vehemently that appeasement was the wrong way of dissuading the dictators from pursuing policies of aggressive invasion of other countries. Appeasement only served to raise the stature of the dictators at home and whetted their appetites for further conquest while offering reassurance that the West was not willing to run any risks to prevent such acts of aggression.[14]

A J P Taylor sparked a fierce historical debate with the publication of *The Origins of the Second World War* in 1961. In this work, Taylor rejects the entrenched interpretation of appeasement as mistaken and morally wrong. Taylor argues that the Versailles Treaty was inadequate and full of inequities. Germany's complaints were legitimate and deserved to be rectified. Chamberlain was therefore right to address these grievances in the interest of preserving peace in Europe.[15] Chamberlain's conciliatory approach was successful in defusing the Sudeten crisis and would have worked in the summer of 1939 if events had not spiralled beyond his control. Forced by parliamentary and public opinion to stand up to Hitler, Chamberlain reluctantly extended a guarantee of military assistance to Poland. Notwithstanding the Anglo-Polish treaty, Hitler expected that he would be able to resolve the Danzig dispute to his satisfaction using the same methods as during the Sudeten crisis: he would threaten force and Chamberlain would apply pressure on the Poles to make concessions. If the Poles had not been so foolishly intransigent, argues Taylor, Chamberlain would have arranged matters to Hitler's satisfaction, thereby averting war. According to Taylor, Hitler neither planned nor began the war. Both Britain and Germany tumbled inadvertently and unwillingly into war against each other.[16]

In the mid-1960s, a revisionist school of interpretation arose which challenged the assumption upon which the arguments of CATO, Churchill and others were based, namely that British policymakers had freely chosen appeasement over a policy of firm deterrence. Instead,

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[13] Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston, 1948), 222
[14] Ibid., 244-8
[15] A J P Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1963), 172-3
[16] Ibid., 335-6

argue the revisionist historians, the foreign policy alternatives available to the British leadership were narrowly circumscribed by a scarcity of resources and a plethora of other commitments. Revisionist historians argue that British politicians and policy makers were operating under so many constraints that appeasing the dictators was the only viable option. Beyond the great aversion to war of a country whose prosperity depended on trade and the maintenance of the status quo, Britain lacked dependable allies and could not rely on the assistance of the Dominions. Britain was economically weak and a strong anti-war sentiment among the public prevented the diversion of sufficient resources to facilitate rapid rearmament on a scale comparable to that of Germany. Patrick Finney refers to the revisionist argument as "massively overdetermined." In other words, according to the revisionist interpretation, British statesmen were confined to a narrow path; external circumstances eliminated all but the policy of appeasement. In 1967, the Labour government in Britain passed the Public Records Act, which shortened the restriction on access to government archives from 50 to 30 years.[17] Robert Skidelsky notes that access to government archives and a more sympathetic representation of appeasement have coincided. "[O]n any but the most resolute historian, all those memoranda have the same effect as they had on the Ministers for whom they were first produced: to show that nothing different could possibly have been done."[18] Finney concurs, observing that revisionist historians have tended to accept too unquestioningly and uncritically the appeasers' assessments of the limitations by which they were bound and their explanations for the policies they pursued.[19]

David Dilks puts forth a revisionist interpretation of appeasement. In a 1987 article, "'We must hope for the best and prepare for the worst': The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937-1939," Dilks argues that appeasement was the only policy which British statesmen could have pursued, given the circumstances which existed in the 1930s. The pace of British rearmament was strictly limited by financial constraints. Consequently, the British Armed Forces were far from capable of meeting threats on three fronts. In November 1937, the British Chiefs of Staff reported that Britain "could not hope to confront satisfactorily Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously" and it was therefore necessary to "reduce the number of [Britain's] potential enemies and to gain the support of potential allies."[20] The Chiefs of Staff repeated this warning in

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[17] Finney, "Introduction," in *Origins*, 13-14
[18] Robert Skidelsky, "Going to War with Germany – Between Revisionism and Orthodoxy," *Encounter*, 39 (1972): 58
[19] Finney, "Introduction," in *Origins*, 14
[20] *DBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 19, No. 316, 513

March and September 1938.[21] Chamberlain, therefore, had no choice but to accomplish by diplomatic means what Britain was too weak to achieve through military action: the pacification of the dictators without damaging Britain's vital interests. Dilks sees Chamberlain's strategy as a delay tactic. Dilks contends that British policy was governed by the warning of the Chiefs of Staff that Czechoslovakia was militarily indefensible and that Britain would almost certainly be defeated in an armed confrontation with Germany.[22] Chamberlain sought to put off the outbreak of hostilities until Britain had rearmed to a point that would allow the country some hope of success in war.[23] Chamberlain, according to Dilks, genuinely wanted to avoid war. In the event that his policy failed to deter Hitler and war came, however, Chamberlain calculated that his conciliatory overtures and willingness to address German grievances would clearly demonstrate to the British public and to Britain's potential allies, the Dominions and the United States, that he had exhausted every possibility of preserving peace.

Dilks portrays Chamberlain as an able and realistic politician who skilfully pursued a wise policy under the burden of numerous constraints. Dilks maintains that Chamberlain achieved a great success at Munich, averting war and manoeuvring Hitler into a peaceful and fair settlement and obtaining his pledge to resolve all future disputes peacefully. Chamberlain's approach was far-sighted as he attempted "to bind Hitler [. . .] to carry methods of conciliation beyond the immediate crisis."[24] Dilks insists that Chamberlain was not fooled into thinking that Hitler would never break his promise and so instituted a policy of accelerated rearmament. On 21 February 1939, Chamberlain requested the consent of Parliament to a twofold increase in British borrowing for defence. £580,000,000 was to be spent on defence in the 1939-40 fiscal year, which for Dilks stands as clear evidence of Chamberlain's commitment to a policy of deterrence.[25] After the German invasion of Czechia in March 1939, Chamberlain adopted a firm policy of deterrence with guarantees to Poland, Romania, Greece and Turkey, the creation of a continental army, together with warnings that Britain would not tolerate any more acts of German aggression. "The essence of British policy towards Germany remained the same until the end of August: to convince Hitler that the chances of winning a war without exhausting Germany's resources were too remote to make war worthwhile; and with the counterpart that Germany must have a chance of getting fair and

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[21] N. H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy, Volume 1: Rearmament Policy* (London, 1976), 642
[22] David Dilks, "'We must hope for the best and prepare for the worst': The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937-1939," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. LXXIII (1987): 324-6
[23] Ibid., 311-14
[24] Ibid., 332
[25] Ibid., 339

reasonable consideration if she would abandon the use of force." Chamberlain was wise to indicate to Hitler that Britain was still willing to negotiate any legitimate German grievances. Chamberlain cannot be blamed for Hitler's bellicose irrationality and his failure to listen to British warnings. Chamberlain had tried every possible means of preventing the German invasion of Poland. Hitler was unstoppable.[26]

Other works which fall into the 'revisionist' category include Keith Eubank's *Munich* (1963), Martin Gilbert's *The Roots of Appeasement* (1966), Keith Robbins' *Munich 1938* (1968), Michael Howard's *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (1972), George Peden's *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-1939* (1979), Larry Fuchser's *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (1982), Gustav Schmidt's *The Politics and Economics of Appeasement: British Foreign Policy in the 1930s* (1986) and John Charmley's *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (1989).

In the 1990s, a counter-revisionist school of interpretation emerged which disputed many of the claims set forth by the revisionist historians. The counter-revisionist historians found that Chamberlain raised the argument of the many limitations under which the British government operated to justify the actions and policies that he favoured, when in fact his choice of policy had not been based on such considerations at all. For example, Chamberlain used the dire predictions of the Chiefs of Staff to justify the adoption of a conciliatory approach to Germany. Similarly, Chamberlain over-emphasised the need for incremental rearmament due to financial constraints. In fact, Chamberlain himself preferred moderate rearmament, as he believed that his diplomacy would avert war and render vast stockpiles of weapons unnecessary. Chamberlain actively endeavoured to control the information that reached the public and to ensure that the way in which the information was presented would reflect favourably upon the government's policy. Clearly, Chamberlain retained a great deal more freedom of action than he would admit and than a credulous reading of the government documents would indicate.[27]

In direct opposition to Dilks, Sidney Aster, an ardent proponent of the counter-revisionist school of thought, is highly critical of the policy of appeasement. He argues that Chamberlain allowed Britain to remain militarily weak for too long, failed to recognise the degree of danger which Hitler posed to the European peace and implemented unwise and unwelcome policies thanks to the large Conservative majority in the House of Commons.[28] Aster contends that appeasement

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[26] Ibid., 347
[27] Finney, "Introduction," in *Origins*, 14-17
[28] Sidney Aster, "'Guilty Men:' the Case of Neville Chamberlain," in *Origins*, ed. Finney, 65

was essentially Chamberlain's personal policy and he believed with overblown certainty in its wisdom. In June 1938 for instance, in the midst of the Sudeten crisis, Chamberlain "exulted in the thought that the Germans 'have missed the bus and may never again have such a favourable chance of asserting their domination over Central and Eastern Europe.'" Even "[a]s late as 6 September he professed optimism."[29] Unlike Dilks, Aster does not consider appeasement to have been a rational and realistic choice. Rather, appeasement was a fatally flawed policy based on Chamberlain's abhorrence of war, on his inaccurate assessment of Britain's limitations and on his under-estimation of Hitler's aims. Aster claims that Chamberlain was indeed fooled by Hitler at Munich and believed that Hitler would honour his pledge to confine himself to peaceful negotiation of German grievances rather than settling disputes through war. Aster also rejects Dilks' contention that British military unpreparedness and the need for more time to rearm "dictated foreign policy. Unfortunately," he writes, "nowhere in Chamberlain's public utterances nor in his private correspondence is there a shred of supporting evidence." Instead, Chamberlain viewed his policy as a means of forever preventing war.[30]

Other works which reject the forgiving conclusions of the 'revisionist' historians are Richard Cockett's *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the* Press (1989), Gaines Post's *Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defence, 1934-1937* (1993), R.A.C. Parker's *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (1993) and Frank McDonough's *Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Road to War* (1998).

A reasonable interpretation of pre-war British foreign policy lies in between the arguments put forth by the revisionist and counter-revisionist schools. Chamberlain was not, as Dilks suggests, completely paralysed by external circumstances. Chamberlain possessed greater freedom of action to opt for policies other than appeasement than he would admit. Instead, his resolute conviction that peace through compromise was attainable and his perception of British economic and military limitations led him to reject the creation of a powerful anti-Hitler bloc backed by overwhelmingly superior armed forces. He believed that such actions would only serve to provoke Hitler.[31] While Chamberlain did authorise accelerated rearmament and staff talks with France and the Low Countries in February 1939, he held firmly to his belief that his diplomacy would succeed in

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[29] Ibid., 69
[30] Ibid., 70
[31] *DBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 19, No. 349, pp. 580-1; R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London, 1993), 135-8

staving off war. In early March 1939, he also concluded prematurely that increased British defence expenditure had served as a clear warning signal to Hitler that Britain would not tolerate a German breach of the frontiers of neighbouring states.[32]

Chamberlain was not as certain that he had achieved lasting peace after Munich as Aster claims. In fact, Chamberlain's private papers show that he vacillated between hopefulness and despondency about the chances of Hitler honouring his pledge. Despite Chamberlain's private expressions of doubt concerning Hitler's reliability, however, the British Prime Minister still believed that a conciliatory approach to Germany would prevent war rather than simply delay it. Speaking at the Lord Mayor's banquet at the Guildhall on 10 November 1938, Chamberlain defended the course of action he had taken. "The settlement at Munich imposed upon Czechoslovakia a fate which arouses our natural sympathy for a small State and for a proud and brave people, yet we cannot dismiss in silence the thought of what the alternative would have meant to the peoples not only of Czechoslovakia, but of all the nations that would have been involved." He reaffirmed his belief in the wisdom of his policy. "I have no shadow of doubt in my mind that what we did was right."[33]

Dilks' argument that Chamberlain adopted a conciliatory policy towards Hitler in order to buy time for Britain to rearm is unconvincing. Dilks fails to prove that this reasoning was behind Chamberlain's choice of policy. Dilks states that "the arguments for gaining time, if war could not in the end be avoided, were obvious enough." He does not, however, furnish evidence to show that this calculation, however obvious, formed the basis of Chamberlain's strategy.[34] Aster's assertion that Chamberlain believed his foreign policy would avoid war altogether is more credible. Chamberlain's notion that a conciliatory policy could stave off a military confrontation is evident in the particular rearmament strategy that he adopted. Rather than injecting money into the army, he focused on increasing the size and strength of the air force and on equipping Britain with defensive equipment to protect the country in the event of a German air attack. He hoped that the prospect of having to fight a long war would lead Hitler to reconsider his plans.[35] If Chamberlain had indeed envisioned his mollifying approach to Hitler as a means of winning time for Britain to rearm, he would presumably have pursued a policy of aggressive and rapid rearmament in accordance with the urgency of the situation. Chamberlain's approach to rearmament was inextricably linked to his

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[32] Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 396-7
[33] Quoted in Neville Chamberlain, *In Search of Peace* (New York, 1939), 233
[34] Dilks, "The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany," 324
[35] 341 HC Deb 5s, col. 1209; Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 283

approach to foreign policy. He believed that he could deter Hitler from making war and so adopted a policy of moderate rearmament, rather than pushing British military production to the highest possible level.

Dilks states that after the German occupation of Prague in March 1939, Chamberlain committed Britain to a firm policy of deterrence. Dilks exaggerates the aplomb of Chamberlain's stance. The British government did officially adopt an uncompromising policy towards Hitler's demands for further territorial changes and issued guarantees of assistance to Poland, Romania, Greece and Turkey.[36] Chamberlain, however, refused to abandon appeasement altogether. On occasion, he circumvented his Cabinet and the Foreign Office, making surreptitious approaches to the German government in the hope that a negotiated settlement could still be achieved. Chamberlain's continued offers to Hitler for negotiation could only have confirmed Hitler's belief that the British would not oppose his expansionist schemes by force, thus undermining the tougher policy line which the government adopted in 1939.[37] As Gordon A. Craig writes, "an effective policy of deterrence depends upon an agreement that one's interests in a region threatened by an opponent are important enough to require a commitment to defend them and a willingness to make that commitment clear by threats that are both credible and sufficiently potent to impress the opponent and dissuade him from acting."[38] While Britain and France were sincerely committed to preventing any more instances of Hitlerian aggression, they failed to issue an unmistakable, uncompromising threat that German aggression would be met with British and French military retaliation. At the end of September 1938, in response to the apparently imminent German attack on Czechoslovakia, France called up her reservists and Britain mobilised the Fleet. But Chamberlain diluted the potency of the British and French threat by issuing a further offer of negotiation to Hitler.[39] Further, as Donald Cameron Watt argues, British and French armed strength was still insufficient to lend credibility to such a threat.[40] An effective deterrent would have been a military alliance with the Soviet Union, which Chamberlain failed to obtain, partly because of his own

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[36] 345 HC Deb 5s, col. 2415; *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 4, Nos. 48 & 53

[37] See below, 94-5

[38] Gordon A. Craig, "Making Way for Hitler," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 36, No. 15 (12 October 1989): 12

[39] See below, 65-66

[40] Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (London, 1989), 621

distaste for the political system of the Soviet Union and his scepticism regarding Soviet military capabilities.[41]

1.2 Historiography of the Foreign Contacts of the German Resistance

During the years immediately following the Second World War, British statesmen downplayed or denied altogether that contacts had existed between members of the German resistance movement and the British government. Sir Robert Vansittart, who was appointed Permanent Under-Secretary of State in the British Foreign Office on 13 November 1929 and served in this capacity until January 1938, was a close contact of Dr Carl Goerdeler and of the brothers Drs Erich and Theodor Kordt before and during the early years of the war. After the war, however, Vansittart would not acknowledge that the Kordt brothers had been involved in anti-Hitler activities and refused to assist Theo Kordt in his attempt to be repatriated from Switzerland to the British zone of occupied Germany.[42] E. A. Bayne, an Intelligence Officer for the US Foreign Economic Administration, requested confirmation of the Kordt brothers' resistance activities from Vansittart, who replied that although the Kordts had disapproved of the Nazi régime, "neither of them, so far as I know, ever did anything to demonstrate the fact."[43] Vansittart's statement was a dishonest denial of the firm commitment of the Kordt brothers to the removal of Hitler from power and the risks which they had taken in an effort to accomplish this aim. Vansittart omitted the initiatives that he had taken in arranging meetings with and obtaining information from the Kordts, Goerdeler and other members of the resistance.[44] During the trial of former Permanent Undersecretary of State (*Staatssekretär*) in the German Foreign Office, Ernst von Weizsäcker before the American Military Tribunal, Vansittart was even willing to fabricate a defamatory statement which contradicted the evidence supplied by the Kordts in defence of Weizsäcker. Vansittart claimed that the Kordt brothers were "unreliable" and had only ceased to serve the Nazi régime once it had fallen. "Till then," alleged Vansittart, "they remained on the winning side and never showed any real intention of breaking with the Nazi tyranny [. . .] I see no reason to believe that the Kordt brothers used their official positions in the German Foreign Service to sabotage Ribbentrop's policy."[45]

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[41] Sir Alexander Cadogan, *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, ed. David Dilks (London, 1971), 175; *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 5, No. 697, pp. 753-4

[42] Patricia Meehan, *The Unnecessary War* (London, 1992), 343-4 based on Foreign Office files. FO 371/46852

[43] Lord Vansittart to E.A. Bayne, Kordt Papers, 157/6, IfZ

[44] Theo to Erich Kordt, 22 August 1946, Kordt Papers, 157/6, IfZ

[45] *Trials of War Criminals before the Nürnberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law Number 10* (*Trials*); Vol. 12, *The Ministries Case* (Washington, n.d.), Prosecution Document NG-5786

Although Vansittart was in frequent contact with the Kordt brothers and with Goerdeler, his memoir, *The Mist Procession*, published in 1958, contains only brief mention of these men. Vansittart refers to the Kordts only once in passing, stating that they had "remained in Hitler's service."[46] Vansittart retained a favourable opinion of Goerdeler, commenting in *The Mist Procession* on the unmistakable sincerity of Goerdeler's opposition to Hitler. After bestowing a few accolades upon Goerdeler, however, Vansittart's tone becomes derisive. He implies that Goerdeler was hopelessly naïve to believe that the German generals would co-operate in ousting Hitler from power. "I never attached importance to [Goerdeler's] hallucinations," writes Vansittart, "finding no Resistance Movement worth mention in either German Foreign Office or German Army. Talk there was aplenty; somebody was always just going to do something when Britain didn't."[47] The evidence indicates that Vansittart did indeed attach importance to the information which he obtaind from Goerdeler. In fact, Vansittart solicited information from Goerdeler on several occasions. For instance, the British engineer A. P. Young, who served as an intermediary between Goerdeler and the British Foreign Office between August 1938 and January 1939, records that in July 1938, Vansittart was anxiously searching for someone to travel to Germany to obtain a message which Goerdeler had to transmit.[48] Until December 1939, Vansittart vigorously and continously urged the British government to assist the German resistance in their bid to remove Hitler from power.[49]

Like Vansittart, Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, a member of the British Foreign Office Political Intelligence Department, offered a distorted version of his involvement with members of the German resistance. In the autumn of 1939, both Wheeler-Bennett and Dr Adam von Trott zu Solz were attending a conference in Virginia Beach.[50] The conference served as a cover for Trott to pursue diplomatic efforts on behalf of the German opposition in the United States.[51] At the time,

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[46] Lord Robert Gilbert Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (London, 1958), 495

[47] Vansittart, *Mist*, 512-13

[48] The British banker, Robert Stopford, after having been named to the Runciman mission, baulked at travelling to Germany to meet with Goerdeler for fear of the attention which he might attract. Young went in Stopford's place. A. P. Young, *The 'X' Documents*, ed. Sidney Aster (London, 1974), 45

[49] Ian Colvin, *Vansittart in Office* (London, 1965), 152-4

[50] The conference was on 'Problems of the Pacific' and was organised by the New York-based Institute of Pacific Relations. The Secretary General of the Institute, Edward C. Carter had invited Trott to attend. For an account of Trott's trip to the United States at the end of 1939, please see Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945*, trans. Richard Barry, 3rd ed. (Montréal, 1996), 114-19; Christopher Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty: The Story of a German Aristocrat who Defied Hitler* (New York, 1969), 306-331 and Klemens von Klemperer, *German Resistance Against Hitler: The Search for Allies Abroad* (Oxford, 1992), 180-9; Katharine Sams, "Adam von Trott zu Solz' Early Life and Political Initiatives in the Summer of 1939," (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1990)

[51] Weizsäcker hoped that Trott would be able to obtain some assurances from the American government concerning the peace terms which a post-coup German government could expect. Weizsäcker, *Erinnerungen*,

Wheeler-Bennett supported Trott's attempt to persuade the governments of the Allied powers to issue a statement of Allied war aims, which would include a commitment to a "fair and durable peace settlement."[52] To buttress Trott's initiative, Wheeler-Bennett sent a memorandum to the British Foreign Office in which he urged that anti-Nazi elements within Germany be "strengthened and encouraged to the point where they themselves can take the initiative [. . .] in destroying the Nazi régime and in restoring in Germany a Reign of Law."[53] Wheeler-Bennett also assisted Trott in the composition of a memorandum for Lord Halifax in which he advised the British to encourage resistance against the Nazi régime within Germany by demonstrating "a real determination to build the peace of Europe on justice and equality."[54]

In Wheeler-Bennett's *Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945*, the author devotes only one page to a description of Trott's visit to the United States and fails to mention the considerable support which he had extended to Trott. Wheeler-Bennett suggests that little difference existed between Trott and the Nazis in terms of territorial aspirations, maintaining that Trott insisted that none of Hitler's territorial acquisitions would be restored following a coup d'état and the installation of a non-Nazi government.[55] Contrary to Wheeler-Bennett's claim, Trott willingly accepted that Germany would relinquish the gains that Hitler had made. The memorandum, which Trott wrote with Paul Scheffer[56] during Trott's sojourn in the United States, included the assertion that a post-coup Germany would accept the status quo of 1933.[57]

After the war, in response to the publication of the memoirs of Erich Kordt and of Weizsäcker, Wheeler-Bennett denounced the claim that the German resistance had extended peace feelers to the British government as "fallacious—and in some cases—mendacious." Wheeler-

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272; Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 219; Erich Kordt, *Nicht aus den Akten: Die Wilhelmstraße in Frieden und Krieg* (Stuttgart, 1950), 341

[52] Quoted in Hans Rothefels, "Adam von Trott und das State Department," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (VfZ)*, Vol. 7 (1959), 328

[53] Hans Rothfels, "Trott und die Aussenpolitik des Widerstands," *VfZ*,, Vol. 12 (1964), 316-18; Harold Deutsch, *The Conspiracy Against Hitler in the Twilight War* (Minneapolis, 1968), 155-7

[54] In New York City Trott gave the memorandum to his cousin by marriage, Charles Bosanquet, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Newcastle-on-Tyne, who delivered it to the British Foreign Office. Rothfels, "Trott und die Aussenpolitik des Widerstands," 313-15; Deutsch, *Conspiracy*, 157

[55] Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945* (London, 1967), 486-8

[56] According to Klemperer, the memorandum emerged from conversations between Trott and a group of (mostly expatriate) Germans living in New York, including former German Chancellor Heinrich Brüning, Kurt Riezler, Hans Simons and Hans Muhle. The Scheffer-Trott memorandum circulated at the highest level of the US government. William T. Stone gave the memorandum to the American Under Secretary of State, Sumner Welles and to George Messersmith of the State Department, who passed the memorandum along to US Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Klemperer, *Search*, 182-4

[57] Rothfels, "Adam von Trott und das State Department," 327

Bennett responded scathingly to the claims of both Kordt and Weizsäcker that they had attempted to achieve the basis for a peaceful settlement between the British government and a post-Hitler régime. Such assertions were, according to Wheeler-Bennett, "not only tendentious but also, in some cases, deliberate perversions of fact."[58]

The memoirs of other British statesmen who had been in contact with the German resistance contain scanty information concerning these meetings. In the second volume of his memoirs, entitled *The Reckoning* (1965), former Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden (1st Earl of Avon), mentions only that he had received a memorandum written by Hans Schönfeld and Dietrich Bonhoeffer from Dr. George Kennedy Allen Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, at the end of June 1942.[59] Eden does not include any reference to the reports from Carl Goerdeler, which were forwarded by A. P. Young. In 1974, Young published an account of his meetings with Goerdeler. Young writes that he sent copies of all six of the reports recording his conversations with Goerdeler to Eden between August 1938 and March 1939.[60]

In his memoirs published in 1957, the former Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax does not refer to his meeting with Trott at the beginning of June 1939, nor does he mention the resistance activities of Theo Kordt, who was the Chargé d'Affaires in London and was in regular contact with Halifax.[61]

Goerdeler's name appears only once in the *Diplomatic Diaries* (1970) of Oliver Harvey, who served as Private Secretary to both Eden and Halifax. Harvey refers to the memorandum, which Goerdeler drew up at the request of Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, Economic Counsellor in the Foreign Office as "a half-baked scheme" and describes Goerdeler as "a crypto-enemy of Nazism who is in with the moderates who are supposed to be only waiting to overthrow the régime." Clearly, Harvey held a sceptical view of the commitment of the German resistance movement to the removal of Hitler from power. Harvey concludes that Goerdeler's request for assistance from the British government for a post-Hitler German régime was a "mad scheme which we cannot possibly

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[58] Wheeler-Bennett, quoted in Meehan, 394 & 396, based on PRO FO 371/2168
[59] Earl of Avon, *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon: The Reckoning* (Boston, 1965), 387-8
[60] Young, *'X' Documents*, 69
[61] Lord Halifax, *Fulness of Days* (London, 1957). For an account of Trott's conversations with Halifax in June 1939, please see Hans Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler* (Chicago, 1948); Hans Rothfels, "The German Resistance in its International Apects," *International Affairs* 34 (1958), 482-3; Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty*, 241-2. For an account of Theo Kordt's contacts with Halifax, please see Letter from Theo Kordt to Lord Halifax, Munich, 29 July 1947; Schrift Dr Theo Kordts an den Prüfungsausschuss in Bad Godesberg-Bonn, p. 6; Kordt Papers, ED 157/6, IfZ; Kordt, *Nicht*, 245-57; Hoffmann, *History*, 66-7; Klemperer, *Search*, 101-5

have anything to do with."[62] Likewise, in *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan* (1971), Cadogan, Vansittart's successor as Permanent Undersecretary in the Foreign Office, refers to the December 1938 memorandum by Goerdeler as "too much like *Mein Kampf*."[63] Thus the memoirs of British statesmen are of little help in piecing together the history of the foreign contacts of the German resistance. These works do offer an insight into the scepticism with which German resisters were received in London. They also serve to demonstrate the insistence with which British statesmen minimised the significance of the approaches made to their government by German resisters.

T. Philip Conwell-Evans' *None So Blind: A Study of the Crisis Years, 1930-1939* serves as an important counter-weight to Vansittart's manipulation of the facts and extraordinary lapses of memory. Conwell-Evans had lectured at the University of Königsberg between 1932 and 1934. He had served as Joint Honourary Secretary of the Anglo-German Fellowship and had accompanied Lord Lothian in 1935 and former Prime Minister David Lloyd George in 1936 on their respective visits to Hitler. By 1938, he was using his contacts in Germany to obtain information for Vansittart, who had established his own network of agents to gather intelligence in Germany, known in Whitehall as "Van's private detective agency."[64] Conwell-Evans facilitated meetings with British leaders for various members of the German opposition, including the Kordt brothers.[65]

In *Vansittart in Office,* published in 1965, the British journalist Ian Colvin draws upon Vansittart's private papers to show that he actively sought information from German resisters. Vansittart's contemporary comments reveal that he considered Goerdeler and the Kordt brothers to be trustworthy and that he judged their information credible. Vansittart used the reports that were transmitted to him by Goerdeler and the Kordts to build his case for an uncompromising British policy towards Hitler. Colvin's book contains valuable but incomplete information concerning Vansittart's meetings with Goerdeler in 1937 and 1938.[66]

Goerdeler's principal contact was the British engineer A.P. Young. Young's *The 'X' Documents* (1974) recounts the author's meetings with Goerdeler from 1937 to 1939. *The 'X' Documents* contains complete copies of the reports submitted by Young to the Foreign Office. These reports repeated the information provided by Goerdeler as well as his recommendations concerning the best course of action that the British government could follow.

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[62] Oliver Harvey, *The Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940*, ed. John Harvey (London, 1970), 226-7
[63] Cadogan, *Cadogan Diaries*, 128
[64] Keith Middlemas, *The Strategy of Appeasement: The British Government and Germany, 1937-1939* (Chicago, 1972), 91
[65] Letter from Theo Kordt to Lord Halifax, 17 December 1947, p. 7, Kordt papers, ED 157/8, IfZ
[66] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 149-55, 168, 205-6

Goerdeler's *Politisches Testament*, written during his sojourn in the United States at the end of 1937, was published in 1945. Gerhard Ritter has written a biography of Goerdeler, *The German Resistance: Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny* (1958), which includes helpful information on Goerdeler's extensive travels abroad in search of foreign support. Joachim Scholtyseck's *Robert Bosch und der liberale Widerstand gegen Hitler* (1999) details the support that Bosch provided for Goerdeler's journeys abroad. Lothar Kettenacker's, *Krieg zur Friedenssicherung: Die Deutschlandplanung der britischen Regierung während des Zweiten Weltkriegs* gives a detailed account of the evolution of British policy towards Germany.

The diaries and memoirs of members of the German resistance and the published recollections of relatives of deceased resisters provide invaluable information and insight into the activities and motivations of those resisters who sought foreign support. These publications include the German Ambassador to Italy (1932-7) Ulrich von Hassell's *Vom Anderen Deutschland* (1946),[67] Fabian von Schlabrendorff's *Revolt Against Hitler* (1948),[68] Weizsäcker's *Erinnerungen, 1882-1947* (1950) and *Die Weizsäcker Papiere, 1933-1950*, Erich Kordt's memoir *Nicht aus den Akten* (1950), League of Nations High Commissioner Carl J. Burckhardt's *Meine Danziger Mission* (1960) and Counsellor at the German Embassy in Moscow Hans von Herwarth's *Against Two Evils* (1981). Christabel Bielenberg, David Astor and Sheila Grant Duff have published their personal recollections of Trott, all of which shed some light on his missions abroad.

Karen Bingel's Master's thesis on Weizsäcker provides information concerning the *Staatssekretär*'s warnings to the British in 1938 that Hitler was poised to invade Czechoslovakia. Katharine Sams' Master's thesis on Trott includes a chapter on his clandestine approaches to foreign governments and her PhD dissertation provides pertinent insight into the motivations and thinking behind Trott's diplomatic initiatives in 1939 and 1940.

Works that pertain specifically to the foreign contacts of the German resistance movement are two articles by Peter Hoffmann, "Peace through Coup d'État," (1986) and "The Question of Western Allied Co-operation with the German Anti-Nazi Conspiracy," (1991) Klemens von Klemperer's *German Resistance Against Hitler: The Search for Allies Abroad* (1992) and Patricia Meehan's *The Unnecessary War* (1992). Hoffmann focuses on the Allied demands for Germany's unconditional surrender, annexations of German territory and the expulsion of German populations as conditions for peace. He details how these demands contributed to the prevention of the conclusion of an agreement between the German resistance and the British government. I have

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[67] A revised and expanded edition of von Hassell's diary was published in 1988

[68] Schlabrendorff's memoir was reissued in 1994 under the title *The Secret War Against Hitler*

chosen to concentrate on how the erratic evolution of British foreign policy affected the possibility of co-operation between the British government and the German opposition to Hitler.

Klemperer offers an overview of all the approaches to the British, the Americans and the Soviets made by the German resistance movement between 1938 and 1945. The huge array of incidents that he attempts to describe is unmanageable for one work. Consequently, his study lacks precision and depth. He fails to contextualise the resistance approaches, thereby imparting an anecdotal quality to his account of the missions of the German opposition emissaries abroad. Similarly, Meehan's work does not place the approaches of the German resistance in the context in which they occurred. Her work is disjointed and lacks a clear structure. She does not have a full grasp of the relevant secondary literature, nor does she make sufficient use of the primary sources available in German.

I intend to offer a more detailed study of a shorter time span, confining myself to the years 1937 to 1940 and examining only the contacts established by the German resistance with the British government. In analysing the outcome of the missions launched by German resisters, I will consider the attitude of the particular official to whom the approach was addressed, together with the international and bilateral events occurring at the time which may have affected the British response.

This thesis will be based upon all of the above primary and secondary sources, as well as the first, second and third series of *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (Series C and D), *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (Séries 1 and 2) and *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik* (I Reihe). Finally, this thesis will draw upon the Kordt papers, which I consulted in the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich.

Chapter 2: Approaches of the German Resistance, May 1937-September 1938

2.1 Dr Carl Goerdeler

Dr Carl Goerdeler, the former mayor of Leipzig, former *Reich* Prices Commissioner and candidate for the chancellorship in 1932, was the principal emissary abroad for the German resistance movement. Goerdeler served as *Reich* Prices Commissioner from 18 December 1931 until 16 December 1932 under the government of Heinrich Brüning.[69] In November 1934, Hitler asked Goerdeler to take up the post of Prices Commissioner again. Goerdeler accepted in the hope

[69] Gerhard Ritter, *The German Resistance: Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, trans. R. T. Clark (London, 1958), 25-6

that he would be able to persuade the Nazi leadership to alter the course of its policy.[70] Goerdeler presented his arguments in economic terms but his broader criticisms of the régime were implicit. On 7 August 1935, Goerdeler submitted a report to his government concerning the status of Germany's foreign exchange, raw materials and currency in which he was sharply critical of Nazi economic policy. Goerdeler insisted upon the need for a restoration of the balance of payments through foreign loans. He urged that Germany take the lead in bringing about an end to global currency dislocation and a general economic understanding. Such a placable policy would have required the Nazi régime to govern according to the rule of law, to guarantee freedom to its citizens and to cease the persecution of the Jews, the handicapped, the Churches and political opponents. Germany, maintained Goerdeler in his report, would have to exercise moderation in the pursuit of its goals; rearmament in particular would have to be decelerated. The Nazi régime would have had to reverse its policies, aims and style of governing before implementing the policies suggested by Goerdeler. At a Cabinet meeting on 2 September 1935, Göring declared Goerdeler's memorandum "utterly useless" and the Ministry of Propaganda forbade its publication. According to Gerhard Ritter, Goerdeler's biographer, he "always regarded this as the great turning-point in his public career, putting an end to any practical possibility of bringing about a change in the course of events by direct influence on those in power."[71]

Goerdeler resigned from the Leipzig mayoralty in November 1936 following the removal by the local Nazi party authorities of a statue of the composer Felix Mendelssohn against Goerdeler's explicit orders.[72] Immediately following his resignation, some members of the Stuttgart opposition group, which had formed around the industrialist Robert Bosch, approached Goerdeler. Bosch was a stalwart opponent of the Nazi government and he furnished financial assistance for numerous anti-Nazi resistance activities.[73] He appointed Goerdeler financial advisor to his company as well as its representative to the Berlin authorities. Goerdeler's connection with Bosch served as a credible cover for his trips abroad. In addition, Bosch furnished Goerdeler with financial support and with connections to contacts outside Germany. Under the auspices of Bosch,

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[70] Ibid., 32
[71] Ibid., 34-5
[72] Ibid., 36
[73] Bosch provided funds for the resistance activities of Ulrich von Hassell as well as financing the publication of the anti-Nazi periodical *Deutsche Rundschau*, which was edited by Rudolf Pechel. Ibid., 81

Goerdeler was able to make numerous trips abroad, where he spoke to an impressive array of national leaders and high-ranking civil servants.[74]

In every one of these conversations, Goerdeler warned his interlocutors of the severity of the danger posed by the Nazi régime, providing them with detailed information on Hitler's bellicose intentions. In the hope of preventing war, Goerdeler urged that the British government take an uncompromising stand vis à vis Hitler. Finally, Goerdeler attempted to enlist foreign support for a post-Hitler régime, which would be installed following a coup d'état.[75]

In June 1937, Goerdeler travelled to London, where he met the British engineer, A. P. Young, who managed the works at Rugby for the Thomson-Houston Company.[76] Goerdeler's friend, Dr Reinhold Schairer, a German jurist and educator who had been living in London since 1933 and who had joined the Institute of Education of London University in 1937, helped Goerdeler to make contacts in England.[77] It was Schairer who arranged Goerdeler's introduction to Young.[78] At the request of Schairer, Young hosted a dinner at the National Liberal Club in London in order for Goerdeler to have a chance to present his views to some British notables who were close to government circles. Present at this dinner were Sir Wyndham Deedes, Director for the National Council for Social Service, Hugh Quigley, Economic Advisor to the Central Electricity Board, Leslie Satchell, Young's chief assistant at the Rugby Works and Schairer.

Goerdeler informed his hosts that Britain must halt Hitler's plans for aggression by adopting an inflexible stance in her negotiations with Germany. A conciliatory or prevaricating British approach, warned Goerdeler, would be taken by Hitler as a sign of weakness. Young recalls the first impression that he formed of Goerdeler as a man whose character was "dominated" by "superb moral courage." Young records that upon leaving the dining room at the National Liberal Club,

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[74] Between June 1937 and August 1939, Goerdeler travelled to Belgium, Britain, the Netherlands, France, the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Turkey and Syria. In Britain, prior to the commencement of the war, Goerdeler spoke to Anthony Eden and Lord Halifax, successive Foreign Secretaries, Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, a Foreign Office Counsellor and head of the Economic Department, Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England and Winston Churchill.In France, Goerdeler met with Prime Minister Edouard Daladier and Minister of Justice Paul Reynaud. In the United States Goerdeler met with Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Secretary for Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles, Assistant Secretary of State G.S. Messersmith, former President Herbert Hoover, Henry Lewis Stimson, who became Secretary for War, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and Honourary Chairman of the General Electric Company, Owen D. Young. Hoffmann, *History*, 55-6

[75] Ritter, *Goerdeler*, 81

[76] Young managed the Rugby works from 1928 until his retirement in 1945. Young, *'X' Documents*, 22

[77] Klemperer, *Search*, 77, fn. 211

[78] Young had become acquainted with Schairer when the latter visited Rugby to observe the Thomson-Houston Company's apprentice and educational programmes. Young, *'X' Documents*, 22-4

Deedes remarked that "'Goerdeler has decided with commendable courage to go forth and fearlessly condemn the Hitler régime regardless of the consequences.'"[79]

Following the dinner hosted by Young, Deedes arranged for Goerdeler to meet Vansittart in early July.[80] Vansittart was quite receptive to the views of resisters against Hitler. He regarded Hitler as the scourge of Europe, and he believed that no concessions should be made to Hitler. Vansittart had entertained no illusions concerning Hitler's intentions from the time the dictator had manoeuvred his way into power. "Anything peaceful said by Hitler is merely for foreign consumption and to gain time," wrote Vansittart to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Simon on 28 August 1933.[81] "Hitler," continued Vansittart, "may vary his methods, but he will not abandon—save under compulsion—his firm intention of destroying Austrian independence and creating a de facto *Anschluss*." Vansittart concluded his memorandum with the prediction that "[a]ll Europe would be affected by this event."[82] Vansittart was a resolute opponent of Chamberlain's appeasement policy, consistently urging that Britain pursue rapid rearmament, issue strong condemnations of Hitler's "atrocities" and make it known that his machinations for the territory of his neighbours would not be tolerated.[83] Vansittart was unsuccessful in persuading any of the three British governments under which he served to put his suggestions into practice. He commented that "a lone voice can accomplish nothing, and in the last analysis a British public servant can do little to serve the State." Vansittart was "tarred as an alarmist" and any information presented to the Cabinet by him was immediately dismissed as an exaggerated prediction of doom.[84]

Vansittart and Goerdeler met three times in July 1937, twice in the Foreign Office and once at Vansittart's country residence, Denham Place, twenty miles west of London. Vansittart initially held Goerdeler in high esteem, describing him as "an impressive person, wise and weighty, a man of great intelligence and courage and a sincere patriot." Vansittart appreciated the great risk that Goerdeler had undertaken in coming to London to deliver his warning. Vansittart recalled Goerdeler saying that "in making any but blindly favourable comment abroad he was 'putting his neck in a noose.'"[85] Vansittart regarded Goerdeler as trustworthy and did not doubt the sincerity of his opposition to the Nazi régime. Writing after the war in his memoirs, Vansittart maintained that Goerdeler "seemed the only genuine German conspirator [. . .] German conspirators all wanted

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[79] Ibid., 24
[80] Ibid., 9
[81] Vansittart, *Mist*, 480
[82] Ibid., 479
[83] Ibid., 478
[84] Ibid., 497-8
[85] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 151

illicit rewards for fictitious exploits; but here was a genuine article [. . .] for Goerdeler desired the destruction of Hitler with catonian simplicity.[86]

Vansittart showed Goerdeler a memorandum that had been drawn up by the German Heavy Industry Association concerning Germany's economic potential and asked him to explain its origin and confirm its authenticity. Vansittart had received a copy of this document from the British Embassy in Berlin, to which it had been forwarded by the British Legation in Prague, where it had first appeared. Goerdeler explained that he had requested the composition of this study. The report was subsequently given to the senior officers of the German General Staff. This study, together with a similar report written by Colonel Georg Thomas, the Head of the War Economy Section in *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH),[87] was intended to impress upon the officer corps that Germany's economic situation was too precarious to sustain the cost of a war. The report of the German Heavy Industry Association found that there was a deficiency of raw materials, food and fodder in Germany. Over the next four years, German domestic output would only produce approximately 50 per cent of the iron and steel required by the nation, 70 per cent of zinc, 45 per cent of lead and 15 per cent of copper. The nation carried the burden of a substantial foreign and internal debt. The report concluded that Germany should substitute its policy of economic and political isolation for one of international co-operation. Goerdeler stressed the accuracy of the findings of the report and added that Germany was on the verge of bankruptcy and was only able to stay afloat by issuing uncovered bills of exchange.[88]

In his meetings with Vansittart, Goerdeler urged that British policy towards Germany be "firm and clear. 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."[89] Finally, Goerdeler cautioned against the conclusion of a superficial Anglo-German understanding. He warned, however, that British leaders would find it extremely difficult to reach a meaningful and binding agreement with the current German leaders.

As a result of his meetings with Goerdeler in the early summer of 1937, Vansittart became, for a time at least, a staunch supporter of the position of the German 'moderates,' urging the British government to extend its support to them in their opposition activities against the Nazi régime.

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[86] Vansittart, *Mist*, 512-13; Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 151

[87] *Oberkommando des Heeres*: High Command of the German Army. Thomas later became head of the 'Economics and Supply' Group in the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW).

[88] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 153

[89] Goerdeler, quoted in Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 153

Vansittart's advice, however, was never heeded in Whitehall. Following his meetings with Goerdeler, Vansittart submitted a paper based on the information he had received from Goerdeler to Eden, to be presented to Cabinet. Vansittart included the information contained in the German Heavy Industry Association memorandum in his report. He emphasised the unsteadiness of the German economy, the great likelihood that the Four-Year Plan would fail and the shortcomings of Germany's military situation. Vansittart also detailed the opposition of the German officer corps to Hitler's plans for the conquest of Czechoslovakia and insisted that this opposition should be bolstered by encouragement from the British government. Eden, however, refused to present the memorandum to the Cabinet. Across the first page of the draft, Vansittart noted, "Suppressed by Eden."[90]

In December 1937, Vansittart was 'promoted' to the newly created position of Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the Government, an impressive title that belied the import of his reassignment, where he was excluded from the foreign policy decision making process. Vansittart harboured no illusions about the implication of his new post. In November 1937, Vansittart had commented to his secretary Clifford Norton: "They are trying to get rid of me. They want a Permanent Head whom they can push around. They know that I am quite independent of them."[91] Although he maintained contact with members of the German resistance and continued to deliver their information to the government, from this point forward, Vansittart lost all influence in the Foreign Office.[92]

Goerdeler was again in London at the end of April 1938. Frederick Leggett, the Assistant Secretary in the British Ministry of Labour and a friend of Young, provided a credible cover for Goerdeler's trip by inviting him to give a lecture at the Institute of Public Administration.[93] During this visit, Goerdeler met with Vansittart on two occasions. At the first meeting, Goerdeler made the unfortunate declaration that the Sudetenland should be ceded to Germany, which served to alienate Vansittart somewhat. Goerdeler's statement, coming as it did on the heels of the *Anschluss* of Austria on 13 March 1938, aroused British suspicions that there was not a great deal of difference between the Nazis and the opposition. Vansittart told Goerdeler that Britain might agree to a greater degree of autonomy for the Sudeten Germans. He cautioned, however, that Britain would never

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[90] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 152-4
[91] Vansittart quoted in Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 170
[92] Ibid.,169-70; Earl of Avon, *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon: Facing the Dictators* (Boston, 1962), 590-1
[93] Young, *'X' Documents*, 41

agree to the cession of Czechoslovakian territory to Germany.[94] Goerdeler countered with the assertion that Britain must pursue a policy rooted in political reality. The British, he argued, must be careful to avoid forcing Hitler's "ambition into territory to which there was no claim" by refusing to agree to changes to the status quo in the Sudeten region, where Germany did have a valid stake.[95]

Vansittart failed to perceive the essential difference between the territorial aspirations of Goerdeler and Hitler. Goerdeler was proposing that certain key concerns be opened up for negotiation, whereas Hitler was set on war. Goerdeler himself asserted: "I have stressed everywhere that as a German I considered changes of the political scene (the Sudeten question, the Polish Corridor) necessary, but that I detest Hitler's methods and that the German people would turn away from him once it learned the truth."[96]

Goerdeler's statements concerning the Sudetenland appear to have soured Vansittart's attitude. At their second meeting, he adopted a more sceptical attitude towards Goerdeler, placing little importance on his assertions that the German generals were hostile to Hitler and that no one in Germany, excluding Hitler, wanted war. Vansittart dismissed Goerdeler's information with the comment that he was "talking treason."[97] This remark reveals a lack of understanding of the objectives and motives of the German resistance movement. Members of the German opposition were not motivated by a thirst for power and political prominence. Most members of the opposition, including Goerdeler, Beck and Weizsäcker, had initially been willing to continue to serve the state after Hitler's seizure of power. Gradually, however, they had realised the grave implications of the mistaken policies and practices that the Nazi government was implementing. They then proceeded to point out to Hitler what they perceived to be mistaken, foolish or dangerous decisions. Only when they understood that Hitler was immune to logic, common sense and morality, did they conclude that he must be removed from office.[98] There is no evidence that they engaged in efforts to overthrow the Nazi régime with the aim of installing themselves in prestigious positions. Rather, they sought to remove from power a man who they believed would lead Germany to ruin; a man whom they regarded as criminally irresponsible and utterly unfit to govern, who employed the most brutally oppressive measures to silence dissent and who subjected innocent

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[94] Ritter, *Goerdeler*, 84
[95] Goerdeler, quoted in Ritter, *Goerdeler*, 84
[96] Goerdeler, quoted in Klemperer, *Search*, 138
[97] Vansittart, quoted in Ritter, *Goerdeler*, 84
[98] Ritter, *Goerdeler*, 34-5; See above for a description of Goerdeler's conclusion that Hitler would not responsd to reason and therefore had to be removed from power, 26-7; Concerning Beck, see below, 37-9; Concerning Weizsäcker, see below 49-51

German citizens to persecution and murder. The weight of the evidence researched for this thesis indicates that the primary objective of the German resistance movement was simply to wrest power from Hitler's hands. Considerations about the composition of a post-Hitler government were secondary.[99]

On 28 May 1938, Hitler announced to the *Wehrmacht*, Party and State leaders his "unalterable decision to destroy Czechoslovakia by military action within a foreseeable time." The decision was confirmed in writing on 30 May.[100] Members of the German resistance took it upon themselves to warn the governments of the Western powers of Hitler's bellicose aims. From 6-7 August 1938, Goerdeler met with Young at the former's vacation home in Rauschen Düne, a seaside town on the Baltic, approximately 20 miles north of Königsberg.[101] Young went to Germany to meet Goerdeler in place of the British banker Robert Stopford, with whom Goerdeler had reached an agreement during his last visit to London. The two men had decided that if Goerdeler had some important piece of information to transmit, he would request a meeting and Stopford would immediately leave for Germany. At the end of July 1938, Goerdeler had asked for a meeting but Stopford balked at the prospect of travelling to Germany, as the British press had just announced that he was to accompany Lord Runciman on his special mediation mission to Czechoslovakia. Vansittart, who was anxious to receive Goerdeler's message, had asked Stopford to suggest a replacement for himself. Stopford suggested Young.[102] Clearly, then, despite his displeasure at Goerdeler's remarks concerning Germany's claim to the Sudeten region, Vansittart still considered Goerdeler an important and reliable source of information.

In Rauschen Düne, Goerdeler informed Young that Lord Runciman's mission would surely fail. Lord Runciman, the former President of the Board of Trade and a former Cabinet Minister, had been sent by Chamberlain to Czechoslovakia to mediate between the Czech government and the Sudeten Germans. At the end of July 1938, in response to an entreaty from the Czech government to send a British mediator to help reach an agreement with the Sudeten Germans, Chamberlain and Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax[103] elected to dispatch Runciman. Runciman's mission was to bring

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[99] For example, Helmuth von Moltke and the conspirators close to him, including Peter Yorck von Wartenburg and Horst von Einsiedel were primarily concerned with how to establish "as just a state as the imperfections of human nature allow" and how to prevent war from occurring again in the future. Balfour and Frisby, *Helmuth von Moltke*, 127-30

[100] Wolfgang Foerster, *Ein General kämpft gegen den Krieg: Aus nachgelassenen Papieren des Generalstabchefs Ludwig Beck* (München, 1949), 107; *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal* (*IMT*), Vol. 25, 434

[101] Young, *'X' Documents*, 46

[102] Ibid., 45

[103] Lord Halifax replaced Anthony Eden as Foreign Secretary in February 1938

the stalled Czech-Sudeten German talks to a close by "suggesting means for bringing negotiations to success." Essentially, Chamberlain and Halifax wanted Runciman to push Czech President Eduard Beneš to make further concessions to Konrad Henlein, the leader of the Sudeten German Party. They also hoped that the despatch of a British mediator would force Hitler to be patient and not to resort to force before the mission had been concluded.[104]

In Rauschen Düne, Goerdeler warned Young that Hitler was determined to wage war and would therefore never allow Runciman to bring about a peaceful settlement of the Sudeten German problem. Goerdeler insisted that Britain and France should not wait for the inevitable failure of the Runciman mission. Rather, the Western powers should make a declaration warning that they would intervene by force on behalf of Czechoslovakia in the event of a German invasion. Goerdeler emphasised the urgency of the situation and advocated that action take place within the next three to six weeks. He warned that Hitler believed that Britain and France would not intervene if he launched an attack against Czechoslovakia. According to Goerdeler, a strong statement from the British government would therefore have a restraining effect on Hitler. Goerdeler maintained that such a declaration from Britain would also augment the existing anti-war sentiment among the German people and would strengthen the position of the German generals, who were already opposed to Hitler's plans. Goerdeler suggested that the pronouncement of support for Czechoslovakia be followed by one which would indicate a willingness on the part of the Western powers to negotiate Germany's "life problems," particularly the questions of colonies; Central Europe; currency and gold; freer trade and deceleration in armaments.

Upon returning to London, Young passed his report, known as *The 'X' Document No. 1* since Goerdeler was referred to as "X" throughout the report, on his meeting with Goerdeler to Vansittart.[105] Young also sent a copy of this report to Eden, who was on holiday in Northern Ireland. Young forwarded all of the reports on his discussions with Goerdeler to the former Foreign Secretary.[106] Finally, Young forwarded a copy of the first *'X' Document* to Schairer, who was in the United States to attend the World Youth Congress at Vassar College. Young intended Schairer to show it to Owen D. Young, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, who was in close touch with US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Young hoped that Roosevelt could be persuaded to exert pressure on the British government through the American Ambassador in London. According to Young, Schairer showed the first *'X' Document* to Cordell Hull, the

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[104] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 546, pp. 7-8
[105] Young, *'X' Documents*, 50-55
[106] Ibid., 69

American Secretary of State, upon whom the report made "a deep impression" and from which Hull developed "a clearer picture of the situation in Germany than he had hitherto gleaned." Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the President was also informed and Young conjectures that it is "reasonable to assume" that President Roosevelt was appraised of the contents of the report. If Roosevelt was inspired to urge the British government to harden its attitude towards Nazi Germany, his influence did not alter the course of British policy.[107]

2.2 General Ludwig Beck

During the Sudeten crisis, General Ludwig Beck, the Chief of the General Staff of the German Army instigated and co-ordinated the German resistance campaign to persuade the British to adopt a firm and unyielding position regarding Hitler's demands for German territorial expansion. Beck believed in the necessity of the overthrow of Hitler, a conclusion he had reached at the end of July 1938.

Beck first directed warnings about Hitler's belligerent plans to the British and French governments in June 1937 while on an official stay in Paris. The British Air Attaché, Group-Captain Malcolm Graham Christie conveyed these warnings to Vansittart.[108] While in Paris, Beck declared 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. Beck stated that he had made no proposals during a recent visit to the French Army High Command. Any proposals would be pointless, maintained Beck, since he did not have the mandate to make any. "Of course," said Beck, "I could have touched upon a theoretical agreement for the limitation of armaments, but I did not do so, because I know that the Nazi Government would most certainly break any such agreement [. . .] Hitler," concluded Beck, "is pathological and wholly incalculable."[109]

On 5 November 1937, Hitler announced that he intended to expand the *Lebensraum* of the German people through the acquisition by force of territory in Eastern Europe, beginning with Czechoslovakia and Austria. He admitted that such territorial expansion would involve the risk of war with Britain and France. Yet he quickly dismissed this possibility as unimportant, asserting that Britain's imperial commitments exceeded the limits of her resources and that France was wracked

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[107] Ibid., 73

[108] T. Philip Conwell-Evans, *None So Blind: A Study of the Crisis Years, 1930-1939*, (London, 1947), 91-2; Peter Hoffmann, "Peace through Coup d'État : The Foreign Contacts of the German Resistance 1933-1944," *Central European History* 19, 1 (March 1986), 15; Nicholas Reynolds, *Treason Was No Crime. Ludwig Beck: Chief of the German General Staff* (London, 1976), 111-14

[109] Beck quoted in Hoffmann, "Peace through Coup d'État," 15

by internal turmoil. In any case, maintained Hitler, the likelihood that Britain and France would come to the rescue of Czechoslovakia was slim.[110]

Beck first tried to use reason and logic to make Hitler understand that his plans for expansion were dangerously impracticable. In a series of memoranda beginning on 12 November 1937, Beck argued that Britain and France would never step aside and allow Hitler to overrun Europe; Hitler gravely underestimated British and French military capacities and the "extent of French and English opposition to increases in German power and space;" Germany would never be capable of defeating or even defending herself against hostile Western Powers. The result would be a European and probably a world war in which Germany would be pulverised.[111]

Beck attempted to address Hitler through the Commander-in-Chief of the German Army, Colonel-General Walther von Brauchitsch. On 7 May, Brauchitsch received a memorandum from Beck entitled "Considerations on the future German Military-Political Situation." Beck warned that Germany was militarily and economically unprepared to wage war and therefore the Sudeten question should not be solved by force but rather through a negotiated settlement of which Britain approved.[112] Brauchitsch passed only the third section of Beck's memorandum on to Hitler, who immediately rejected Beck's cautionary words as being overly gloomy.[113]

On 28 May 1938, Hitler announced to *Wehrmacht*, Party and State leaders his "unalterable decision to destroy Czechoslovakia by military action within a foreseeable time." Hitler referred to the need for *Lebensraum*.[114] On 29 May, in response to Hitler's announcement, Beck composed a memorandum, which he read to Brauchitsch on 30 May. Here, Beck stressed that Germany was woefully unprepared for war. The nation was worse off in every way than she had been before the commencement of the war of 1914. The German Army was weaker in terms of personnel, material and ideals than it had been in 1914. Germany's financial situation was dismal and she lacked the

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[110] Hitler made this announcement to Konstantin Freiherr von Neurath, the Foreign Minister, Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, the War Minister, Colonel-General Werner Freiherr von Fritsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Admiral Erich Raeder, the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Colonel-General Hermann Göring, Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force and to Friedrich Hossbach, Hitler's *Wehrmacht* aide. Friedrich Hossbach, *Zwischen Wehrmacht und Hitler 1934-1938* (Göttingen, 1965), 181-92

[111] Beck memorandum of 12 November 1937, "Bemerkungen Becks zur Niederschrift des Oberst i. G. Hoßbach über eine Besprechung in der Reichskanzlei am 05.11.1937 vom 12.11.1937," quoted in Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *General Ludwig Beck. Studien und Dokumente zur politisch-militärischen Vorstellungswelt und Tätigkeit des Generalstabschefs des deutschen Heeres 1933-1938* (Boppard am Rhein, 1980), 498-501; Reynolds, *Treason Was No Crime*, 118

[112] Beck Memorandum of 5 May 1938, "Betrachtungen zur militärpolitischen Lage im Mai 1938 vom 05.05.1938, " in Müller, *General Ludwig Beck*, 502-12; Memorandum also in Foerster, *Generalstabchefs*, 82-8; Hoffmann, *History*, 71-2

[113] Hoffmann, *History*, 72

[114] *IMT*, Vol. 25, 434

reserves of food and raw materials necessary to wage war. The German people were strongly disinclined to tolerate the involvement of their nation in a war. Finally, if Germany were to launch an invasion of Czechoslovakia, she would face a formidable and indomitable combination of foes: Czechoslovakia, Britain, France and the United States. Given the circumstances, Germany was virtually certain to be badly defeated.[115] On 30 May, the same day that Beck read this memo to Brauchitsch, Hitler informed the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force in writing that Czechoslovakia was to be destroyed by military action. The commanders were to be prepared for the possibility of a German invasion of Czechoslovakia by the end of September.[116]

On 16 July 1938, Beck submitted a memorandum to Brauchitsch. Beck warned of the grave danger of a European war. Beck asserted that Hitler "*must be induced to stop the war preparations which he has ordered* and to postpone his proposed solution of the Czechoslovakian question by force until the military conditions have radically changed." Beck proposed that the senior commanders of the *Wehrmacht* inform Hitler that they were against war. If Hitler could not be persuaded to abandon his plans, the senior commanders should collectively resign from their posts.[117] Despite almost unanimous agreement with Beck's assessment of the military situation among army group and corps commanders at a conference in Berlin on 4 August 1938, Brauchitsch failed to present Beck's proposal for a collective protest.[118]

Beck wrote of the necessity for the Army to be ready for the "upheaval at home" which might arise due to a strike by the army commanders. "Get Witzleben together with Helldorf," wrote Beck. Thus, Beck revealed his willingness to launch a coup d'état against the Nazi régime. General Erwin von Witzleben was the commander of III Army Corps and Military District III (Berlin), and Wolf Heinrich Graf von Helldorf was the Police President of Berlin. According to Peter Hoffmann, "these two together had sufficient force to occupy all key positions in Berlin." Beck instructed Lieutenant-General Karl-Heinrich Stülpnagel, Deputy Chief of Staff II in the Army General Staff, with Witzleben, to begin devising precise plans for the take-over of the state.[119]

In July 1938, Hitler's secretary, Captain Fritz Wiedemann, had met with the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, who told him that a violent response by Germany to the Sudeten problem

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[115] Beck Memorandum of 29 May 1938, "Stellungnahme zu den Ausführungen Hitlers vom 28.05.1938 über die politischen und militärischen Voraussetzungen einer Aktion gegen die Tschechoslowakei vom 29.05.1938, " in Müller, *General Ludwig Beck*, 521-8; Memorandum also in Foerster, *Generalstabchefs*, 90-4

[116] *IMT*, Vol. 25, 434-9

[117] Beck Memorandum of 16.07.1938, "Denkschrift an den Oberbefehelshaber des Heeres über die militärische Aussichtslosigkeit eines Krieges gegen die Tschechoslowakei vom 16.07.1938, " in Müller, *General Ludwig Beck*, 542-50 (Müller's italics); Memorandum also in Foerster, *Generalstabchefs*, 98-102

[118] Foerster, *Generalstabchefs*, 116-20; Hoffmann, *History*, 74-8

[119] Hoffmann, *History*, 77-8; Foerster, *Generalstabchefs*, 127-8

would be unacceptable to Britain.[120] Hitler, however, was not to be dissuaded from his belligerent aims. On 28 July 1938, Beck heard the details of Hitler's response to the account his secretary, Captain Fritz Wiedemann, gave him of his trip to London. "The moment seems to have passed [. . .] to wean [Hitler] from these ideas by reasoned arguments and warnings," concluded Beck.[121] The realisation that Hitler was not to be deterred, coupled with his abandonment by Brauchitsch, prompted Beck to apply on 18 August to be relieved of his post; Beck officially turned over his duties to his successor on 27 August.[122]

By pointing out the potentially catastrophic results of a German invasion of Czechoslovakia in minute and precise technical and strategic detail, Beck had hoped to dissuade Hitler from putting his belligerent plans into effect. Beck had expected that if Hitler understood the dangerous consequences of an attack on Czechoslovakia, he would abandon his schemes. Beck was convinced that a military solution to the Sudeten problem would precipitate Germany's downfall. By the end of July, Beck was certain that Hitler was impervious to reason and that he intended to lead Germany into this inevitably ruinous adventure. At this point, Beck resolved to channel his energies into removing from power a leader who ignored the advice of his military experts and chose to pursue his personal dreams of aggrandisement at the expense of the security of the nation.

By the time of the Sudeten crisis in the summer of 1938, a well-organised opposition group had formed inside Germany whose objective was the removal of Hitler from power. By mid-August, Beck, together with Witzleben, Helldorf, Dr Hans Bernd Gisevius, of the *Reich* Ministry of the Interior, Dr Hjalmar Schacht, Minister of Economics, and Major-General Walter Graf von Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt, the commander of the Potsdam division, were formulating plans to take over the state. Under the leadership of Brockdorff, the nerve centres of power in Berlin were to be occupied: the radio station, the SS barracks, Gestapo headquarters and the Chancellery where Hitler would be arrested and possibly shot.[123]

The sincerity and commitment of Beck's opposition to Hitler have been cast into doubt by some historians including Klaus-Jürgen Müller and Nicholas Reynolds. They claim that Beck shared Hitler's goals of territorial and political aggrandisement and only began to engage in oppositional activities after he resigned from his position as Chief of the General Staff of the Army at the end of August 1938. Reynolds even denies (without evidence) that Beck was involved in the

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[120] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 1, Nos. 510 & 511; Kordt, *Nicht*, 234
[121] Foerster, *Generalstabchefs*, 107
[122] Ibid., 123-6
[123] Hans Bernd Gisevius, *To the Bitter End: An Insider's Account of the Plot to Kill Hitler*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston, reprinted with a new introduction by Peter Hoffmann (New York, 1998), 305-16

plot to stage a military *putsch* during the Sudeten crisis.[124] Contrary to the assertions of Müller and Reynolds, Beck regarded Hitler's plans to invade Czechoslovakia as dangerous, ill-conceived folly. Beck never worked to further Hitler's scheme to expand German territory by military force; Beck had no sympathy for Hitler's aims. From the time he learnt of Hitler's announcement on 5 November 1937 to increase Germany's *Lebensraum* through aggressive invasion, Beck began a concerted memorandum writing campaign to try to dissuade Hitler from executing his plans. When all attempts to make Hitler see reason had failed, Beck took steps aimed at overthrowing the régime, beginning with the proposal for a collective protest in his memorandum of 16 July 1938.

Müller and Reynolds have seized upon Beck's statements that an attack on Czechoslovakia should be postponed until conditions were more "favourable"[125] as an indication that he was ultimately in agreement with Hitler's plans and only disagreed with the timing, believing that an invasion should wait until Germany could be certain of success. Reynolds writes that Beck had "his own time-table for aggression against Czechoslovakia."[126] In fact, Beck hoped to prevent war altogether. Beck's domain was strictly military. He was not supposed to base his estimates of military success upon the political climate. Beck's argument against a German invasion of Czechoslovakia was founded, however, on the prediction that Britain, France and possibly the United States would intervene if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia. Thus, it was on this reading of the political situation that Beck claimed that Germany was not militarily ready for war. Beck's arguments show that he was not advocating a postponement of Hitler's plan to give Germany time to equip herself adequately. Rather, he hoped for an outright cancellation of the scheme. Germany could never expect to wage a successful campaign against Czechoslovakia based on the assumption that Britain, France and possibly the United States would line up against Germany. Thus, according to Beck's argument, the Czechoslovakian question should never be solved by force.[127]

Beck abhorred Hitler and vehemently disagreed with the proposal to solve the Czechoslovakian question by force. The depth of Beck's opposition to Hitler during the period before his retirement is most clearly indicated by his suggestion for the collective resignation of the senior commanders of the German Army. Beck recognised that the instability, which would inevitably follow such a step, might require that the Army take over the key organs of the state. The

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[124] Müller, *General Ludwig Beck*, 272-311; Reynolds, *Treason*, 172
[125] See for example Beck's memorandum of 29 May 1938 in Müller, *General Ludwig Beck*, 521-8; Memorandum also in Foerster, *Generalstabchefs*, 90-4
[126] Müller, *General Ludwig Beck*, 299-300; Reynolds, *Treason*, 153
[127] Peter Hoffmann, "Ludwig Beck: Loyalty and Resistance," *Central European History*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (December 1981): 344-5; Hoffmann, *History*, 74

seriousness with which Beck took this possibility is evidenced by the detailed plans that he initiated for a coup d'état.

Even with the careful strategy formulated by Beck and his co-conspirators, in order for a coup d'état to be successful, it was essential that the Western powers issue an unmistakable declaration of support for Czechoslovakia in the event of a German invasion. Only then would the active support of Beck's successor as the Chief of the General Staff of the Army, General Franz Halder and that of Brauchitsch be ensured. Halder had professed his willingness to take part in the overthrow of Hitler. "Halder certainly seemed determined to put an end to the Nazi reign of terror," recalled Gisevius in his memoirs.[128] Halder balked, however, at the prospect of being portrayed as having stabbed Hitler in the back, fearing for the negative repercussions on the Army.[129] According to Gisevius, Halder argued that because of Hitler's popularity, the soldiers in the German Army would never participate in a coup d'état against the Nazi régime. Hitler would first have to experience a defeat, or preferably "a succession of bad experiences," which would cause the German people and soldiers to lose faith in their leader. Such a defeat would have to occur in the foreign policy sphere since the "system of terrorism was by then so firmly established that no event on the domestic scene would be likely to have much influence."[130]

Halder had to be certain that Britain and France would indeed go to war in defence of Czechoslovakia. Gisevius claims that Halder "preferred to stand the risk of bombings rather than [. . .] precipitate a civil war within the army."[131] The rest of Gisevius' account equally portrays Halder as full of excuses why he would not "stop the Nazi leader at once, before irreparable harm was done." Gisevius condemns Halder for his "timidity."[132] Halder was immobilised by indecision despite his awareness of what was right and what should be done. Other thoughts and emotions, including traditional soldierly values, ambition and honour ultimately overcame his understanding of and objection to Hitler's dangerously irresponsible war plans.

On 2 August 1934, Hitler had combined the offices of President and Chancellor, thus becoming Head of State, as well as Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the German *Reich*. The Army was obliged to swear an oath of allegiance to their new Commander. Rather than pledging allegiance to the nation or the constitution, the officers and soldiers swore an

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[128] Gisevius, *Bitter End*, 289
[129] Ibid., 294-5
[130] Ibid., 292; On Halder see also Hoffmann, *History*, 81-96
[131] Ibid., 293
[132] Ibid., 296

oath of "unconditional obedience" to Hitler personally.[133] An oath of loyalty was not taken lightly or easily discarded by the officer corps of the German Army. Hoffmann explains that "[d]iscipline is the foundation of any military organisation and for the relationship between a modern government and its army. Over centuries of history," he continues, "Europe has made up its mind that policy shall be decided, not by generals or insurrectionists, but by the government of that state. If the military are not subordinate to the government, there can only be chaos internally and impotence externally"[134] Gisevius was therefore unrealistic to expect that the Chief of the General Staff of the Army (or any self-respecting soldier or officer) would be willing to commit high treason without qualms or hesitation as his nation stood poised on the verge of war. Halder's weakness and wavering highlights that Beck was a great exception in placing his duty to the nation and to humanity above obedience to the supreme commander.

Thus, the leaders of the conspiracy had to obtain the firmest possible assurances from the British and French in order to encourage the participation of non-committal military commanders such as Halder, whose key positions nevertheless made their support essential for the success of a coup. The chances for a successful coup d'état rose relative to the extent to which the commanding corps of the army was committed to participate. As Gisevius points out in his memoirs, "[the generals] alone had the technical prerequisites for driving a breach into the government's defences."[135]

In conjunction with the Chief of Staff of the OKW / *Amt Ausland / Abwehr*, Lieutenant-Colonel Hans Oster, (who had the approval of *Abwehr* head, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris), together with Weizsäcker, Beck organised several approaches to the British government.[136] Beck hoped that these initiatives would serve three purposes. He and his co-conspirators wanted to prevent the outbreak of war. In his memoirs, Weizsäcker records that he and Beck "were in complete agreement that a European war must be prevented."[137] The resisters sought to obtain a firm and preferably public declaration that England would go to war against Germany if she attacked Czechoslovakia. Beck, Oster and possibly Weizsäcker had determined that, besides saving the peace, such a declaration would help to create the necessary conditions for the execution of a coup d'état. If the British threatened to intervene and Hitler persisted in pursuing his belligerent plans, he

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[133] Allan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1952), 309; Klaus Hildebrand, *The Third Reich*, trans. P. S. Falla (London; New York, 1999), 14
[134] Hoffmann, *History*, 71
[135] Gisevius, *Bitter End*, 297
[136] Weizsäcker had been in contact with Beck since taking up the position as State Secretary in April 1938. Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 141
[137] Ibid.

would be exposing Germany to the great risk of defeat in battle. In this case, the opposition would be able to expose Hitler to the German people as an irresponsible leader who was willing to imperil his nation for the sake of his expansionist schemes. Alternatively, if the British declared their intention to defend Czechoslovakia and Hitler backed down, his prestige would suffer a tremendous blow and the position of the opposition would be strengthened. Thus, the conspirators pursued two strategies simultaneously: they attempted to weaken the Nazi régime by enlisting foreign support to exert pressure from outside and by securing the co-operation of individuals who held key positions within the state.

2.3 Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin

In August 1938, Beck dispatched Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, an aristocratic Pomeranian landowner who was a fierce opponent of the Nazis, to London. "Bring me certain proof that Britain will fight if Czechoslovakia is attacked and I will make an end of this régime," Beck told Kleist before he left.[138] Kleist was already acquainted with the British *News Chronicle* journalist Ian Colvin. According to Colvin, he had first made Kleist's acquaintance in a club on the Bendlerstraße in Berlin in the spring of 1938. Kleist had approached Colvin and implored him to transmit to England the message that the German Armed Forces were unprepared to wage war and that Hitler would abandon his plans to invade Czechoslovakia if England threatened military intervention. Hitler, maintained Kleist, "fears like the plague that England will caution him" against an invasion of Czechoslovakia and had admitted that if England were to intervene, "the adventure must be put off." In May 1938, Colvin reported this conversation to Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, Counsellor in the British Embassy in Berlin. Ogilvie-Forbes sent a report of Colvin's conversation with Kleist to the Foreign Office in London.[139] Two weeks prior to Kleist's departure, Colvin wrote a letter to Lord Lloyd, Chairman of the British Council, announcing that Kleist would be travelling to London with the aim of persuading the British government to threaten military intervention in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia.[140] The British Ambassador to Germany, Sir Nevile Henderson, also recommended Kleist as a representative of "the moderates in the German General Staff."

During his sojourn in London, Kleist met with Vansittart, Winston Churchill, who was then a Conservative back-bencher in the House of Commons and Lord Lloyd, the former British High

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[138] Beck, quoted in Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 223

[139] The report has not been included in the published foreign policy documents but Colvin is certain that it reached Vansittart. Ibid., 210-11

[140] Letter from Colvin to Lord Lloyd, 3 August 1938. Ibid., 221

Commissioner in Egypt and, since 1935, head of the British Council. Vansittart and Churchill kept the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary appraised of their conversations with Kleist. On 18 August 1938, the day of Kleist's arrival in London, he met with Vansittart. During their discussion, Kleist emphasised that there was no longer any doubt that Hitler would attack Czechoslovakia. "Do you mean extreme danger?" asked Vansittart. "No, I do not mean an extreme danger, I mean a complete certainty," replied Kleist. Kleist told Vansittart that the only possible means of preventing an invasion was a definitive public statement from a British leader, which would impress upon Hitler that Britain and France would not stand idly by and let him take over Czechoslovakia. Kleist maintained that such a setback would precipitate the end of the Nazi régime. He informed Vansittart that all of the German generals "without exception" were "dead against war but they [would] not have the power to stop it unless they [got] encouragement and help from outside."[141]

On 19 August 1938, Kleist spoke with Churchill. Churchill sent an account of his conversation with Kleist to Halifax. Churchill also gave Kleist a letter, which was read and approved by Halifax, to take back to Germany to show to his co-conspirators.[142] In this letter, Churchill stated his conviction that a German invasion of Czechoslovakia would precipitate a world war. The "spectacle of an armed attack by Germany upon a small neighbour and the bloody fighting that will follow will rouse the whole British Empire and compel the gravest decisions," wrote Churchill. He also warned that, once it had begun, such a war "would be fought out like the last one to the bitter end [. . .] Evidently, all the great nations engaged in the struggle, once started, would fight on for victory or death."[143] Despite Churchill's stern words of warning, he wielded no real power at this point. His statement that Britain would intervene on behalf of Czechoslovakia did not carry the same force as if the Prime Minister had issued it.

Following Kleist's return to Germany, Churchill's letter was read by those close to Hitler, having been directed to the Führer's aides either by Canaris or by the Foreign Ministry.[144] Weizsäcker also included an excerpt of Churchill's letter in a report of 6 September concerning the response that could be expected from foreign powers in the event of conflict between Germany and Czechoslovakia.[145]

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[141] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, Appendix 4, pp. 683-4
[142] Ibid., p. 683
[143] Ibid., p. 688
[144] According to Fabian von Schlabrendorff, Canaris gave the letter to Hilter. Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *The Secret War Against Hitler* (Boulder, Colorado, 1994), 9; Ian Colvin states that Weizsäcker circulated Churchill's letter. Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 233-4
[145] *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (*DGFP*), Series D, Vol. 2, No. 436

On 19 August, Chamberlain received Vansittart's record of his meeting with Kleist. The Prime Minister remarked in a letter to Halifax: "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 William's time and I think we must discount a good deal of what he says."[146] Chamberlain's light, derisive dismissal of Kleist's message reveals that the Prime Minister failed to grasp the urgency of Kleist's warnings, as evidenced by the grave danger to which he had exposed himself by undertaking this mission. Chamberlain obviously did not understand the motivation behind Kleist's treasonous approach. Kleist and the backers of his mission were not chasing power for its own sake. Rather, they sought to remove from power a dictator who, in their view, would do irreparable harm to Germany and to all of Europe. They aimed to terminate Hitler's reign of terror and replace him with a government which would restore democracy and the rule of law and which would refrain from attacking other states.

Kleist's approach elicited little response in Britain. On 24 August, the British government decided that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Simon should deliver a speech in which he would restate the essence of Chamberlain's 24 March 1938 House of Commons speech. In this speech, Chamberlain had declared that, although peace was "the greatest interest of the British Empire," Britain would not shirk her Treaty obligations and would be prepared to fight.[147] Kleist had informed Vansittart that the 24 March speech lacked strength. "That is not enough. Those impressions have waned," Kleist had declared.[148]

Simon delivered his speech at Lanark on 27 August. Simon described British foreign policy as "a positive policy of peace" and praised the efforts of Chamberlain and Halifax "to reduce tension and to promote appeasement." He asserted that although Germany's present system of government was "very different" from that of Britain, "that is no reason why we should conduct our foreign policy as though friendship was impossible with these States of widely different political systems." Simon proclaimed his belief that the nations of Europe should co-operate "to remove causes that might lead to war." He pledged that Britain's arms would "never be used for any aggressive purpose" and expressed his conviction that "true solutions cannot be found by the use of

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[146] Ibid., p. 686 The Jacobites were supporters of James II, who had been exiled in 1688. The Jacobites were engaged in efforts to overthrow William of Orange and restore James to the throne by provoking France against England.
[147] 333 Deb 5s, cols. 1339, 1405-6
[148] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, Appendix 4, 685

violent measures." Finally, Simon emphasised that Chamberlain's 24 March speech continued to hold true, stating explicitly that "[t]here is nothing to add or to vary in its content."[149]

Simon's speech did not even come close to meeting the expectations of Kleist and his co-conspirators. On the contrary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that Britain's foreign policy had not changed. The German opposition had hoped for an unequivocal indication that British leaders would change their tactic and adopt an inflexible position vis à vis Hitler. Further, Simon's speech contained several indications that the British government would be willing to make concessions to Hitler for the sake of avoiding armed conflict. Simon declared that "if all nations alike will do their utmost to remove causes that might lead to war and will try to meet in a fair spirit difficulties from whatever quarter they come, war is never inevitable. The influence of Britain is constantly thrown on the side of peace." With regard to the Czech question, Simon asserted that the British government "recognised [. . .] a real problem that urgently needs to be solved." He expressed his conviction that "it should be possible to find a solution which is just to all legitimate interests." Mention was made several times in the speech of Britain's extreme reluctance to involve herself in war. Simon's affirmation of appeasement could only have strengthened Hitler's belief that Britain would not intervene if he attacked Czechoslovakia. Kleist described the outcome of his mission to Colvin as a failure.[150]

2.4 Ernst von Weizsäcker

On 1 September 1938, Professor Carl Jacob Burckhardt, the League of Nations High Commissioner for Danzig, who was en route to Berne, stopped in Berlin to discuss the Czechoslovakian situation with Weizsäcker. Weizsäcker asked Burckhardt to warn the British government that Hitler was poised to invade Czechoslovakia. Weizsäcker told Burckhardt:

> Something must be done. We are on the very brink. The British must send somebody as quickly as possible so that one can talk, but not a personality too high in 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.[151]

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[149] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 704
[150] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 234
[151] *Trials*, Vol. 11, *The Ministries Case*, Doc. Book 1A, Burckhardt affidavit

Burckhardt recalls that by plotting with Germany's potential enemy in an effort to save the peace, Weizsäcker was "engaging in a double game of the utmost peril [. . .] Even as early as this, Weizsäcker was making no secret of his view that the preservation of peace and the salvation of Germany were only possible if the one ruinous figure, in whose hands all power was concentrated, should disappear."[152]

Weizsäcker asked Burckhardt to contact London upon his return to Switzerland. Jarred by Weizsäcker's desperation, Burckhardt drove the 900 kilometres to Berne without stopping. Upon arrival he communicated Weizsäcker's message to the British Minister in Berne, Sir George Warner, who sent a telegram to Lord Halifax. Burckhardt also transmitted Weizsäcker's message to the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs R. A. Butler. In Geneva several days later, Burckhardt repeated the message to his British League of Nations colleague, Ralph Stevenson, who wrote a letter summarising this information to Sir William Strang, the Head of the Central Department in the British Foreign Office.[153] In this letter, Stevenson recounted Burckhardt's description of his meeting with Weizsäcker in detail. Weizsäcker, wrote Stevenson, had concluded that war might be avoided if Chamberlain sent a personal letter to Hitler stating that if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, "a war would start in which Great Britain would inevitably be on the opposite side to Germany." Weizsäcker had "impressed on Burckhardt the extreme urgency of the matter" and urged that the letter reach Hitler before the conclusion of the Nazi party rally in Nürnberg. Burckhardt, explained Stevenson, had known Weizsäcker for a long time and was accustomed to his "absolute loyalty in ordinary circumstances to his superiors." Weizsäcker's message had therefore obviously made a deep impression on Burckhardt, who had rushed straight to Berne to transmit it to the British government. Weizsäcker's message also jolted the prevaricating British Cabinet into action. As a result of Weizsäcker's intervention, the Cabinet decided to instruct Henderson, the British Ambassador to Germany, to deliver a warning to Hitler at the Nürnberg Party Rally.[154] That Weizsäcker's action played a decisive part in the Cabinet decision to issue a warning to Hitler is evidenced by a note from Sir Orme Sargent to Vansittart. On 20 June 1939, Sargent wrote: "[I]n the early days of last September, Weizsäcker's advice was, through Burckhardt, to send a strong warning to Hitler. It was largely on this advice that the Cabinet

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[152] Carl Jacob Burckhardt, *Meine Danziger Mission* (München, 1960), 181-3; Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 147
[153] Burckhardt, *Meine Danziger Mission*, 183-7; *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, Appendix 4, 689-92
[154] Quoted in Peter Hoffamnn, "The Question of Western Allied Co-operation with the German Anti-Nazi Conspiracy, 1938-1944," *The Historical Journal* 34, 2 (1991), 439, based on PRO, FO 371/22973/55491; Sir Nevile Henderson, *Failure of a Mission: Berlin 1937-1939* (Toronto, 1940), 150-1. See below, 61

decided to instruct Sir N. Henderson at Nuremberg to deliver the famous passage to Hitler. If you remember, Sir N. Henderson demurred, and eventually won the day."

2.5 Theodor and Erich Kordt

Immediately following Kleist's journey to London, Oster and Weizsäcker orchestrated another approach to the British government. Beck was also consulted and approved the plan.[155] The aim of the mission, in Weizsäcker's words, was to enter into "conspiracy with the potential enemy for the purpose of assuring peace."[156] Oster instructed Erich Kordt, the head of the Ministerial Bureau in the Foreign Ministry in Berlin to secure from the British government a clear statement that Britain would go to war to protect Czechoslovakia. Oster maintained that the British government must be informed of the unreadiness of the German Armed Forces for war and the opposition to war of the German people. If Britain threatened military intervention and Hitler backed down, his popularity would diminish and the position of the opposition would be made stronger. If, on the other hand, Hitler refused to heed British warnings, the German opposition would launch its plans for a coup d'état. Oster told Erich Kordt that if the British government would make an "energetic declaration," the opposition would be able to mount a case against the Nazi régime that would be immediately understood by ordinary Germans. If the British agreed to issue such a declaration, instructed Oster, Kordt could tell them that the military fronde led by Beck would be in a position to prevent the outbreak of war. "Then there would be no more Hitler," concluded Oster.[157]

Kordt recognised that "sabre-rattling did not suit the British mentality." He was familiar with the British propensity to communicate using "the restrained form of 'understatements.'" Kordt also knew that the British government was committed to conservative defence spending and that its top foreign policy priority was the preservation of peace. Kordt believed, however, that the British must realise that "a great diplomatic disgrace for Hitler could easily be the beginning of his end." If the British could be made to realise the overall weakness of the German Armed Forces, the likelihood that Hitler would make a "pitiful climb down" when faced with the threat of British military intervention and the readiness of the Chief of the General Staff of the Army to participate in a coup d'état, they might be persuaded to issue a strongly-worded declaration. The vulnerability

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[155] Klemperer, *Search*, 102
[156] Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 145
[157] Kordt, *Nicht*, 246-9; For an account of the Kordt mission, please see Hoffmann, *History*, 65-8; Klemperer, *Search*, 101-5; Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 145; Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis*, 417-19; Rothfels, *German Opposition*, 60-3

of the German military had to be impressed upon the British government. The Siegfried Line was weak and the German Army would have only five to seven divisions with which to confront a French Army of fifty divisions.[158] Confronted with odds that would almost certainly lead to a dreadful defeat, the German military commanders could be relied upon to support the overthrow of the Nazi régime. In Kordt's view, "a rebellion against Hitler [was] the only way out of an apparently hopeless situation for the German army commanders"[159]

During the night of 3-4 September, after conferring with Weizsäcker, Erich Kordt drafted a message outlining the situation in Germany and calling for the British government to take a firm stance towards Hitler. Erich Kordt transmitted his message to his cousin Susanne Simonis. She committed it to memory and then travelled to London, arriving on 5 September 1938, where she relayed Erich Kordt's words to his brother Theo, Counsellor in the German Embassy in London, who was also acting as Chargé d'Affaires.[160]

Through his contact, Sir Horace Wilson, chief industrial advisor to the British government and also one of Chamberlain's foreign policy advisors, Theo Kordt was granted an interview with the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax. Theo Kordt had first met Wilson on 23 August at the home of Philip Conwell Evans, who facilitated many of the contacts between German resisters and British statesmen.[161] Kordt had entreated Wilson to use his influence to persuade Chamberlain that he could prevent war by adopting a firm and unswerving policy towards Hitler.[162] Upon receiving his brother Erich's message, Theo Kordt again approached Wilson. They met on 6 September and Wilson arranged for Kordt to meet Halifax the next day. The meeting between Kordt and Halifax took place in Wilson's office at 10 Downing Street with Kordt arriving at the garden entrance to avoid attracting unwanted attention.

Kordt presented himself to Halifax as the spokesman for an opposition circle comprised of men from the upper echelons of the German military and civil service. Kordt stated that this group sought to thwart Hitler's plans to invade Czechoslovakia. They were capable of realising their intentions, said Kordt, but only if Britain made it clear that war with Czechoslovakia was tantamount to war with Britain. If Hitler carried on with the same policy, the German generals

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[158] Colonel-General Alfred Jodl's Diary in *IMT*, Vol. 28, 388
[159] Kordt, *Nicht*, 246-9
[160] Schrift Dr. Theo Kordts an den Prüfungsausschuss, Bad Godesberg-Bonn, p. 18; Kordt Papers, ED 157/6, IfZ
[161] Hoffmann, *History*, 66; Supporting Memorandum to the Curriculum Vitae of Dr Erich Kordt, Kordt Papers, ED 157/30, IfZ
[162] Kordt, *Nicht*, 279; Letter from Theo Kordt to Ernst von Weizsäcker, London, 23 August 1938, Kordt Papers, ED 157/3, IfZ

would be justified and willing to intercede and prevent him from doing so by force. Before a coup d'état could be launched with a reasonable hope of success, however, Hitler must suffer a serious setback in the foreign policy sphere. An unambiguous British commitment to defend Czechoslovakia would achieve this purpose. Halifax agreed to pass Kordt's message on to Chamberlain, promising that the request would be carefully considered. Kordt took leave of Halifax, confident that a firm statement of British support for Czechoslovakia would be forthcoming. One week later, however, Chamberlain flew to Berchtesgaden to meet with Hitler. Halifax later admitted to Kordt that the plans for Chamberlain's visit to Hitler were already under consideration at the time that Kordt had asked for a declaration of British support for Czechoslovakia. Halifax told Kordt that the British "were not able to be as frank with you as you were with us. At the time in question we were already considering a personal initiative of Chamberlain."[163]

The efforts of the Kordt brothers and of Weizsäcker during the autumn of 1938 to warn the British government of Hitler's intentions have been ignored and cast into doubt since the conclusion of the war. On 28 July 1947, Erich Kordt was formally charged in a Denazification Court as a "major offender" according to the clearance procedure in force in the American Zone of occupation.[164] Weizsäcker was arrested by the Allied Military Authorities and put on trial on 5 November 1947 at Nürnberg in Case 11 of the Trials of War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, which came to be known as the "Wilhelmstraße Trial."[165]

John Wheeler-Bennett writes contemptuously of Weizsäcker and the Kordt brothers. Wheeler-Bennett alleges that these men formed part of that "mild and ineffective Opposition within the German Civil Service whose members remained in the service of the Third Reich, did the work of their Nazi masters, and to-day, having survived untouched to tell the tale and deeply regretting their lack of initiative in the past, now vividly remember their objections to the excesses of Nazi foreign policy and even their conspiracies to restrain it."[166] Wheeler-Bennett misrepresents the activities of the German resisters within the Foreign Office who worked against the policies of the Nazi dictatorship. With the use of the adjective, "mild," Wheeler-Bennett implies that Weizsäcker

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[163] Kordt, *Nicht*, 250-2, 279-81; Affidavit of Hilde Waldo, Santa Monica, California, 29 May 1946; Letter from Theo Kordt to Lord Halifax, Munich, 29 July 1947; Letter from Lord Halifax to Theo Kordt, Garrowby, York, 9 August 1947, Kordt Papers, ED 157/6; Curriculum vitae of Erich Kordt, p. 2, Supporting Memorandum to the curriculum vitae of Dr. Erich Kordt, pp. 6-7, Kordt Papers 157/30; Evidence given by Theo Kordt in the Wilhelmstraße Trial, 14 July 1948, Kordt Papers, ED 157/7, IfZ

[164] Letter from Theodor Kordt to Lord Halifax, Munich, 29 July 1947, Kordt Papers, ED 157/6, IfZ

[165] On 14 April 1949, Weizsäcker was sentenced to seven years in jail. In 1950 he was released under amnesty. Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis*, 416; Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 309-10

[166] Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis*, 416

and the Kordts may have harboured a few trivial objections to the policies of the régime, which they nevertheless continued to serve faithfully. Wheeler-Bennett suggests that these men fabricated tales of oppositional activities in an attempt to salvage some remnant of their reputations only after the war, when the Nazi régime and all those who had served it were subject to universal scorn and enmity.

Wheeler-Bennett contends that although Weizsäcker was in contact with Beck and Goerdeler, he was not involved in any resistance activities against the Nazi régime. Weizsäcker, maintains Wheeler-Bennett, began to claim that he had participated in the resistance only during his trial.[167] Wheeler-Bennett's charge is false. Weizsäcker's dedicated opposition to Hitler's foreign policy and to the Nazi system of government is evident in the warning that he issued to the British government through Burckhardt and the warnings that he instructed Erich Kordt to deliver. As Burckhardt commented, Weizsäcker's actions reveal that he was prepared to engage in a 'double game of the utmost peril.' In order to save the peace, Weizsäcker sabotaged his government's foreign and defence policy by colluding with Germany's potential enemy.

Wheeler-Bennett claims that the Kordt brothers warned the British government of Hitler's intention to invade Czechoslovakia only because they wanted to prevent "a war which in the long run would be disastrous to Germany."[168] While the prevention of war was certainly of great importance to the Kordt brothers, their opposition to the Nazi régime extended beyond their disagreement with Hitler's plan to invade Czechoslovakia. They were firmly committed to the overthrow of the Nazi dictatorship. They sought to obtain a British threat of military intervention because they believed that such a warning would ensure the participation of the German army commanders in a coup d'état, thereby dramatically increasing the chance of successfully removing Hitler from power. Erich sent instructions to Theo at the beginning of September having been told by Oster that if a threat of British military intervention could be obtained, "there would be no more Hitler." Thus, it was with the intention of setting in motion the events that would precipitate a coup d'état that Erich and Theo Kordt approached the British government. Convincing evidence of the Kordts' opposition to the Nazi régime comes from the man with whom Theo Kordt spoke on 7 September 1938. On 29 July 1947, in an attempt to help clear his brother's name, Theo Kordt wrote to Lord Halifax requesting a letter of confirmation from the former British Foreign Secretary stating that Erich Kordt had "given proof of active resistance to the criminal Nazi policy."[169] Halifax

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[167] Ibid., 417
[168] Ibid., 418
[169] Letter from Theo Kordt to Lord Halifax, Munich, 29 July 1947, Kordt Papers, ED 157/6, IfZ

responded promptly. In a letter dated 9 August 1947, Halifax wrote that he remembered "very well" the information that had been transmitted by the Kordt brothers to the British government before the outbreak of war. Halifax stated that in passing along this information, Erich Kordt "took very great risk and in doing so gave practical evidence of his active opposition to the criminal policy of Hitler."[170]

Further evidence exists that Erich Kordt envisaged a British pledge to defend Czechoslovakia as the necessary precursor to a coup because it would ensure the participation of the generals. A meeting, which took place between Brauchitsch and Kordt at the end of August, shows that Erich Kordt's actions, including the approach to the British government in early September, were aimed at bringing about a coup d'état. This meeting occurred after Oster suggested that Kordt arrange to meet with Brauchitsch and explain the external political situation to him.

Kordt consulted Weizsäcker, who approved of the meeting. Subsequently, Kordt met inconspicuously with Brauchitsch at the War Ministry. Kordt stressed Germany's dangerously isolated position. He insisted that Britain and France would certainly defend Czechoslovakia if she were attacked by Germany. Kordt explained that Hitler and Ribbentrop had no concrete foundation for their claims that Germany would emerge victorious. Kordt referred to a memo written by Ribbentrop which claimed that if Britain and France interfered with Germany's conquest of Czechoslovakia "75 million Germans would fall upon them as one man and annihilate them." Kordt concluded his visit with the statement "the fate of the Army and of Germany, and therefore entire responsibility now lay with Brauchitsch." Kordt intended to impress upon Brauchitsch the gravity of the situation, in particular the great chance that Germany would have to face Britain and France if the plan to invade Czechoslovakia were carried out. Kordt hoped that if Brauchitsch could be made to understand the peril into which Hitler was prepared to thrust the German Army and the German nation, he would defy these orders and co-operate in the removal of Hitler from power.[171]

Like Wheeler-Bennett, Vansittart did his utmost to slander both the Kordt brothers and Weizsäcker during the latter's trial. In an affidavit dated 12 August 1948, Vansittart described the Kordts as "unreliable and essentially time-servers [. . .] They served Hitler and Ribbentrop until the Nazi tyranny was clearly beaten. Till then they remained on what seemed to be the winning side and never showed any real intention of breaking with the Nazi tyranny." Vansittart criticises the Kordt brothers for failing to quit the German foreign service. According to Vansittart, the Kordts

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[170] Letter from Lord Halifax to Theo Kordt, Garrowby, York, 9 August 1947, Kordt Papers, ED 157/6, IfZ
[171] Kordt, *Nicht*, 241-4; Hoffmann, *History*, 63-4

ought to have remained in Britain to fight the Nazi régime. Vansittart claims that he "never had any impression that [the Kordt brothers] really intended to take action against the régime or that they were associated with any persons or groups who would do so."[172]

Vansittart's willingness to issue defamatory statements against the Kordt brothers is quite astonishing, given that he sought information from them which he passed on to his government and which he used to support his argument for the abolition of the policy of appeasement. Vansittart received information from the Kordts during the Sudeten crisis as well as throughout the summer of 1939, when they warned that Germany was seeking an agreement with the Soviet Union and reported on the progress of the German-Soviet negotiations.[173] Further, it was Vansittart himself who urged the Kordts not to relinquish their posts in the German diplomatic corps, insisting that they could be far more effective in creating the necessary conditions for a coup d'état within the state apparatus than from outside.[174] In an attempt to explain Vansittart's virulent condemnation of the Kordts, Hans Rothfels points to the second affidavit, dated 31 August 1948, which Vansittart submitted to the International Military Tribunal.[175] In this affidavit Vansittart states: "The whole basis of my attitude to Germany was the conviction that there neither existed nor would exist any real or effective opposition."[176] In his biography of Vansittart, Colvin describes "the vehement disillusion and rejection of all things German that characterised Vansittart in the war years and after." This disillusion, which might properly be termed hatred, is apparent in Vansittart's untrue claim that he had never received any information of importance from the Kordt brothers. Whatever the reason, Vansittart's attitude to the German resistance shifted abruptly and violently.

In January 1941, Vansittart agreed to the publication of a collection of seven radio broadcasts delivered on the British Broadcasting Corporation Overseas Programme in a volume entitled *Black Record: Germans Past and Present.* Vansittart endeavoured to show that all Germans were imbued with an aggressive instinct for conflict and conquest, which led them to prosecute wars for the sheer love of battle. "The word 'vandalism' was coined to describe gratuitous German savagery." He claimed that "German barbarism had first crushed Latin civilisation at the Battle of Adrianople in the year 378" and that it had continued to upset the otherwise harmonious European civilisation down the centuries. He maintained that Germany

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[172] Affidavit of Robert Gilbert Baron Vansittart, London, 12 August 1948, Kordt Papers, ED 157/8, IfZ
[173] Kordt, *Nicht*, 314; Theodor Kordt, Short Autobiography (I), p. 12, Kordt Papers, ED 157/4, IfZ; Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 325
[174] Letter from Hellmut Becker, Weizsäcker's lawyer, to Warren E. Magee, 21 August 1948, Kordt Papers, 157/8, IfZ
[175] Hans Rothfels, *Die Deutsche Opposition Gegen Hitler: Eine Würdigung* (Krefeld, 1951), 190-1, fn 47
[176] Second Vansittart Affidavit, London, 31 August 1948, Kordt Papers, ED 157/8, IfZ

would pose a perpetual threat to peace unless the German people were to "undergo a deep, spiritual regeneration." According to Vansittart, "there *can* be a new Germany, but it must be quite a new Germany, the Germany that has been imagined, but has never been."[177] His virulent, sweeping diatribe against the German people betrays nothing of the seasoned diplomat, who was well acquainted with the facts of European history but rather suggests a man overcome with hatred and eager to inflame his listeners. Vansittart's willingness to deliver propaganda tracts entirely unbefitting the Chief Diplomatic Advisor to His Majesty's Government on the national broadcasting service indicates that he may have allowed his judgement to be clouded by violent feelings. Perhaps the same could be said for his decision to fabricate tales aimed at discrediting Weizsäcker and the Kordt brothers after the war.

2.6 Carl Goerdeler

During the Sudeten Crisis, Goerdeler intensified his efforts to persuade the British government to threaten military intervention if Germany invaded Czechoslovakia. On 10 September 1938, Goerdeler sent an urgent telegram to Young asking him to come immediately to Zürich, Switzerland. Young left his Kenilworth home the next morning and arrived in Zürich the same afternoon. Upon arrival, Young met Goerdeler at the St Gotthard Hotel.[178] Goerdeler told Young that Hitler was set on aggression in Czechoslovakia because he believed that neither Britain nor France would honour her commitment to defend Czechoslovakia. Hitler was convinced that he would be able to enter and conquer Czechoslovakia without setting off a European war. Hitler was certain that Britain would not lend military support to France if she fulfilled her treaty obligations and came to the aid of Czechoslovakia. Hitler conjectured that France would not honour her commitment to Czechoslovakia without British support.[179]

Goerdeler emphasised that it was still possible to preserve peace. He urged that Britain must take the initiative. The leading German generals were opposed to Hitler's plan for the conquest of Czechoslovakia, believing that Britain and France would indeed step in and deliver a bloody defeat to Germany. If, however, Hitler proved the generals wrong and succeeded in conquering Czechoslovakian territory without precipitating a war, the generals would have far more difficulty justifying opposition to any future schemes for aggressive invasion which Hitler might have.[180]

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[177] Sir Robert Gilbert Vansittart, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present* (London, 1941), 21
[178] Young, *'X' Documents*, 72-3
[179] Ibid., 76
[180] Ibid., 75

Goerdeler's desperation to force the British to look at the situation in its stark reality is apparent from his choice of words. Goerdeler stressed that the Nazi leaders were "criminals—a set of gangsters who recognise no law but their own." Goerdeler repeated the statement that he had made on 6 August that "Hitler has reached the stage where he feels he is a god – in fact he is mad." British leaders must comprehend that they were dealing not with statesmen but with criminals and must therefore "adapt [their] technique of dealing with the Government of Germany to the requirements of this gangster type of mind."[181]

Goerdeler stated that the British government must understand that Hitler was an "abnormality" who had attained his present position by a lucky string of successes. "A dictator," explained Goerdeler, "must, if he is to maintain his position, move steadily from one spectacular success to the next." It was the responsibility of the British, together with the other two "great democracies" (France and the United States) to break Hitler's series of successes.

Goerdeler insisted that the power to avert war rested in the hands of the British government. He urged that swift action be taken. Parliament should be recalled immediately. The resumption of Parliament alone would have a "profound effect" on Hitler and on the German people. "It would be a gesture to the world that the great democratic Commonwealth of Nations realised the gravity of the situation and were at last 'taking off their coats' to get down to business." After the summoning of Parliament, advised Goerdeler, Chamberlain should issue a declaration to Germany and to the world. In this declaration, the British Prime Minister should warn that Britain would retaliate with military force against any act of violence perpetrated against Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain, suggested Goerdeler, should declare that the "French and British peoples [. . .] will fight together with all their might [. . .] for the sake of those great imponderables, Justice, Law, and Decency." The British Ambassador to Germany, Henderson, should be recalled to London. A statement should be issued announcing that Henderson would not return to Germany until Britain received a "clear assurance that the British people and British institutions will not further be maligned by officials of the German Government."

Chamberlain should remind the German government and people that Britain sought always to resolve outstanding problems through negotiation, as evidenced by the recent visits to Germany by both Eden and Halifax.[182] Neither of these goodwill gestures had elicited a response from the

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[181] Ibid., 76-7

[182] Eden, together with Sir John Simon, met with Hitler in March 1935. Avon, *Dictators*, 148-159. Halifax, then Lord President, met with Hitler in Berchtesgaden in November 1937. Earl of Birkenhead, *Halifax. The Life of Lord Halifax* (London, 1965), 368-74

Nazi leaders, but that had not diminished the strength of Britain's commitment to address all of Germany's grievances in a peaceful fashion. This commitment extended to the Sudeten German question, which Britain was willing to negotiate with the best interests of all in mind, on the condition that she first received from the German Government a pledge to keep the peace. Chamberlain should reveal his awareness of Germany's economic and military weaknesses. Finally, he should state that Britain had the highest respect for the "character, the kindliness and sense of honour" of the German people. If the leaders of Germany, however, were to ignore the desire of all peoples for peace, Britain would have no alternative but to declare war on Germany. Goerdeler explained that an unequivocal British threat to defend Czechoslovakia would be sure to avert war. There were two possible outcomes following a British warning. Hitler might abandon his plan to conquer Czechoslovakia or he might forge ahead with his plan and the generals would then be justified in refusing to carry out his orders and the way would lie open for a coup d'état.

Finally, Goerdeler outlined his vision for a post-Hitler world order, which would see Britain, France and Germany, with the support of the United States, working in close co-operation to "securely lay the foundation for a reconstructed League of Nations, destined, in the future, to become the sure material and spiritual anchorage for struggling humanity."[183]

Young arrived in London in the late afternoon of 12 September, whereupon he went immediately to the Foreign Office and delivered his report on his meeting with Goerdeler to Vansittart.[184] Young also sent copies of the report to Eden, Schairer and Sir Horace Wilson. Vansittart sent a copy of the second *'X' Document* to 10 Downing Street, but it is unknown whether it was read.[185]

Chapter 3: British Policy, May 1937-September 1938

3.1 Appeasement

The emissaries of the German resistance who approached the British government in 1938 all hoped to obtain a firm declaration pledging British military assistance in defence of Czechoslovakia in the event of a German attack. To comply with this request, the British government would have had to reverse the direction of the nation's foreign policy. From the time he assumed the position of Prime Minister on 28 May 1937, Chamberlain had determined to steer British foreign policy firmly towards an agreement with Nazi Germany. Chamberlain eschewed

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[183] Young, *'X' Documents*, 80-3
[184] Ibid., 73
[185] Ibid., 85-93

rapid rearmament and threats of force as a means of subduing Hitler and keeping Germany under Britain's thumb. Instead, he believed that he could reach a settlement with Hitler by addressing issues of concern for Germany in a reasonable, logical and flexible manner.[186]

Chamberlain's conviction that his conciliatory approach to Hitler would render rearmament unnecessary led him to discard or ignore viable options that would have allowed Britain to equip herself adequately to participate in a European war. Keith Middlemas is critical of Chamberlain's approach to rearmament, arguing that there were more alternatives than the Prime Minister allowed. Greater scope existed for a more flexible policy. "[T]he assumption that rearmament was 'finished,' ill-judged as it was, should never have been allowed to exclude considerations of a rolling defence budget." While Middlemas acknowledges the legitimacy of Chamberlain's fear that "both shortage of rentier capital and an unstable tax-base" would make it difficult to finance a larger rearmament programme, he suggests that "in the reduction of unemployment, rearmament could be seen as a positive economic gain." British foreign policy need not have been so restricted by economic considerations. The perceived need to limit defence spending and "the transfer of the burden to diplomatic action [. . .] governed and limited British policy in the crises of [. . .] 1938." In focusing so closely on the health of the economy, Chamberlain and his ministers gave insufficient consideration to the reality of the international situation and Britain's role within it. Restrictions on defence expenditure "were imposed largely by Chamberlain's direction and they owed surprisingly little to consideration of existing commitments. Seldom have the defences of a nation been rearranged with such concentration on economic grounds."[187] F. Coghlan concurs with Middlemas' assessment. "It would not be too strong to conclude that Britain's will to rearm was paralysed by economic arguments." Chamberlain's firm set of priorities governed the approach of the British government to rearmament. "Social expenditure was much more congenial to him than arms expenses, and he was deeply aware of the country's great need for more education, better housing and social welfare." Chamberlain believed that the nation could only rearm rapidly at the expense of these other vital national services. According to Coghlan, Chamberlain failed to recognise the "impact that a revitalised arms industry would have upon the depressed areas of the economy."[188]

Chamberlain's attitude regarding the acceleration of Britain's rearmament programme was bound to his conviction that he could secure Hitler's co-operation by offering the dictator a few concessions. Chamberlain's steadfast determination to negotiate an agreement with Hitler led him

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[186] Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 319
[187] Middlemas, *Strategy*, 126-28
[188] F. Coghlan, "Armaments, Economic Policy and Appeasement," *History* Vol. 57, No. 190 (June 1972): 208

to reject alternative policies and to refuse to confront evidence that cast his hopes and assumptions into grave doubt. Chamberlain had few qualms about ignoring or overriding the objections of his ministers and of his expert advisors. In November 1937, for instance, the editor of *The Field* invited Halifax, then Lord President, to attend a hunting exhibition in Berlin. Chamberlain and Halifax saw the invitation as a chance to converse informally with the Nazi leadership and to discover the German conditions for a general settlement and an arms limitation agreement.[189] Chamberlain insisted on the visit over the protestations of Anthony Eden, then Foreign Secretary, and of Foreign Office officials, who balked at laying out the British position for Germany. Instead, as Eden told Halifax and Henderson: "We must keep Germany guessing as to our attitude. It is all we can do until we are strong enough to talk to Germany." Any approach to the Germans would be unwise until Britain had reached a higher level of rearmament. Until then, British negotiators would have difficulty in securing a deal which would be favourable to the country's interests.[190]

Conversely, Chamberlain felt confident that the Germans would be more amenable in the context of intimate, informal conversations. Immediately before leaving for Berlin, Halifax noted: "I have a feeling that if we could convince them that we wanted to be friends we might find many questions less intractable than they now appear."[191] While in Berlin, Halifax spoke with Foreign Minister Konstantin Freiherr von Neurath, Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force Hermann Göring, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, President of the Reichsbank, Hjalmar Schacht and War Minister Werner von Blomberg. He also visited Berchtesgaden and spoke with Hitler. In the report of his visit submitted to the Foreign Office, Halifax described the outcome of his conversation with Hitler in quite unpromising terms. During his visit to Berchtesgaden, Halifax assured Hitler that Britain would not stand in the way of a German attempt to redraw the boundaries of Eastern Europe, with particular reference to Austria, Czechoslovakia and Danzig, on the condition that any changes be effected peacefully. Hitler, however, claimed that peaceful revision of East European territorial boundaries would be infeasible as all the countries concerned would never be able to agree on mutually acceptable alterations. Further, Hitler avoided any discussion of disarmament, which he believed was only a substanceless "shibboleth" to which a British government that had lost touch with reality clung in futile desperation. In Hitler's view, disarmament "offered no practical prospect of a solution to Europe's difficulties." In his report, Halifax recorded his scepticism regarding the possibility of an agreement between Britain and Germany. "I doubt," he

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[189] Birkenhead, *Halifax*, 365
[190] Avon, *Dictators*, 512
[191] Halifax, quoted in Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 99

wrote, "whether there is any other practical way of effecting change in Anglo-German relations."[192] Nevertheless, manifesting an optimism that ran counter to the conclusions he had reached in his own report, Halifax told the Cabinet upon his return that "the basis of an understanding might not be too difficult as regards Central and Eastern Europe."[193] Ignoring that Hitler had declared that he would refuse to accept a peaceful revision of the European status quo and his relative lack of interest in colonial acquisitions, Halifax believed that Britain should lure Germany into a peaceful settlement of outstanding grievances in Eastern and Central Europe by offering colonies to Germany. In a letter to his sister, Ida, Chamberlain proclaimed the Halifax visit "a great success because it achieved its object, that of creating an atmosphere in which it was possible to discuss with Germany the practical questions involved in a European settlement." The Halifax visit reinforced Chamberlain's determination to secure a general settlement and an arms limitation agreement with Germany.[194]

The circumstances surrounding the resignation of Anthony Eden also exemplify Chamberlain's tendency to push ahead with his own agenda without taking into account the objections raised by members of his Cabinet, Parliament or senior civil servants. The existing differences between Chamberlain and Eden reached a climax after the Foreign Office received news of Hitler's meeting with the Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg on 12 February 1938. Hitler had subjected Schuschnigg to a "browbeating" and had forced him under threat of an armed invasion to agree to ten demands aimed at the Nazification of Austria, including the appointment of Artur Seyss-Inquart, who was a Nazi, as Minister of the Interior. On 17 February, Lord Edward Drummond Perth, the British Ambassador in Rome, sent a telegram to Eden informing him that the Italian leader, Benito Mussolini and his Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano were eager to begin talks with Britain "in view of [the] possibility of certain future happenings." The Italian offer to enter into discussions carried a thinly veiled threat that "[t]oday an agreement will be easy but things are happening in Europe which will make it impossible tomorrow."[195] In Eden's view, this statement was simply a repetition of the same threat the Italians had used to gain concessions from the British in the past, namely the lifting of League of Nations sanctions imposed as a result of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia on 3 October 1935 and the Gentleman's Agreement of 2 January 1937

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[192] *DBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 19, No. 336, p. 547
[193] Halifax, quoted in Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 100
[194] Letter from Neville Chamberlain to Miss Ida Chamberlain from the private papers of Neville Chamberlain in the University of Birmingham Library, reprinted in *DBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 19, No. 349, pp. 580-1
[195] *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. 1, No. 294; *DBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 19, Nos. 506, 538, 543 & Appendix I, pp. 1141-3

according to which both Italy and Britain disclaimed their intention of altering the status quo in the Mediterranean or perpetrating unfriendly acts or disseminating hostile propaganda. Eden was sceptical of the sincerity of the Italians' claim that they wanted to reach a comprehensive and permanent agreement with Britain. Rather, he saw it as another attempt to milk concessions from the British in a moment of vulnerability. Eden believed that the Italians ought to make some gesture of good will before Britain agreed to enter into negotiations. Chamberlain, on the other hand, regarded an agreement with Italy as a strategic necessity. According to the information he had from the defence experts and the Treasury officials, Britain could not afford to have too many enemies. The nation was ill equipped militarily and lacked the resources to arm herself to the extent that good diplomatic relations with all three aggressor states could be allowed to lapse. Chamberlain informed Eden that "he had missed one opportunity after another of advancing towards peace; he had one more chance, probably the last, and he was wanting to throw it away." On 19 February, the Cabinet met and both Eden and Chamberlain put forth their arguments. Fourteen ministers supported Chamberlain; three supported Eden, at which point Eden announced his resignation.[196]

Chamberlain consistently brushed aside Eden's concerns and undermined the authority that he had as Foreign Secretary. At a meeting between Chamberlain and Count Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador in London on 27 July 1937, Grandi suggested that the Prime Minister write a personal note to Mussolini. The Italian ambassador believed that a personal note would help to reassure Mussolini that Britain had no aggressive intentions toward Italy. Chamberlain agreed and "promptly sat down and wrote the letter." Chamberlain expressed his regret that relations between Italy and Britain had deteriorated and his hope that "the old mutual confidence" could soon be "restored."[197] Chamberlain indicated his willingness to begin conversations at any time. Without consulting the Foreign Office, Chamberlain gave the letter to Grandi, who forwarded it to Mussolini.

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[196] Eden, *Dictators*, 579; Harvey, *Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, 91; Chamberlain may have had Halifax in mind as Eden's successor since Halifax' November 1937 visit to Hitler. Chamberlain, however, needed a reason to get rid of Eden and this chance arose at the time of the row over how best to deal with Italy. According to Andrew Roberts, "it came as a shock to Halifax when he discovered that Eden was contemplating resignation over the question of the projected Anglo-Italian entente." Halifax only learned of the rift between Eden and Chamberlain at the Cabinet meeting on Saturday 19 February 1938. After Eden declared his intention to resign, Halifax "appointed a committee [Inskip, Stanley, MacDonald and Morrison] to join him and the two antagonists to try to find some formula under which Eden could rescind his threat." Five days after Eden resigned, Chamberlain offered Halifax the Foreign Secretaryship, which came as a surprise to many. R. A. Butler, for example, thought that "'they will appoint a whole time Foreign Secretary in the Commons and Halifax will as usual wish to keep out of the limelight.' Andrew Roberts, *The Holy Fox.' The Life of Lord Halifax*, (London, 1991), 83-5

[197] Chamberlain, quoted in Larry William Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: a Study in the Politics of History* (New York, 1982), 82

According to Larry Fuchser, the "seemingly spontaneous nature of Chamberlain's actions masked the fact that the letter was part of a carefully designed plan to circumvent Eden and Foreign Office experts." In a private letter, Chamberlain wrote that he had intended the letter to impress Grandi by showing that "a British prime minister could write such a letter without first seeking the advice of colleagues."[198] In his diary, Chamberlain noted that he had purposely not shown the letter to Eden. "I did not show my letter to the Foreign Secretary, for I had a feeling that he would object."[199] Chamberlain also circumvented Eden when he proposed talks with Mussolini and Ciano at the beginning of February 1938 through his sister-in-law, Ivy Chamberlain, who was on friendly terms with the Italian dictator.[200] "The highly irregular nature of this interchange can hardly be understated," writes Fuchser. "Here was the sister-in-law of a British prime minister [. . .] discussing the most important diplomatic issues without either the knowledge or the consent of the British Foreign Office, with the full support of her brother-in-law, the prime minister."[201] Similarly, when Roosevelt sent a message to the British government suggesting an international conference to try to diffuse the tensions in Europe, Chamberlain did not inform Eden for two days after receiving the message. Without consulting Eden, Chamberlain replied to Roosevelt that it was not the appropriate time for such a conference. As Paul Doerr points out, "most historians would agree that to conduct foreign policy without the input of the Foreign Secretary is problematical."[202] Frank McDonough concurs. "A key part of the conflict between Eden and Chamberlain "was constitutional and political." McDonough argues that the issue at stake was "whether foreign policy should result from a close collaboration between foreign secretary and prime minister, as Eden saw it, or whether the prime minister should undertake the major initiatives, sometimes in his absence, often involving intermediaries, sometimes without his knowledge, consent or approval."[203]

Finally, Chamberlain was quick to brush aside Eden's pleas for accelerated rearmament as the necessary precondition for securing favourable agreements with the dictator states. In his memoirs, Eden recounts an incident that occurred in November 1937. Eden expressed his frustration at the slow pace of British rearmament. "Finally, at the end of some exchanges which became rather sharp, the Prime Minister adjured me to go home and take an aspirin [. . .] He attributed my concern about rearmament to my illness and hoped that I would shortly be able to

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[198] Fuchser, *Politics of History*, 82-3
[199] Quoted in Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 330
[200] *DBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 19, Appendix I, pp. 1140-41
[201] Fuchser, *Politics of History*, 103. See also Andrew Roberts, *'The Holy Fox. The Life of Lord Halifax* (London, 1991), 83; Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 109
[202] Paul Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (Manchester, 1998), 215, 219
[203] McDonough, *Road to War*, 54

take a holiday."[204] The picture that emerges from the relations between Eden and Chamberlain is one of a Prime Minister so certain of the rectitude of his policy that he blithely disregarded the jurisdiction of the Foreign Secretary and launched his own initiatives. On occasion, Chamberlain circumvented Eden deliberately, when he supposed Eden would object to his plans. Chamberlain's willingness to practice this old style of 'personal diplomacy' continued up until the outbreak of war, even when these informal approaches conflicted with official British policy.

A further example reveals Chamberlain's refusal to be diverted from his aim of reaching an agreement with Hitler by peaceful means. At the beginning of 1938, the British government had to determine which course of action it would pursue in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia. In a speech to the Reichstag on 20 February 1938, Hitler had declared his intention to bring the German populations of Austria and Czechoslovakia into Greater Germany.[205] The Liberal and Labour oppositions, the French government, and a number of Conservative Members of Parliament, including Churchill, were exerting pressure on the British government to take a firm stance vis à vis German aggression. The Cabinet had little choice but to initiate a policy review. It is clear from Chamberlain's comments, however, that he had no intention of deviating from the current policy of reaching an understanding with Germany. Two days after the announcement of the *Anschluss* of Austria, on 15 March, Chamberlain told the Foreign Policy Committee of the Cabinet that he "did not think anything that had happened should cause the government to alter their present policy, on the contrary, recent events had confirmed him in his opinion that the policy was the right one."[206]

On 18 March, Halifax presented a Foreign Office Paper, based on an analysis by William Strang, the head of the Central Department in the Foreign Office, to the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee which urged that Britain should commit herself to defend France in the event of hostilities between the French and the Germans as a result of France having come to the defence of Czechoslovakia according to her treaty obligations. British support would depend on proof from the Czechs that they had treated the Sudeten German minority fairly. Halifax disputed the proposals set forth by Strang. Halifax argued that Germany would resent the intervention of a third power in a dispute between herself and Czechoslovakia. Britain would risk war by interfering. Halifax also

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[204] Eden, *Dictators*, 512-13

[205] [Adolf Hitler], *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939*, ed. & trans. Norman H. Baynes (New York, 1969), 1404-6

[206] Chamberlain, quoted in Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 133, based on Neville Chamberalain Papers in Birmingham Univeristy Library, NC 18/1/1041, 1042; CAB 23/93 fols 32-44; Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, 272-3

sought to avoid close British association with France and the Soviet Union, lest Hitler get the impression that Germany was being encircled. Chamberlain agreed with Halifax, declaring his belief that it was Hitler's intention only to solve the problem of the Sudeten Germans, not to annex all of Czechoslovakia. Lasting peace could only be achieved through the conclusion of a settlement that suited Germany. Halifax and Chamberlain obtained support for their position from the rest of the members of the Committee. The Committee reached its conclusions before the Chiefs of Staff had completed their report on the proposal for British support for France if she defended Czechoslovakia against a German attack. Before the Cabinet meeting on 22 March, the Chiefs of Staff submitted their report in which they concluded that Britain and France could only successfully defend Czechoslovakia against Germany in a protracted struggle. Britain's prospects of success would be even more dismal if Japan and Italy assisted Germany. Halifax informed the Cabinet that he and Chamberlain had initially been inclined to give a guarantee to France but had been dissuaded by the report from the Chiefs of Staff.[207] Clearly, Halifax's claim was untrue. Conveniently the Chiefs of Staff report supported Chamberlain's and Halifax's decision not to give a guarantee to France but the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary had arrived at this decision before receiving the views of the Chiefs of Staff.

3.2 The Sudeten Crisis

Chamberlain and Halifax determined to exert pressure on the Czechoslovakian government to resolve the outstanding problems with the Sudeten Germans living inside the borders of Czechoslovakia. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary would make clear to the Czechs that no British or French military support would be forthcoming in the event of a German attack unless an agreement were reached with Konrad Henlein's Sudeten German Party. First, Chamberlain and Halifax had to persuade the French government to comply with Britain's policy. Accordingly, the French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier and the Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet were invited to London for two days of meetings on 28 and 29 April 1938. Chamberlain and Halifax succeeded without too much difficulty in convincing Daladier and Bonnet to push the Czech President Eduard Beneš into making concessions to Henlein by threatening to deprive Czechoslovakia of French military assistance if Germany launched an attack.[208]

After the Anglo-French meetings, both Britain and France pressured Beneš, Milan Hodza, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, and Kamil Krofta, the Foreign Minister to conclude an

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[207] Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, 642; Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 135-8
[208] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. I, No. 164, pp. 198-234

agreement with Henlein. The British warned the Czech government that there would be no chance of securing a British guarantee of Czechoslovakian independence until a deal had been concluded. At the same time, the British made informal probes in Berlin to ascertain the conditions that the German government would consider acceptable. The British also prevailed upon the Germans to wait patiently while a solution was worked out. British policy towards Czechoslovakia during the spring and summer of 1938 was based on two assumptions, both of which were false. First, the British government trusted that Henlein would negotiate in good faith with the Czechoslovak government. Second, the British believed that Hitler would be satisfied if changes were made to improve the situation of the Sudeten Germans and would not insist on annexing Czech territory. In his memoir, *Home and Abroad*, Strang records that Henlein had successfully duped the British into believing that he only wanted autonomy for the Sudeten Germans, not incorporation into the German Reich. Even Vansittart, whom Henlein met in London in 1937 and 1938 "did not plumb all the depths of his perfidy."[209]

Disappointed by the failure of the Runciman mission to bring about a settlement of the Sudeten German question and increasingly apprehensive about the ominous German military activities[210] and the belligerent statements emanating from Berlin, Chamberlain cast about for a new strategy to safeguard the European peace. At the end of August, Chamberlain concluded that if the negotiations between Beneš and Henlein broke down, as they seemed on the verge of doing, he would propose a personal meeting between himself and Hitler. Chamberlain had concocted the scheme of a personal visit together with Sir Horace Wilson, on whose advice, according to Donald Cameron Watt, Chamberlain leaned "as much as or more than on anyone else."[211] Chamberlain told Halifax and Simon of his idea but the rest of the Cabinet was not informed until Chamberlain decided to put his plan into action in the middle of September.[212]

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[209] Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad* (London, 1956), 128-9

[210] Henderson and General Sir Frank Noel Mason-MacFarlane, the British military attaché in Berlin, sent reports warning that military exercises were scheduled for September. On 3 August, Mason-MacFarlane sent a telegram to Halifax in which he warned that the German High Command was to carry out a "partial test mobilisation in September," involving seven or eight divisions in Germany and all formations in Austria. Mason-MacFarlane conceded that the desire of the German High Command to test the functioning of their mobilisation machinery was unexceptional. He observed, however, that "they are proposing to do so to an extent and on a scale which was never approached even in pre-war days" and he concluded that "the situation [. . .] is clearly fraught with dangerous possibilities." Similarly, Henderson declared himself "extremely perturbed over the German military measures contemplated for September." *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 576, p. 45 and No. 575, pp. 42-5

[211] Watt, *How War Came*, 395

[212] Keith Robbins, *Munich 1938* (London, 1968), 263-7

At a Cabinet meeting on 30 August 1938, British ministers discussed the best way to deal with Hitler. Halifax objected to the delivery of a warning that Britain would declare war on Germany if she invaded Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia, argued Halifax, was militarily indefensible. Halifax would not accept that "it was justifiable to fight a certain war now in order to forestall a possible war later." Similarly, Chamberlain argued that even if a British threat of intervention succeeded in preventing war, Hitler would feel that he had been "thwarted" and he would be driven to further acts of aggression. Finally, Henderson, the British Ambassador to Germany, who was in London, presented his views on the situation in Germany to the Cabinet. He argued that German military action against Czechoslovakia was not yet a certainty; a British threat would only provoke Hitler and make war more likely. The Cabinet decided unanimously against delivering a threat to Hitler.[213]

Throughout his tenure as British Ambassador to Germany, which spanned the crucial years from 1937 until 1939, Nevile Henderson consistently provided his government with poor assessments of the situation in Germany. Henderson harboured an inappropriate admiration for the Nazi régime, which seems to have clouded his judgement. Upon his arrival in Berlin in April 1937, for instance, Henderson declared at a dinner given in his honour by the Anglo-German Fellowship that too many people in Britain "have an entirely erroneous conception of what the National Socialist régime really stands for. Otherwise they would lay less stress on Nazi dictatorship and much more emphasis on the great social experiment which was being tried in Germany."[214] Henderson misunderstood the nature of the Nazi dictatorship; he believed that threats of armed intervention would incite Hitler to aggressive action when he could instead be mollified and restrained with promises of concessions. Henderson repeatedly underestimated Hitler's bellicose intentions and failed time and again to foresee the dictator's next move, even when unmistakable hints were dropped in his lap.[215]

Chamberlain shared Henderson's belief that threats of military intervention would only serve to make Hitler more irate. Chamberlain articulated the reasons for his vehement unwillingness to publicly threaten intervention in his letters to his sisters. He believed that such a

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[213] Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 231-2

[214] Quoted in Meehan, *Unnecessary War*, 23, based on FO 794/10

[215] Before the German invasion of Prague and the rest of Czechia, for instance, Weizsäcker managed to deliver a veiled warning to Henderson. Henderson did not, however, understand the implications of Weizsäcker's warning. The British Ambassador sent a report to the Foreign Office stating his belief that the German Army would not march. In his memoirs, Weizsäcker writes: "Ich fürchtete, der Marsch auf Prag werde Henderson seine Stellung kosten wegen mangelnder Voraussicht. Ich fühlte mich daran nicht schuldig." Weizsäcker , *Erinnerungen*, 219; Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 177; Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, 213

stand would mean relinquishing control of the situation and would compel Britain to fulfil her promise if Hitler forged ahead with his plans. Chamberlain was intent on doing his utmost to avoid war. "I would never take that awful responsibility upon my shoulders unless it were forced upon me by the madness of others." Similarly, on 11 September 1938, Chamberlain insisted that "we should be wrong to allow the most vital decision that any country could take, the decision as to peace or war, to pass out of our hands into those of the ruler of another country, and a lunatic at that."[216] Nor was Chamberlain eager to involve Britain in a war for the sake of a faraway country structured on apparently incompatible multiethnic lines. As he said in his speech in the House of Commons on 24 March 1938, Britain's "vital interests are not concerned [in Czechoslovakia] in the same degree as they are in the case of France and Belgium."[217]

During the first week of September, the British government anxiously awaited Hitler's speech at the Nürnberg Party Rally, which was scheduled for 12 September. It was feared that unless a Czech-Sudeten German settlement were reached before then, Hitler would proclaim his intention to invade Czechoslovakia. Due largely to the warning issued to the British government by Weizsäcker through Burckhardt,[218] Halifax was growing increasingly nervous and concluded that a message of remonstrance must be sent to Hitler. Halifax, with the support of the Cabinet, directed Henderson to deliver a warning to Hitler at the party rally. Henderson, however, protested vehemently against these orders. On 8 September, he sent a letter to Halifax in which he stated: "For Heaven's sake send no more instructions as on May 21st.[219] Believe me that would utterly defeat our object and ensure what we are trying to avoid." In Henderson's view, peace could only be ensured if Beneš fulfilled the demands of Henlein. "None of us can ever think of peace again till Beneš has satisfied Henlein," claimed Henderson. In a second letter dated 10 September, Henderson maintained, "I do not think Hitler is contemplating a 'recourse to force' now [. . .] An official démarche will drive him to greater violence or greater menaces."[220] These statements reveal Henderson's misunderstanding of the situation. Hitler of course cared little for the plight of the

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[216] Chamberlain, quoted in Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 359-60

[217] 333 HC Deb 5s, col. 1405

[218] Hoffmann, "Question," 439, based on PRO, FO 371/22973/55491; Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, 150-1. See above, 42, fn. 151

[219] On 20 May 1938, the Czech government complained to the German Minister in Prague and to London that German troops had been concentrated along the Czech border. Partial German mobilisation was ordered overnight. Believing that Hitler was preparing for war against Czechoslovakia, the British and French ambassadors in Berlin were ordered to issue warnings that such a move by Hitler would endanger peace. The French reaffirmed their commitment to Czechoslovakia. When Germany denied having had any intentions of invading, the Western Press declared that Hitler had suffered a diplomatic defeat, thereby enraging the Führer.

[220] Cabinet 24 / 278 C. P. 196 (38), 11 September 1938

Sudeten Germans; he was simply intent on the conquest of territory. Henderson failed to grasp that handing over the Sudeten region would not be enough to satisfy Hitler, but rather would simply allow him to pursue his next conquest sooner. Henderson continued to insist on the strategy of pressuring the Czechs to acquiesce even after Philip Conwell-Evans, who was attached to the British Embassy in Berlin, had spent an hour and a half patiently explaining to Henderson that Hitler did indeed intend to invade Czechoslovakia. Henderson simply repeated to Conwell-Evans that a warning from the British would merely serve to provoke Hitler.[221] On 10 September, upon receipt of Henderson's messages in which he expressed his "violent" opposition to a warning, Chamberlain and his advisors elected to "hold their hand."[222] Chamberlain issued an unofficial statement to the press in which he declared that Britain would not stand aside if France went to war to protect Czechoslovakia from Germany. The force of this declaration was diluted by its unofficial character and by Chamberlain's emphasis that any differences could be resolved through negotiation.

Meanwhile, the crisis threatened to erupt into a full-scale conflagration at any moment. At the beginning of September, Beneš gave in to British pressure and agreed to grant almost all of Henlein's demands. Henlein immediately terminated the negotiations with the Czechoslovak government, using as a pretext a riot, which had been started by Sudeten Germans in Moravská Ostrava. In his speech at the Nürnberg Party Rally on 12 September, Hitler condemned Beneš and the Czechs and made imprecise but disquieting threats of German military intervention if the Sudeten Germans were subjected to further 'persecution.'[223] Hitler's speech prompted a new wave of rioting in the Sudetenland. On 13 September, the Czech government implemented martial law in two or three districts of the frontier area of the Sudetenland.[224] These events were viewed in dire terms by Sir Basil Cochrane Newton, the British Minister at Prague, by Henderson in Berlin and by Sir Eric Phipps, the British Ambassador in Paris. Cochrane described the situation as "ugly."[225] At 1.25 p.m. on 13 September, Halifax received a telegram from Phipps who reported that the French Foreign Minister, Georges Bonnet "feels that the whole question of peace or war may now be only a matter of minutes instead of days." By 7.10 p.m. Bonnet "was very upset and said that peace must be preserved at any price."[226] Henderson warned that Hitler was on the very brink of launching an

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[221] Conwell-Evans, *None So Blind*, 142
[222] Cadogan, *Cadogan Diaries*, 96
[223] *Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, 1487-1500
[224] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 844, p. 304; No. 846, p. 305
[225] Ibid., No. 844, p. 304
[226] Ibid., No. 848, pp. 305-6; No. 855, p. 310

attack on Czechoslovakia unless the "Czechs *without any further delay* grant genuine and full autonomy in compliance with Germany's demands and start at once putting it into execution."[227]

At 10 p.m. on 13 September, Chamberlain met with Halifax, Sir Alexander Cadogan, (Vansittart's successor as Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office) and Wilson, who agreed that the propitious moment had arrived to launch Chamberlain's secret plan to pay a personal visit to Hitler. Sir Samuel Hoare, the Home Secretary, and Simon were consulted. The Cabinet was not informed of the plan until the next day, after Chamberlain had already sent his proposal to Hitler.[228] On 15 September, Chamberlain met Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Chamberlain opened the conversation by stating his hope that direct conversation would improve the relations between Germany and Britain. Hitler demanded an instant solution to the Sudeten German question. He declared that he was willing to lead his country through the "crisis" of "a world war" if that proved to be the only way of reaching a solution to the problem. Hitler declared that: "The return to the Reich of the 3 ½ million Germans in Czechoslovakia he would make possible at all costs." Chamberlain asked whether Hitler did not "aim beyond this at the disintegration of the Czechoslovak state." Hitler replied that demands similar to those of the Sudeten Germans would be made by the Poles, Hungarians and Ukrainians living in Czechoslovakia. "[I]n the long run," maintained Hitler ominously, "it would be impossible to ignore these demands." Chamberlain said that he did not oppose the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany. He would have to consult the British Cabinet and the French government before returning a firm reply.[229] Wilson, who accompanied Chamberlain to Germany, characterised the visit as a "bold master-stroke in diplomacy [. . .] Hitler had appreciated the Prime Minister." Wilson expressed his certainty that Hitler was negotiating in good faith and would co-operate with Chamberlain.[230]

At a Cabinet meeting on 17 September, Chamberlain argued that Hitler's "objectives were strictly limited;" he sought only a solution to the Sudeten German problem. Chamberlain made this assertion despite Hitler's loaded remark about the inevitable disintegration of the Czechoslovak state. Chamberlain proposed that the British government should agree to immediate self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. Chamberlain gained the assent of his Cabinet on 17 September.[231] On 18 September, Daladier and Bonnet flew to London for meetings with the British government. The French agreed to the cession of the Sudeten region in return for a British

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[227] Ibid., No. 849, pp. 306-7
[228] Ibid., No. 862, p. 314
[229] Ibid., No. 896, pp. 342-51
[230] Cabinet 24 / 278 C. P. 202 (38), 16 September 1938
[231] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 162

guarantee to defend a truncated Czechoslovakia.[232] The British and French governments, via their respective ministers in Prague, Newton and Victor de Lacroix, proceeded to exert enormous pressure on President Beneš to acquiesce to the cession of the Sudeten region. The French government threatened to renege on the guarantee to the Czechs if they refused to accept the Anglo-French proposal.[233] On 21 September, after two days of bullying, Beneš gave in.[234]

A week later, Hitler proved all Wilson's predictions wrong. Chamberlain returned to Germany, to the Godesberg conference from 22-24 September, prepared to grant all of the demands that Hitler had made at Berchtesgaden. Hitler, however, immediately raised the stakes, demanding a German military occupation of the Sudetenland by 1 October. Chamberlain returned to London, where he tried to convince the Cabinet to agree to urge the French and the Czechs to acquiesce to Hitler's new set of demands. The Cabinet, however, rejected Chamberlain's proposal. Likewise, the French and the Czechs rejected Hitler's Godesberg terms.[235] Ever confident in the power of personal diplomacy, Chamberlain devised a new plan. He would write a letter to Hitler and send Wilson to Berlin to deliver it. In the letter, he would ask Hitler to drop some of the demands he had made at Godesberg and propose the establishment of a commission composed of German, Czech and British representatives to devise and implement a peaceful means of transferring Czech territory to Germany. If Hitler still did not co-operate, Wilson would warn Hitler verbally that a German invasion of Czechoslovakia would prompt British military intervention.[236] Wilson telephoned Henderson and instructed him to tell the German government that they should not pay heed to any British statements other than those made by Chamberlain. In this way, Wilson sought to undermine the authority of the British ministers who favoured an inflexible stance towards Hitler, including the Foreign Secretary himself.[237] Wilson spoke to Hitler on 26 and 27 September. Hitler declared that he would smash Czechoslovakia.[238]

On 27 September, Hitler ordered an advance of *Wehrmacht* units towards the Czech frontier. To bolster the fighting spirit, he arranged for a military parade to pass by the Chancellery in Berlin at the end of the work day, when the streets would be filled with people departing from their work places. Contrary to the Führer's expectations, the crowds on the street did not cheer nor

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[232] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 928, pp. 373-400
[233] *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (*DDF*), Deuxième Série, Tome 11, No. 217, p. 340; No. 222, pp. 347-8; No. 232, p. 361
[234] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 993, pp. 438-439
[235] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 1092, pp. 518-19; No. 1093, pp. 520-35
[236] Alfred Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London, 1954), 237
[237] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 174
[238] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 1115, pp. 552-3; No. 1116, p. 553

did they give the Hitler salute. Instead, they stood by in stony silence, their absence of enthusiasm serving as an unmistakable indication that the German people were vehemently opposed to war. The American CBS correspondent William Shirer described the scene in his diary as "a terrible fiasco [. . .] for the Supreme Commander. The good people of Berlin simply did not want to be reminded of war [. . .] Today they ducked into the subways, refused to look on, and the handful that did stood at the curb in utter silence. It has been the most striking demonstration against war I've ever seen."[239] Realising that "with such a people" he could not wage war, Hitler sent a somewhat less hostile overture to Chamberlain in which he denied that he sought to deprive Czechoslovakia of her national existence and suggested that Chamberlain exert his influence on the Czechs. Hitler continued to insist, however, on the Godesberg demands.[240]

Meanwhile, in London, in the mid-afternoon of 27 September, Chamberlain gave a secret authorisation for the mobilisation of the British Fleet which was only announced on the BBC at 11.28 p.m. after Duff Cooper, the First Lord of the Admiralty, telephoned the press section of the Admiralty to release the news of the mobilisation of the fleet.[241] The announcement was not released to foreign countries until 11.45 p.m. Also on the 27th, the German Military Attaché in Paris sent a report to his government stating that by the sixth day of the French mobilisation, which had already commenced, the French Army would have deployed 65 divisions, compared to a maximum of twelve German divisions.[242] On the evening of 27 September the Nazi Minister for Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels had announced to an assembly of newspaper editors that an ultimatum was to be delivered to the Czechs, demanding that they accept Hitler's Godesberg terms by 2 p.m. the following day. News of the British mobilisation reached Germany at midnight. An hour later, Goebbels summoned the press representatives to the Propaganda Ministry and ordered them to publish nothing concerning the ultimatum.[243] According to Conwell-Evans, a member of the German Foreign Office declared that "the mobilisation of the British Fleet was one of the decisive factors which prevented the attack on the Czechs."[244]

With the mobilisation of the Fleet, Britain had finally delivered an unmistakable threat of force. Hitler's instantaneous, panicked retreat confirmed that if Britain and France threatened intervention, Hitler would scuttle backwards. Instead of maintaining this uncompromising stance

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[239] William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1959), 540
[240] Gisevius' Evidence before the Internaional Military Tribunal, *IMT*, Vol. 12, 219
[241] Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 240
[242] *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. 2, No. 647; *DDF*, Série 2, Tome 11, No. 405, pp. 612-13
[243] Conwell-Evans, *None So Blind*, 147; Meehan, *Unnecessary War*, 177, based on PRO FO 371/21664
[244] Conwell-Evans, *None So Blind*, 148

initiated by the mobilisation of the Fleet, however, Chamberlain sent a letter to Hitler proposing further negotiations.[245] On 28 September, Mussolini offered to mediate and Hitler agreed to Chamberlain's offer of an international conference to settle the dispute through negotiations rather than by force.

On the evening of 28 September Goerdeler made a final attempt to persuade the British government to exert intense pressure on Hitler and extract concessions from him that would weaken his hold on power. Goerdeler telephoned the British Foreign Office from Switzerland. He urged the British not to "give way another foot. Hitler is in a most uncomfortable position. See that you keep the responsibility for any use of force on his shoulders [. . .] The *Stimmung* against Hitler and his Nazi henchmen has risen very remarkably during the past few days." Goerdeler suggested that the British attempt to wring guarantees from Hitler concerning collective guarantees and a limitation of armaments. Finally, Goerdeler adjured the British government to "carry on at full blast" about the Franco-British mobilisation and determination to confront Hitler's troops with the full force of their armies.[246] Thus, before the commencement of the Munich Conference, the British were furnished with valuable inside information, which revealed the vulnerability of Hitler's position. The British government did not, however, use this knowledge to secure guarantees on security or a limitation of armaments or any measure that would have served to restrain Hitler.

The Munich Conference opened on 29 September. The agreement that was concluded at the conference stipulated that German military occupation of the Sudetenland should take place between 1 and 10 October. Plebiscites in certain "doubtful areas" were to be overseen by a commission of British, French, Italian, German and Czechoslovakian representatives. This commission would set the precise frontiers of the territories that were to be ceded to Germany.[247] On 30 September, in a private discussion between Hitler and Chamberlain, Hitler agreed to sign the agreement that stated that Britain and Germany would "never go to war with one another again."[248]

The policy of appeasement was the major obstacle that prevented the German resistance from obtaining the assurances and support that they sought from the British government. Chamberlain was unwilling to alter the direction of the nation's foreign policy. He consigned ministers and civil servants, notably Eden and Vansittart, who opposed his policy to political oblivion, while relying heavily on a small-circle of advisors, the so-called 'Inner Cabinet,'

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[245] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. II, No. 1158, p. 587
[246] Goerdeler's message was recorded in the Foreign Office files. FO 371/21664, quoted in Meehan, *Unnecessary War*, 181
[247] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 1227, pp. 630-40
[248] Ibid., Appendix to No. 1228, p. 640

consisting of Sir John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Halifax and Sir Samuel Hoare, Home Secretary and also upon the advice of Sir Horace Wilson.[249] Chamberlain launched unilateral diplomatic approaches to Hitler before consulting or even informing his own Cabinet, to say nothing of Parliament, which he regarded as little more than a nuisance.[250] He singled out the reports from British diplomats and military officials abroad which supported his own ideas, in particular those of Sir Nevile Henderson, who consistently misread the situation in Berlin, perpetually under-estimating Hitler's determination to have war and downplaying the criminality of the Nazi régime. Henderson pushed for the British government to meet Hitler's demands, repeating that the Czechs were the problem. Chamberlain ignored or minimised the significance of reports from *British* sources that contradicted his view of the situation. He was thus not disposed to listen to the cautionary messages and requests for support from the German opposition.

British statesmen devoted insufficient attention to privileged information originating in the upper echelons of the German state apparatus. The grave implications of the information furnished by the German resistance movement might reasonably have been expected to prompt a serious policy review in Britain. Had British statesmen given due consideration to the information provided by the German resistance, they might have recognised the futility of offering concessions to a dictator who was bent on waging war. They would have realised that the Runciman mission was futile since Henlein was not willing to negotiate and that Hitler cared nothing for the Sudeten Germans, who merely served as a convenient justification to launch his war for territorial conquest.[251] If British leaders had listened seriously to resistance emissaries, they would have understood that the German economy was faltering and that German military forces were neither prepared nor enthusiastic about executing Hitler's orders.[252] Further, Hitler harboured a fear that Britain would threaten military intervention and he had expressed serious hesitation about forging ahead with plans to invade Czechoslovakia if Britain and France came to the defence of Czechoslovakia.[253] Hitler's reluctance to face the armed forces of the Western powers was evident

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[249] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 163; Meehan, *Unnecessary War*, 16

[250] In a letter to his sister Ida, with reference to the possibility of reaching an agreement with Germany, Chamberlain wrote: "All the same the obstacles don't look insuperable provided the press and the House will abstain from badgering us to reveal exactly how far we have got or what exactly we are proposing to do next." *DBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 19, No. 349, p. 581

[251] See for example, Goerdeler's warning to the British government delivered via Young at the beginning of August 1938, Young, *'X' Documents*, 73 and above, 26-8

[252] See for example, Goerdeler's report to Vansittart in July 1937, Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 153 and above, 23-4

[253] See for example, the information which Kleist passed along to Colvin, Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 210-11 and above, 37

in his hasty retreat on 27 September when Britain mobilised the Fleet. Finally, if the British had heeded the information provided by the German opposition, they would have realised that there was little reason to fear a military defeat at the hands of the German Armed Forces, which were unprepared to face Britain and France in an armed conflict.[254] The lack of attention paid to the information received from the German opposition was due in part to the British Ambassador in Berlin. Henderson's attitude towards the German resistance was generally negative and he helped to cast the reliability of resistance emissaries into doubt and to discredit the warnings that they transmitted to his government. In July 1938, for instance, Henderson warned Cadogan: "You may be hearing, especially through secret sources – which it can be taken for granted are anti-Nazi and to that extent unreliable – that dissatisfaction against the régime is growing in Germany [. . .] It is true, but," cautioned Henderson, "its effect should not be overestimated [. . .] Some people, who allow their wishes to be father of their thoughts, foresee in this the possibility of the weakening of the régime and the reinforcement of the theory that Germany is unprepared for war."[255]

Henderson simply reinforced what Chamberlain already believed. Chamberlain thought that if he granted German demands concerning the Sudetenland, Hitler could then be persuaded to eschew force and join in a general peace settlement. Chamberlain aimed to secure Hitler's co-operation in bringing Germany back into the community of respectable nations, not in helping to engineer the downfall of the dictator. Chamberlain viewed the Munich Agreement as "insurance" against German aggression.[256] If Hitler broke his word, he would be contravening a formal agreement recognised as binding before the entire world. This belief was based on an under-estimation of the scope and ardour of Hitler's plans for European domination. Corelli Barnett suggests that Chamberlain's conviction that he could convince Hitler to agree to a permanent peace settlement reflected an absence of strategic planning. Chamberlain's decision to pay a personal visit to Hitler in September 1938 "demonstrate[d] that [. . .] he failed to see, or refused to see, the European situation in terms of conflict, strategy and the equilibrium of power." According to Barnett, by agreeing to the cession of the Sudetenland, Chamberlain allowed "the formidable Czech frontier defences," and forty Czech divisions to be "struck from the balance-sheet of 'allied' strength, and their first class equipment added instead to Germany's." Barnett speculates that

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[254] See for example, the information which Kleist gave to Colvin, who forwarded it to Ogilvie-Forbes in the British Embassy in Berlin, who sent it to the Foreign Office in London, Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, 210-11 and above, 37. See also the information which was transmitted from Theo Kordt to Halifax, Kordt, *Nicht*, 250-2, 279-81and above 41-3

[255] Quoted in Meehan, *Unnecessary War*, 53, based on FO 800/269

[256] Caputi, *Chamberlain*, 189

Chamberlain simply did not consider such factors to be relevant. "[I]n order to win a present respite, Chamberlain was now quite prepared to countenance the disappearance of a well-armed and well-organised Czechoslovakia [. . .]from the scene. [. . .] He was prepared for these things to happen [. . .] because they held little importance for him. They were outside his system of political thought."[257] Paul Kennedy concurs. He argues that the warnings of the Treasury and the Chiefs of Staff at the time of the Sudeten crisis were "not infallible." He stresses that German military weaknesses were overlooked. Chamberlain emphasised the possibility of a German aerial attack on Britain but "without consideration of whether the *Luftwaffe* would or could throw itself against London whilst Germany was engaged in a Central European war." Further, Kennedy suggests that the warnings of the Chiefs and the Treasury were "sometimes used by Chamberlain to justify policies he already wanted to pursue."[258]

Other factors contributed to the failure of the German opposition to secure the co-operation of the British government at the time of the Sudeten crisis. The territorial claims of the German resistance, for instance, Goerdeler's request for the cession of the Sudetenland in April 1938, diminished the opposition's chances of winning the support of the British government. Such territorial demands blurred the lines between the Nazi régime and its opponents in the not always particularly discerning eyes of British statesmen. The British remained unconvinced of the need to assist a German opposition group in its plan to overthrow the Nazi régime, because they believed that a German opposition regime, once installed in power, would make the same territorial demands as their predecessors. Moreover, the involvement of the British government in the risky schemes of underground conspirators whose chances of success were extremely uncertain lay squarely outside the realm of respectable diplomacy. It seemed safer to deal with the Nazi dictatorship, which, however loathsome, was at least an established fact and with which Chamberlain firmly believed he could reach a *modus vivendi*. Finally, British leaders, unlike the German opposition, did not generally recognise that Hitler was irrevocably set on waging war. The British government thus did not see that the plotters who would remove the Nazi régime from power would also prevent Hitler from unleashing war.[259]

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[257] Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London, 1972), 525
[258] Paul Kennedy, "Appeasement," in *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered: The A. J. P. Taylor Debate after Twenty-five years*, ed. Gordon Martel (Boston, 1986), 156
[259] Hoffmann, *History*, 57-8; David Astor, "Why the Revolt Against Hitler was Ignored: On the British Reluctance to Deal with German Anti-Nazis," *Encounter*, Vol. 32, No. 6 (1969), 9

The signing of the Munich Agreement prevented Hitler's enemies within Germany from launching the coup d'état as they had planned. On 27 September, the conspirators had been poised for action. Late that evening, Oster secured a copy of the letter sent by Hitler to Chamberlain that afternoon, in which the German dictator rejected the British Prime Minister's final mediation proposal. The following morning, Witzleben showed the letter to Halder. Halder went to see Brauchitsch and reported back to Witzleben that Brauchitsch was "outraged and would probably take part in a *Putsch*." The decision was taken to execute the plans for a coup d'état on 29 September, the moment Hitler ordered the mobilisation of the troops for an invasion of Czechoslovakia on 30 September. All the necessary conditions were now in place for a coup to occur. Hitler's rejection of Chamberlain's offer of negotiation served as the unequivocal proof required by Halder that Hitler was determined to have war. The German people desired peace; they would not be outraged at the removal of the Führer who intended to lead the nation into an unwanted war.[260] Only Brauchitsch hesitated. Hitler's war plans and the partial British mobilisation caused Brauchitsch great anxiety. Nevertheless, as he conceded after the war, he had continued to harbour doubts as to whether or not he should give the order that would set the coup in motion. He sought an unequivocal confirmation that Hitler had indeed decided to go to war. According to Otto John, in The Bridgend Camp after the war, Brauchitsch claimed that nobody had told him about the plan to overthrow Hitler. "Nothing," maintained Brauchitsch, "was further from his thoughts than the issue of an order for a rising against Hitler." Brauchitsch said to John: "'For God's sake, Doctor John, why should I, of all people, have undertaken some action against Hitler? The German people had elected [sic] him and was extremely content with his political successes. Those who were so intelligent at the time and thought it necessary to eliminate Hitler should have done it themselves.'"[261]

On the afternoon of 28 September, Halder and Witzleben were in the midst of finalising the coup plans when the news came that Chamberlain and Daladier were going to fly to Munich for further negotiations, a development which shattered the basis for the overthrow of the régime. Halder described the consequences of the Munich Agreement at the post-war Nürnberg trials:

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[260] Gisevius, *Bitter End*, 325-6; Kordt, *Nicht*, 268-9; Please see also Ritter, *Goerdeler*, 200-1; Hoffmann, *History* 95-6 Gisevius' Evidence before the International Military Tribunal, *IMT*, Vol. 12, 219

[261] Gisevius, *Bitter End*, 325; Colonel-General Alfred Jodl's Diary, Document 1780-PS in *IMT*, Vol. 28, 388; Gisevius' Evidence in *IMT*, Vol. 12, 219; Otto John, *Twice through the Lines* (London, 1972), 33

> Hitler returned home from Munich as an unbloody victor glorified by Mr Chamberlain and Daladier. Thus it was a matter of course that the German people greeted and enjoyed his successes. Even in the circles of Hitler's opposition – the senior officer corps – those successes of Hitler's made an enormous impression. I do not know if a non-military man can understand what it means to have the Czechoslovak army eliminated by the stroke of a pen, and Czechoslovakia, being stripped of all her fortifications, stood as a newly born child, all naked. With the stroke of a pen, an open victory was attained. The critical hour for force was avoided.[262]

Hitler's enemies inside Germany received the news of the Munich Agreement with dismay, confusion and frustration. Their carefully laid plans to seize control of the state and depose Hitler lay in ruins. By keeping the peace, Hitler's prestige was restored in the eyes of the German public and the need for a coup d'état could no longer be easily justified. Giesvius declared that the "revolt was done for" the moment it was learned that Chamberlain and Daladier were on their way to Munich. Gisevius recalls that for a few hours he continued to hope that the revolt could still be carried out until Witzleben explained that "the troops would never rebel against the victorious Führer." Chamberlain saved Hitler," maintained Gisevius.[263] Ulrich von Hassell noted bitterly in his diary on 1 October 1938 that "Hitler's brutal policies have brought him great material successes."[264] Goerdeler told Young on 15 October that by failing to stand firm on 28 September, Chamberlain had lost his chance to "disrupt [. . .] Hitlerism in Germany [. . .] The great psychological moment was missed through lack of leadership inspired by a moral purpose."[265] Fabian von Schlabrendorff declared that "France and Great Britain had bought not peace but merely postponement of the inevitable conflict to a time when Hitler would be a much more dangerous and formidable antagonist [. . .] They had cut the ground out from under the German resistance and lessened any chance of Hitler's overthrow from within.[266]

While it is impossible to declare with certainty that Hitler would have been successfully deposed had the Western Powers not acquiesced to his demands, the chances of success were high. Peter Hoffmann asserts that "[p]reparations were more thorough and prospects of success greater

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[262] *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Supplement B (Washington, 1947), 1558
[263] Gisevius, *Bitter End*, 326
[264] Ulrich von Hassell, *The Von Hassell Diaries 1938-1944: The Story of the Forces Against Hitler Inside Germany, as Recorded by Ambassador Ulrich von Hassell, a Leader of the Movement* (New York, 1947), 7
[265] Young, *'X' Documents*, 116
[266] Schlabrendorff, *Secret War*, 103

than at any subsequent period."[267] Halder explained at the Nürnberg trials that there were three necessary conditions for a successful revolutionary action: "clear and resolute leadership, [. . .] the readiness of the masses of the people to follow the idea of the revolution, [and] the right choice of time." At the end of September 1938, those in key positions were ready to take action against Hitler and "the nation was ready to consent to a revolutionary act for fear of war."[268] Finally, with the expectation of Hitler's mobilisation order, the choice of time was right. When Prosecutor Captain Sam Harris asked Halder at the Nürnberg trials whether the plan would have been executed and Hitler deposed if Chamberlain had not gone to Munich, Halder replied: "I can only say, the plan would have been executed."[269]

Chapter 4: October 1938-June 1939

4.1 Goerdeler

Even after the planned coup d'état was thwarted by the Munich Agreement, the German resisters continued their efforts to gain foreign support for the opposition. Goerdeler persisted tirelessly in his quest to persuade the British government to co-operate with the German resistance movement. At the meeting on 15 October in Zürich with Young, Goerdeler warned that Hitler would now set off, after his victory at Munich, in "ruthless" pursuit of "further conquests," which could ultimately spell the destruction of the British Empire. Goerdeler declared that war had become inevitable. He advised that Britain immediately commence a programme of rapid rearmament. British leaders must demonstrate their commitment to "stand firm on the great moral issues involved" or risk losing their credibility with the "powerful body of liberal and reasonable opinion in Germany and elsewhere." Goerdeler cautioned that Britain was hovering on the edge of moral bankruptcy and must quickly show that she was willing and capable of combating "the onrushing tide of dictatorial power."[270]

In December 1938, Goerdeler was in contact with Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, Economic Counsellor in the British Foreign Office with Young acting as intermediary.[271] At the end of November 1938, Ashton-Gwatkin asked Young to pay a secret visit to Goerdeler. Young was to obtain from Goerdeler the desired conditions for collaboration between Britain and a post-Hitler government, in which Goerdeler would be Chancellor. On 4 December, Young met Goerdeler in a

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[267] Hoffmann, *History*, 93
[268] *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Supplement B, 1557
[269] Ibid., 1558
[270] Young, *'X' Documents*, 118-21
[271] Ibid., 22

Zürich hotel. From noon that day until late into the evening, Goerdeler typed the memorandum of conditions requested by Ashton-Gwatkin. Young notes that Ashton-Gwatkin's request had the "force of the British Foreign Office behind it – for Ashton-Gwatkin must have got the consent of [. . .] Lord Halifax before approaching [Young]." Goerdeler, recalls Young, appreciated the importance of the source of this request.[272]

In this memorandum, Goerdeler proposed the elimination of the Polish Corridor; some colonial territory for Germany; a loan of four to six milliard gold marks for the purpose of establishing a "secure and international basis for [Germany's] currency;" an end to German rearmament; a promise from Germany not to pursue hegemony in Eastern Europe; a guarantee of the status quo in the Mediterranean; German withdrawal from any involvement in the Spanish Civil War and the foundation of a new League of Nations by England, France and Germany. With the intention of facilitating a coup d'état within Germany, Goerdeler proposed that Britain and France make a joint demand stipulating that Germany cease to resort to violence as a means of dealing with both domestic and foreign issues. Goerdeler also warned of Hitler's plans for the military conquest of Switzerland, Belgium and Holland and indicated that Hitler would be removed from power if Britain provided the necessary support.[273]

Goerdeler's propositions aimed at securing the revision of residual issues of contention originating in the Treaty of Versailles. Further, as Hoffmann points out, there was not one of his proposals which had not been declared negotiable by Halifax during his November 1937 visit to Hitler.[274] At this meeting, Halifax had told Hitler that the British government would not prevent the revision through negotiation of certain stipulations contained in the Treaty of Versailles, specifically those concerning Danzig, Austria, Czechoslovakia, armaments and colonies.[275] Nevertheless, Goerdeler's memorandum received a negative reception in Britain. Young delivered the document to Ashton-Gwatkin on 6 December. Upon receiving Goerdeler's report, Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs noted in his diary that Chamberlain was utterly dismissive of Goerdeler's proposals, refusing to give them any consideration. Chamberlain, recorded Cadogan in his diary, "was very sceptical. [. . .] He would have none of it: and I think he's right. These people must do their own job."[276] Cadogan's assertion that Hitler's enemies within Germany should be left to "do their own job" suggests a reluctance on

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[272] Ibid., 148-9
[273] Goerdeler's memorandum of 4 December 1938 in Young, *'X' Documents*, 154-6
[274] Hoffamnn, "Question," 440
[275] Birkenhead, *Halifax*, 368-74
[276] Cadogan, *Cadogan Diaries*, 129

the part of the British government to establish a co-operative relationship with a resistance group which remained illegitimate and which did not yet hold power. The resistance was in no position to guarantee that their plans to take over the state would succeed, nor could they guarantee that a post-coup German government of the resistance would survive long enough to fulfil its promises to the British concerning peaceful territorial revision and the creation of a new organisation for European co-operation. British leaders may have concluded that the position of the resisters was too uncertain and that it would be futile and perhaps unwise to negotiate with them until they had managed to wrest power from Hitler.

Chamberlain's parliamentary speech of 19 December 1938 indicates that he had disregarded Goerdeler's approach altogether. "I am still waiting for a sign from those who speak for the German people that they share this desire and that they are prepared to make their contribution to the peace which would help them as much as it would help us," declared Chamberlain. "It would be a tragic blunder to mistake our love of peace and our faculty for compromise as weakness."[277]

In a memorandum based on a conversation between Schairer and Goerdeler that Young submitted to the British Foreign Office in January 1939, Goerdeler employed several different tactics in his bid to convince the British to adopt an uncompromising position vis à vis Hitler's expansionist schemes. First, Goerdeler stressed the chaotic state of the German economy. German business and industry had refused to extend a loan to the government. Likewise, Hjalmar Schacht, the President of the *Reichsbank*, had rejected Hitler's request for a loan of 600 million marks. Schacht demanded that taxation be increased and deep cuts be made to the budgets of both the State and the Party. Further, Germany's lack of raw materials and her foreign trade balance had brought the nation "to the verge of catastrophe." Finally, the German railway system had ground almost to a standstill over the Christmas and New Year holidays. The situation was judged to be worse than it had been in 1918. Discontent was rising as the German National Railway, the *Reichsbahn*, complained that insufficient money had been allotted to maintenance over the last three years. Funds had been diverted for free transportation for Nazi Party members, for the construction of highways and for mandatory fees to innumerable Party organisations.

Goerdeler urged strongly that Britain and France refrain from further negotiations with Hitler, whose confidence, said Goerdeler, had been immeasurably increased since Munich. "Hitler is deeply and definitely convinced that after his unexpected victory at Munich, anything is possible to him [. . .] He says that he is now convinced that England is degenerate; weak; timid; and never

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[277] 342 HC Deb 5s, col. 2524

will have the guts to resist any of his plans." Goerdeler outlined Hitler's plans for further military conquests. Goerdeler reported that Hitler had issued instructions to the General Staff to prepare by 15 February plans for possible attacks on Ukraine, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Goerdeler sought to show the British that given the chaotic state of the German economy, they would not have great difficulty in defeating Hitler if they chose to oppose his next military campaign, which he was now sure to launch given his belief that England would not come to the defence of other nations.

Finally, Goerdeler appealed to the British in moral terms, warning that in his bid to "conquer the world," Hitler had "decided to destroy Jews – Christianity – Capitalism." Goerdeler emphasised that: "As soon as the planned persecution of the Churches begins, or the new persecution of the Jews is started, it is absolutely essential to break diplomatic relations. The moral front must be strengthened more and more. In every situation the democracies must move swiftly from a moral defensive to a strong and firm moral offensive." Thus, rather than arguing strictly in terms of economic and military capabilities, Goerdeler asserted that it was the duty of the great Western democracies to withdraw their support from a dictator who had stripped his people of their fundamental rights and freedoms. Goerdeler argued that Hitler's programme of systematic persecution of 'undesirables' in German society, namely, political opponents, the handicapped, the elderly (in some cases), Jehovah's Witnesses and Jews should be declared unacceptable by the Western powers.[278]

Goerdeler's last meeting with Young took place the day after the German invasion of Prague and the rest of Czechia. Goerdeler advised that Britain, France and the US issue a joint declaration stating their refusal to recognise the occupation of Czechoslovakia and that they recall their ambassadors immediately. He urged that the British government summon a group of industrialists then on a trade mission in Berlin back to England. Goerdeler emphasised the futility of this mission given that any agreement which might be reached would be subject to the approval of the Nazi government and would thus be liable to be violated or discarded at any moment. "Fundamentally," concluded Goerdeler, "it is *not* possible to reach any agreement with breakers of both the law and peace."

Goerdeler suggested that Britain, France and the US invite Hitler to a conference at which all the participant countries should commit themselves first to end rearmament and then to embark on a programme of disarmament. The democratic powers must impose three conditions upon Hitler. First, he must commit no further acts of aggression. Second, he must provide a guarantee to uphold

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[278] Memorandum Based on Most Trustworthy Information Received Before January 15, 1939, in Young, *'X' Documents*, 156-62

this pledge and third, the freedom of Czechoslovakia must be restored according to the terms of the Munich Agreement. Goerdeler realised that Hitler would never consent to these conditions. Upon his refusal of the conditions, Hitler would be "branded before the whole world as a National Bandit," the "moral ascendancy" of the democratic powers would be "strengthened to the point where their ultimate victory over the breakers of the eternal moral code is assured."

Goerdeler urged that a clear distinction be made between the German people and their leaders. The democratic powers must state their recognition that the majority of Germans were not in agreement with the policies of the Nazi dictatorship. Goerdeler again repeated the assertion that "the greatest encouragement to the liberal and reasonable forces in Germany can come only [. . .] from a FIRM AND DETERMINED stand by the democracies in dealing with Hitler and his gangster team – a stand securely anchored to the great MORAL ISSUE at stake." Goerdeler pointed to a series of grave errors committed recently by Hitler, which the democratic powers could use to their advantage if they acted rapidly. Goerdeler cited the pogrom of 9-10 November (known as *Kristallnacht*)[279] during which Nazi thugs arrested 300,000 Jews, destroyed 191 synagogues and looted and destroyed 7,500 Jewish shops. Jews were threatened, beaten and murdered.[280] Hitler's second mistake was the dismissal of Dr Schacht, which served as an indication that Hitler meant to "run riot in financial and economic spheres." Finally, the invasion of Czechoslovakia would arouse the anger of the German people as soon as they realised that Hitler had "forced conditions on a free people which are worse than anything imposed on the German people by the Versailles Treaty." Thus the legitimate German grievances arising from the stipulations of the Treaty of Versailles would be rendered illegitimate. Goerdeler predicted that the "ultimate repercussions inside Germany may well prove to be the death-warrant of the Hitler régime."[281]

4.2 Hitler's Provocations

Besides the warnings from the German resistance, the British government received information from its own diplomats and military personnel concerning Hitler's war plans and his contempt for the Western democracies, who, in his view, would never oppose his actions by force.

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[279] The terror to which the Nazis subjected the Jews on 9-10 November 1938 became known as *Kristallnacht* or "the Night of Broken Glass" because of the shattered plate glass windows which littered the streets the following morning.
[280] David Scrase and Wolfgang Mieder, eds., *The Holocaust: Introductory Essays* (Burlington, Vermont, 1996), 5
[281] Young, *'X' Documents*, 174-81

The gravity of these warning signals did not provoke a commensurate response from Chamberlain and his Cabinet.

Hitler's actions and public statements during the fall and winter of 1938-39 belied the sincerity of his September 1938 pledge to uphold peace in Europe. Hitler's increasingly belligerent and provocative statements ought to have finally persuaded Chamberlain that negotiations could not prevent Hitler from making war. Agreements and treaties clearly meant nothing to him; he simply discarded them as soon as they became inconvenient. For example, in a speech at Saarbrücken on 9 October 1938, Hitler announced that work on the German fortifications along the western frontier would be hastened. Hitler emphasised the need for Germany to "neglect nothing which must be done for the protection of the Reich" since the statesmen of the democratic countries who had worked for peace might "at any moment lose their position to make place for others who are not very anxious for peace." Far from expressing appreciation for the intervention of Britain and France in the Sudeten crisis, Hitler advised "these gentlemen [. . .] that they should busy themselves with their own affairs."[282] In Munich on 8 November, Hitler repeated his irritation at the presumptuous intervention of the democratic powers in Germany's internal affairs. "The régime in Germany is a domestic affair of the German people and we would beg to be spared every form of schoolmasterly supervision!" He accused the "rest of the world" of "obstinately bar[ring] the way against any attempt to let rights be recognised as rights by the way of negotiation" and declared that "there should be no surprise that we secure for ourselves our rights by another way if we cannot gain them by the normal way."[283] Clearly, Hitler was not attempting to cultivate good relations with Britain. On the contrary, he expressed his displeasure over British intervention in the Sudeten crisis and indicated that he did not want any other instances of British interference in what he called Germany's 'domestic affairs.' Rather than opening the way for further negotiations, Hitler effectively slammed the door in Chamberlain's face.

After *Kristallnacht*, unmistakable evidence began to accumulate that Hitler planned more acts of aggression in Central Europe. At the end of November, Sir George Arthur Ogilvie-Forbes, counsellor in the British embassy in Berlin, sent an assessment of Hitler's position to London. "Herr Hitler accepted the Munich agreement with relative ill grace," wrote Ogilvie-Forbes. "Nevertheless he hoped that the Munich declaration would have the effect of slowing down British rearmament and leaving him militarily supreme in Europe."[284] On 10 December, the British

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[282] *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, 1535-6
[283] Ibid., 1556-7
[284] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 3, 282

government learned that Hitler had decided to triple the size of the German submarine fleet.[285] In February 1939, Halifax sent Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, an official in the economic section of the Foreign Office, to Germany with a mandate to "exchange views with [. . .] officials of the Foreign Office, Ministry of Economics, Reichsbank [. . .] on the economic situation in Germany." Ashton-Gwatkin reported that Ribbentrop had stated that "there was some further task for Germany to do in Central Europe—where England must not mix herself in."[286]

From October 1938 until the middle of February 1939, Henderson took a leave of absence from his post due to illness. During this period, the staff at the British Embassy in Berlin undertook to represent the situation in Germany in starker terms, without any of the comforting assurances furnished by Henderson. According to information transmitted privately to D. C. Watt from former members of the staff of the British Embassy in Berlin, they believed Henderson to be "almost wickedly and deceitfully optimistic in his normal reportage."[287] The Embassy staff transmitted information to the Foreign Office concerning Hitler's plans for an attack on Danzig, the level of German aircraft production and the expansion of the German Army. They also had accounts of Hitler's venom towards Britain. In a summary of the reports received from Germany, Gladwyn Jebb, a Foreign Office official wrote that "all our sources are at one in declaring that [Hitler] is barely sane, consumed by an insensate hatred of this country."[288] British military intelligence reported that the German Army was nearing total mobilisation with the result that Hitler that would be able to order a large-scale military action with little warning.[289]

4.3 British Policy Between Munich and Prague

After the Munich Agreement, in a reversal of his earlier position, Chamberlain explored the possibility of co-operation with the German opposition to bring about Hitler's downfall. In January 1939, Chamberlain ordered that contact be established with the German military conspirators.[290] The Chief of the British Secret Service instructed the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) to ascertain from a German emissary "the conditions on which the British government might recognise and support the German resistance if it attempted to establish an alternative

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[285] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 188, based on CAB 23/96 fols 92, 141-2
[286] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 3, Appendix II, 597-601
[287] Watt, *How War Came*, 86, based on private information from former members of the staff of the British Embassy, Berlin, fn. 19, p. 631
[288] Jebb, quoted in Dilks (ed.), 139
[289] Watt, 100-1
[290] Hoffmann, "Question," 443; F. H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: its influence on strategy and operations*, I (London, 1979), 56-7; Callum A. MacDonald, "The Venlo Affair," *European Studies Review*, Vol. 8 (1978): 443-4

German government."[291] The SIS gave the assignment to its continental headquarters in Holland. Chamberlain believed that the best strategy was a strong British defensive position coupled with an attempt to sow discontent with the Nazi régime among the German people.[292] Chamberlain apparently pursued a dual policy. He ordered that contact be initiated with the German military conspirators in the hope of undermining Hitler's domestic position. During the same period, Chamberlain continued to try to secure a peace pledge and a disarmament agreement from Hitler and to profess optimism that an Anglo-German settlement was imminent.

By January 1939, the British Cabinet grasped that the overheated German economy was on the verge of collapse and that Hitler must seek a solution either by decreasing the production of weapons or by waging war in the near future in order to solve the problems of food, raw materials and manpower scarcities. Realising the increasing seriousness of the situation, the Cabinet took steps to strengthen Britain's defensive position. In mid-January, Halifax received a report from the Foreign Office entitled 'Possible German Intentions,' which warned that Hitler appeared to be on the verge of launching an air attack on Britain. The report asserted that Hitler was "capable both of ordering an immediate aerial attack on any European country and of having his command instantly obeyed."[293] The Cabinet decided that Britain would defend the Netherlands in the event of a German attack, as a German-occupied Holland would almost certainly only be a prelude to an invasion of Britain herself.[294] The Cabinet also decided to launch military staff talks with France and Belgium and to rebuild a British expeditionary force.[295]

At the same time, Chamberlain sought to push Hitler in the direction of a deceleration of armaments production and a commitment to peace. Chamberlain suggested that Britain should help Germany by extending a loan of convertible currency and offering colonial concessions. On 27 February, Mason-MacFarlane, the British Military Attaché in Berlin, strenuously urged the British government not to extend economic assistance to Germany. He stressed that "[a]t the present moment Germany's economic and financial position is critical." He summed up the situation in Germany and outlined the potential consequences of economic aid. "Exports must be increased [. . .] if Germany is to be able to continue her economic and financial progress *according to Herr Hitler's rules*. If Germany is given facilities for maintaining her export trade

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[291] Quoted in Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, 56-7
[292] MacDonald, "Venlo," 444-6
[293] Cadogan, *Cadogan Diaries*, 139
[294] Ibid., 140
[295] DBFP, Third Series, Vol. 3, No. 189

on a sufficient scale, there seems to be little prospect that we shall see any reduction in the *tempo* of armament." If Germany were "not given such facilities there is every possibility that a reduction of the speed with which she is rearming and of the scope of her armaments will be forced upon her."[296] Henderson, on the other hand, bolstered Chamberlain's belief that Germany's economic difficulties would prevent Hitler from embarking on any new adventures and that British economic aid for Germany would facilitate an arms limitation agreement and a commitment on Hitler's part to peace. In direct opposition to Mason-MacFarlane, Henderson argued in a letter to Halifax written on 3 March that "if no readiness for economic co-operation and understanding is shown by the United Kingdom, Germany is still more likely to endeavour to carry on with her present military policy [. . .] of senseless rearmament." He insisted that "[a] policy of standing aloof on our part would [. . .] be regarded by Germany as a threat to her interests and as a measure of economic encirclement." Such a stance would "be employed by the German Government at home as the very best form of propaganda in support of foreign adventure and increased armaments."[297] Naturally, Chamberlain took Henderson's comments as an affirmation of his own beliefs, while apparently ignoring Mason-MacFarlane's warning altogether. Chamberlain had written to his sisters at the end of February that "[a]ll the information I get seems to point in the direction of peace." The news from Germany did nothing to shake his confidence, as evidenced by his remark to Lobby journalists in early March that a disarmament conference might convene before the close of 1939.[298] On 10 March, Halifax remonstrated with Chamberlain for his comment to the journalists. Halifax requested that Chamberlain let him know in advance of making remarks on foreign policy to the press. Further, he expressed his doubts as to the possibility of a disarmament conference being convened and cautioned that Germany might extrapolate from such comment that Britain was "feeling the strain."[299] On the same day, Sir Basil Cochrane Newton, the British Minister in Prague telegraphed to inform the British government that the President of Czechoslovakia, Hacha, had dismissed the Slovak Government on the grounds that its members, in concert with the Germans, had been engaged in subversive activities aimed at securing Slovakian independence.[300] On 13 March, the German Army invaded Czechia.

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[296] DBFP, Third Series, Vol. 4, Enclosure in No. 172, p. 175
[297] DBFP, Third Series, Vol. 4, No. 172, pp. 173-4
[298] Chamberlain, quoted in Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 396
[299] Halifax, quoted in Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 397
[300] DBFP, Third Series, Vol. 4, No. 198, pp. 219-20; No. 200, pp. 220-1

4.4 British Policy After Prague

The German invasion of Prague raised an outcry of protest from all sectors of British society, including the press, which condemned Hitler's action. Whereas in the past, declared *The Times*, Hitler's "military *coups* have at least had the justification that they brought unification to a great people from whom it had been long withheld," the invasion of Prague completely discredited his claim that "he had no aggressive designs on any other people."[301] "[N]o defence of any kind, no pretext of the slightest plausibility, can be offered for the violent extinction of Czech independence." Even *The Times*, which had staunchly supported the government's policy of appeasement, saw the occupation of Prague as a watershed which must prompt a change in British policy. "For the first time since Nazism came to power German policy has moved unequivocally and deliberately into the open. Hitherto it has felt its way over ground that was at least debatable: but there is nothing left for moral debate in this crude and brutal act of oppression and suppression." *The Times* concluded that the "invasion, occupation, and annexation of Bohemia-Moravia are notice to the world that German policy no longer seeks the protection of a moral case."[302] Similarly, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *News Chronicle* all called for co-operation between Britain and the other European powers in forming a deterrent against Nazi aggression. Britain, urged the *Daily Telegraph*, should not shy away from taking on Commitments because "without commitments, Herr Hitler will undoubtedly conclude that he can carry on with impunity as far as this country is concerned."[303]

Halifax and the officials at the Foreign Office saw clearly that British policy would have to be reversed: a much more uncompromising stance would have to be adopted towards Hitler and rearmament would have to be stepped up. On 17 March, the Labour Member of Parliament, Harold Nicolson noted in his diary that "[t]he feeling in the lobbies is that Chamberlain will either have to go or completely reverse his policy [. . .] All the tadpoles are beginning to swim into the other camp."[304] On 26 March, Cadogan's diary entry reveals his mounting sense of alarm and his conviction that Britain must take immediate action to prevent more acts of German aggression. "If we want to stem the German expansion, I believe we must try to build a dam *now* [. . .] If we are set on this course, we must set about it quickly and firmly."[305]

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[301] *The Times*, Wednesday 15 March 1939, 15
[302] *The Times*, Thursday 16 March 1939, 17
[303] *Daily Telegraph*, 24 March 1939, quoted in Franklin Reid Gannon, *The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939* (Oxford, 1971), 241
[304] Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters, 1930-1939*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London, 1966), 393
[305] Cadogan, *Cadogan Diaries*, 164

Henderson declared in a letter to Halifax that he regarded "Berlin as a soul-scarifying job. Hitler has gone straight off the deep end again." He advised that the President of the Board of Trade cancel his scheduled visit to Berlin and suggested that Halifax consult the French government on the question of the withdrawal of the British and French Ambassadors.[306] In an interview on 15 March, Halifax spoke sharply to the German Ambassador in London, Herbert von Dirksen. Halifax denounced Hitler's "naked application of force" which was "in flat contradiction with the spirit of the Munich Agreement" and stated that any further assurances from the German government would be regarded as worthless. Halifax warned that if Hitler continued on his present course, he was bound to "find himself up against something that would not be bloodless." Finally, Halifax informed Dirksen that Britain must "deplore the methods that had been employed by the German Government [. . .] and that I should be less than frank if I left him or his Government under any misconception as to the effect that the action of his Government must have upon feeling in this country."[307]

In a speech in Birmingham on 17 March, Chamberlain was careful to tailor his words to suit the current climate of opinion in Britain. Instead of speaking about economic revitalisation and the social services as he had planned, he opted, on Halifax' advice, to discuss Hitler's most recent démarche and the future direction of British foreign policy. He insisted on the wisdom of the Munich Agreement and the policy of placating the dictators, declaring that he had not gone to Germany to improve his popularity but to avert the catastrophe of war. He acknowledged, however, that in light of Hitler's recent actions and the many occasions on which he had shown his total unreliability, Britain was obliged to adjust her policy, particularly vis à vis south-east Europe. He insisted that he was "not prepared to engage this country by new unspecified commitments, operating under conditions which cannot now be foreseen." He warned, however, that "no greater mistake could be made than to suppose that, because it believes war to be a senseless and cruel thing, this nation has so lost its fibre that it will not take part to the utmost of its power in resisting such a challenge if it ever were made."[308] This speech reveals Chamberlain's unwavering belief in the possibility of securing peace and his continuing refusal to lock Britain into any new and far-reaching commitments. Chamberlain did depart from his standard line in two important ways. First, he spoke in no uncertain terms of war as a real alternative if Hitler embarked on another rampage. Chamberlain now indicated that there was a

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[306] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 4, Appendix I (viii), p. 595
[307] Ibid., No. 279, pp. 270-3
[308] Chamberlain, *In Search of Peace*, 269-75

limit to what Britain would tolerate and suggested that the nation would not be pushed much further before retaliating. Britain would not turn a blind eye to Hitler's flagrant disregard for the independence of other states and his deplorable violations of international codes of conduct. Second, Chamberlain indicated that Britain had a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo in Eastern Europe, which Watt terms "a major reversal of British policy [. . .] The attempt to isolate Western Europe as the sole defensible frontier against Germany, which had been the centre of British policy since 1937, if not before, was abandoned."[309] Chamberlain indicated that his thinking concerning British policy towards Hitler had undergone if not a revolution at least a reappraisal and he concluded in a letter to his sisters on 19 March that "it was impossible to deal with Hitler after he had thrown all his own assurances to the winds."[310]

During the last two weeks of March, British policy did undergo a reversal. Whereas the government had shown extreme reluctance to provide any guarantees of military assistance throughout the Sudeten crisis, it now proceeded to issue a spate of guarantees within a few weeks. This policy shift was triggered by a series of aggressive moves on Hitler's part after the German invasion of Czechia. First, Hitler demanded that Poland cede the city of Danzig and the land connection between Germany and German East Prussia, known as the Polish Corridor, to Germany. At the end of March, the British government was bombarded with warnings of an imminent German invasion of Poland. On 20 March, Joseph Kennedy, the American Ambassador to Britain, forwarded a message from his counterpart in Warsaw, Anthony J. Drexel Biddle IV, to the British Foreign Office stating that Ribbentrop was urging an immediate attack on Poland, based on the assumption that Britain and France would not intervene.[311] Similar warnings were issued by the Military Attachés in Warsaw and Berlin and by the Secret Services. On 29 March, Ian Colvin met with Cadogan and Halifax and gave "hair-raising details of [an] imminent German thrust against Poland."[312] Colvin's report was confirmed by Mason-MacFarlane.[313] Colvin's story provided the Cabinet with the final push and on 31 March, Chamberlain announced the British guarantee to Poland in the House of Commons.[314]

On 23 March, the German-Romanian Economic Agreement was signed. The agreement, which was concluded only after the German government had applied intense pressure on the

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[309] Watt, *How War Came*, 168-9
[310] Chamberlain, quoted in Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 401
[311] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 4, No. 571, p. 547
[312] Cadogan, *Cadogan Diaries*, 164-5
[313] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 4, Appendix IV, pp. 624-7
[314] 345 HC Deb 5s, col. 2415

Romanians,[315] essentially gave Germany economic predominance in Romania.[316] At the beginning of April, the Italian Army invaded Albania. On 8 April, the Greek Prime Minister, General Metaxas, informed the British Minister in Athens that the Italians planned to attack the Greek island of Corfu next.[317] The British Cabinet agreed to extend guarantees to Romania and Greece if the independence of either was threatened.[318] A mutual assistance pact was also concluded between Britain and Turkey. Chamberlain announced the guarantees in the House of Commons on 13 April.[319]

Chapter 5: June-September 1939

5.1 Adam von Trott zu Solz

In June 1939, in this atmosphere of rising intolerance for Nazi aggression, Adam von Trott zu Solz travelled to Britain with the aim of securing the help of the British government in the German opposition's bid to topple Hitler.[320] Trott was a young German lawyer who had attended Oxford as a Rhodes scholar from 1931-33. From his vantage point in Britain, Trott had observed Hitler's rise to power with increasing distress. His friend and fellow student at Oxford, David Astor recalled that Trott reacted to events in Germany at the time with "gloom, tempered by challenge [. . .] He strongly sensed that the Nazis were moving in a dangerous direction and, still in his twenties, felt a personal obligation to stop Germany from taking the world into another war."[321] At the end of 1936, Trott elected to embark on a trip to China and to the United States. Philip Kerr, later Lord Lothian, the secretary of the Rhodes Trust and Ambassador to the United States from August 1939

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[315] *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. 6, No. 78
[316] *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. 5, Nos. 293, 294, 297, 298, 306
[317] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 5, No. 97
[318] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 4, Nos. 48 & 53
[319] 346 HC Deb 5s, col. 15
[320] On Trott's missions to Britain in 1939, please see *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. 6, 674-84; Christabel Bielenberg, *The Past is Myself* (London 1968), 44-6; David Astor, "The Mission of Adam von Trott," *The Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 7 June 1956, 7; David Astor, "Why the Revolt Against Hitler was Ignored," *Encounter* (June 1969), 3-13; David Astor, "The Man who Plotted Against Hitler," *The New York Review of Books* 28 April 1983, 16-21; Shiela Grant Duff and Adam von Trott zu Solz, *A Noble Combat: The Letter of Sheila Grant Duff and Adam von Trott zu Solz 1932-1939*, ed. Klemens von Klemperer (Oxford, 1988), 354-6; Sheila Grant Duff, *The Parting of Ways* (London, 1982), 209-10; William Douglas Home, *Half-term Report: an Autobiography* (London, 1954), 112-16; Hoffmann, "Question," 443-5; Hoffmann, *History*, 106-7; Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty*, 221-85; Klemperer, *Search*, 122-9; Sams, *Adam von Trott*, 114-45; Katharine Sams, "Political Thought and Action in the Life of Adam von Trott, 1909-1940," (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2000)
[321] Astor, "Plotted," 16

until his death in December 1940, furnished Trott with a special grant to help finance his travels.[322] According to Lothian, Trott was motivated to travel out of a need to distance himself from Germany in order to determine "what should be his role in the highly unwelcome situation in which the Nazi dictatorship of his country had placed him as a liberal-socialist." Similarly, Astor described Trott's need to decide how he could work most effectively against the Nazi régime. Trott, remembers Astor, knew that an opposition existed within the German Armed Forces and government service. He had to choose whether to join this internal opposition or to attempt to influence events from abroad through his contacts in England and the US.

In December 1938, Trott learned from a friend in the Foreign Ministry (apparently Albrecht von Bernstorff) of the miscarried coup d'état during the Sudeten Crisis. For Trott, the information that resisters in the Army, the Foreign Office and the *Abwehr* had conspired together to overthrow the Nazi dictatorship inspired hope that another attempt could be launched. Trott decided to return to Germany, intending to join in opposition activities to the Nazi régime.[323] Through his wide circle of acquaintances in England, Trott aimed to establish conditions in which a coup d'état could occur. Together with his hope that the opposition movement, which had coalesced in September 1938, could regroup to launch another coup attempt, Trott sought to prevent war. Trott believed war to be the greatest disaster that could befall Europe, as it would infect other nations with the worst aspects of Nazism and bring out the ugliest side of human nature. The peoples of Europe would be swept up in the wave of nationalism that would be generated by a war. The mobilisation of anti-Nazi elements would become more difficult during wartime. At what was to be their last meeting, Trott asked his friend David Astor why he hated Hitler. Without giving Astor a chance to answer, Trott declared:

> For the same reason as me; because he is a fanatic nationalist, because he's cruel and is guilty of the murder of his fellow men, because he is blind with hate. I agree with you in all that – but can't you see that if we have war, then everyone will become a nationalist fanatic, everyone will become cruel, and you and I will kill our fellow men and perhaps each other. We will do all the things we condemn in the Nazis and the Nazi outlook will not be suppressed but will spread.[324]

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[322] Sir Stafford Cripps, Labour Member of Parliament and British Ambassador to Moscow from 1940 to 1942 also contributed from his personal resources to Trott's journey.

[323] Trott's return to Germany from China was also due to the death of his father, of which he learned on 28 October 1938 while in Hong Kong. Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty*, 219

[324] Quoted in Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty*, 272. Sykes quotes David Astor's verbal account of a conversation which he had with Trott in July 1939.

Trott made an initial voyage to England in February 1939 to renew contact with friends whom he had not seen in several years. During this visit, he saw Labour Member of Parliament, Sir Stafford Cripps and his family, Geoffrey Wilson (Cripps' secretary), Hubert Ripka, a Czech journalist who was a confidant of Beneš, former Oxford classmates, Shiela Grant Duff, Goronwy Rees, Diana Hubback and her fiancé David Hopkinson, several former professors, the Wardens of Balliol, Wadham, All Souls and New Colleges, as well as David Astor and his parents Lord and Lady Astor. Lord Astor was the proprietor of the *Observer* and Chairman of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. Trott's conversations with the Astors, Cripps and Wilson during this visit helped to lay the ground work for his next mission a few months later.[325]

Trott returned to Berlin at the beginning of March. During the spring of 1939, he made contact with the opposition group inside the German Foreign Ministry. Trott's friend Gottfried von Nostitz was the link between the resistance cells in the Foreign Ministry and the *Abwehr*. Another friend, Albrecht von Kessel, was Weizsäcker's executive assistant. Kessel introduced Trott to Erich and Theo Kordt.[326] Through a cousin, Trott also met Walter Hewel, who had been a member of the Nazi party almost from the time of its inception and was a loyal supporter of Hitler. Hewel was the Chief of Ribbentrop's Personal Staff and Senior Liaison Officer between the Foreign Office and the Chancellery of the Führer. It was Hewel who facilitated Trott's next trip to England from 1 to 8 June. Although he was devoted to Hitler, Hewel believed that an Anglo-German war would be disastrous. He granted official sanction to Trott's proposal to ascertain the British attitude towards Germany in the hope that this information could be used to prevent Hitler from launching an invasion of Poland. Trott could not, however, reveal that his mission was also intended to buy time for the organisation of a coup d'état. Hewel disagreed with the Führer's military plans but he was an ardent Nazi and would have denounced Trott had he suspected Trott's treasonous intentions.[327]

Trott sought to stall Hitler's plans for the invasion of Poland by drawing the Führer into negotiations with Britain over the restoration of Czechoslovakian political independence in exchange for the return of Danzig and the Polish Corridor to Germany. This "near-fantastic proposal" was not intended as a serious basis for Anglo-German negotiation but merely as a ploy to immerse Hitler in talks, thereby averting war and gaining time for the opposition to organise another coup attempt. Trott and his co-conspirators in the German Foreign Ministry believed that,

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[325] Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty*, 227
[326] Sams, *Adam von Trott*, 122
[327] Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty*, 233-5

in order to carry any credibility, this suggestion would have to reach Hitler from the upper echelons of the British government.[328]

David Astor helped to facilitate Trott's entrance into influential British circles. Astor invited Trott to Cliveden, the grand country estate belonging to his parents, for the weekend of 3-4 June 1939. Lord and Lady Astor invited thirty guests to attend a dinner party, so that Trott would be afforded the chance to present his views to several members of the British government. The guests included Halifax, Lothian, who had by then been appointed Ambassador to the United States and Sir Thomas Inskip, Secretary of State for the Dominions, the lawyer Tom Jones and William Douglas Home. Lady Astor seated Trott strategically opposite Halifax and beside Lothian.

For three hours after dinner, Trott spoke to these British leaders. He maintained that Hitler might negotiate certain changes to the Treaty of Versailles. Revisions to the Versailles treaty would remove "some of the planks from Hitler's dangerously popular political platform and thus pave the way to power for those who had the interest of the world, as well as Germany, at heart."[329] In other words, the possibility would be opened for a non-violent change of government. During this discussion, Trott could go as far as to reveal that he did not support the Nazi régime. He could not, however, disclose his aim of creating the necessary conditions for the overthrow of the Nazi dictatorship. In his autobiography, Douglas Home recorded his impressions of Trott:

> Von Trott, as passionate an anti-Nazi as he was a patriot, spoke with a perfect mastery of English, of the aspirations of the German nation as a whole. While allowing for the mistrust engendered in the British mind by the activities of the Nazi leaders – a mistrust which he fully shared – he seemed to be trying to impress upon [Halifax] the necessity for an immediate adjustment to the *status quo* [. . .] This young man [. . .] spoke with a deep sincerity and a sense of urgency. Listening to him, I understood how it was that so many Germans, loathing and despising Hitler as they did, yet felt that in his insistence on the rights of Germany, he was voicing the wishes of the people [. . .] He saw the disaster ahead, and he felt that, with mutual co-operation and sacrifice, the danger might yet be averted and the problem solved by peaceful means.[330]

Trott was thus able to convey his position as an opponent of the Nazi dictatorship that had seized hold of his country and to give an indication of the widespread dislike for the régime among the German people. His interlocutors were convinced of his sincerity.

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[328] Astor, "Plotted," 18
[329] Douglas Home, *Half-term Report*, 113
[330] Ibid., 113

During dinner, Trott addressed Halifax as directly as possible. Trott emphasised to Halifax the need for the British government to issue a clear, firm statement of its intention to declare war on Germany if she attacked Poland. Trott and Halifax spoke "in general terms, about the internal situation in Germany." Trott stressed the necessity for the German people to look to a régime other than the Nazi dictatorship for leadership. The British government was the ideal source of such leadership. The British government should ignore the German leaders and address the German people directly. A message from the British government would encourage the anti-Nazi forces in Germany.[331]

Halifax arranged for Trott to meet with Chamberlain on 7 June at 10 Downing Street. No record has been found of Chamberlain's meeting with Trott in the private papers of the Prime Minister.[332] Trott did, however, recount his meeting with the British Prime Minister to David Astor. According to Astor, Trott informed Chamberlain of the existence of a resistance movement in Germany which was "well placed to strike at Hitler." Trott tried to persuade the Prime Minister to delay war long enough to give the German resistance time to effect a coup d'état. For this purpose, Trott suggested a British warning, naval manoeuvres and Air Force demonstrations. Trott also outlined his plans for negotiations over Danzig and the Polish Corridor as a means of buying time for the resistance. Astor recalled that Trott had not been sure that Chamberlain had understood the intimations that he should offer encouragement to the German resistance in their bid to launch an attack on their government. According to Astor, Trott left a "favourable impression" on Halifax and Chamberlain. Although Trott did not succeed in persuading these British leaders to offer active support to the German opposition, the serious hearing which he was granted was "an amazing achievement, at that stage of events, for a young German with no official position.[333]

Halifax apparently saw the wisdom of Trott's suggestion to address the German people directly, as evidenced by two speeches that he delivered in June, both of which were printed in *The Times*. On 8 June, in an address in the House of Lords, Halifax stated his belief that there "must be many [. . .] thinking people in Germany [. . .] who were not less shocked than ourselves at the treatment of the Jews, and who realised that whatever Germany might have felt about relations between Germany and Czechoslovakia [. . .] to attempt to solve that problem by the destruction of Czech independence was [. . .] both unwise and wrong." Halifax declared that the German people

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[331] Astor, "Mission," 6; Astor, "Plotted," 19; Sams, *Adam von Trott*, 129. Sams bases her account on interviews with David Astor on 1 and 8 November 1989.
[332] Hoffmann, "Question," 443-4
[333] Astor, "Plotted," 19; Astor, "Mission," 6

must not conclude that Britain "had abandoned all desire to reach an understanding with Germany." On the contrary, the British people "had constantly and would still earnestly desire, if they thought it possible, to reach an understanding with Germany." The British, however, were ready "to make whatever contribution was necessary to preserve their way of life and defend their position in the world."[334] On 29 June, Halifax delivered a speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House. Here, Halifax proclaimed that "Great Britain is not prepared to yield either to calumnies or force." He maintained, however, that if "the doctrine of force were once abandoned [i.e. by Hitler] all outstanding questions would become easier to solve." If the current tension were diffused and Hitler refrained from committing further acts of aggression, the British government would be open to discussions concerning "the colonial problem, the questions of raw materials, trade barriers, the issue of *Lebensraum*" and a host of other potential points of contention.[335] Thus Halifax had delivered the message that Trott had requested. He addressed his words directly to the German people. He had demonstrated his recognition that the German people disagreed with the policies and actions of their government, thereby differentiating between Germans and Nazis. He had stated Britain's willingness to enter into negotiations with Germany but had also indicated that Britain would not shrink from war if Hitler continued to menace smaller nations.

Overall, however, Trott received a mixed reception in Britain. His inability to fully reveal the nature of his mission left some of his British interlocutors in doubt as to his real position vis à vis the Nazi dictatorship. Sir Orme Sargent, the Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs remarked that Trott's plan was "rather woolly."[336] Even people who had formerly been Trott's friends harboured suspicions concerning the position of his loyalties. Trott visited C. M. Bowra, the Warden of Wadham College. Trott disclosed his connection to the underground opposition in Germany but Bowra doubted the truthfulness of this announcement. In his memoirs, Bowra recalls that he "could not believe that the Gestapo would allow so obvious an adversary to go about the world expressing his views in this free manner." Bowra's suspicions were heightened when Trott "went on to argue that we should let Hitler keep all his conquests, and so remain at peace with Germany." At this point, Bowra "decided that von Trott was really on the side of the Nazis and asked him to leave the house." Bowra objected to any suggestions which resembled the policy of appeasement: "I decided that von Trott was playing a double game and trying to weaken our

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[334] Viscount Halifax, *Speeches on Foreign Policy* (Toronto, 1940), 270-81
[335] Ibid., 287-97
[336] Quoted in Klemperer, *Search*, 129, based on PRO FO 800/316

resistance just when at last it was beginning to grow stronger."[337] Similarly, A. L. Rowse records that as long as Trott, however "ambivalently" had a connection with the Nazi régime, "he was no longer welcome to see [Rowse]." Rowse writes that he was not sure that Trott "was not reporting back to Berlin what our opinions and attitudes were."[338] Shiela Grant Duff informed Trott that his conversations with mutual friends in Oxford had "aroused infinite suspicion."[339]

Although most of Trott's friends, including Rowse and Bowra, later publicly expressed regret for their mistaken conclusions,[340] the misconceptions and suspicions which dogged Trott in 1939 continued to persist long after the end of the war. In a review of Sykes' biography of Trott in the *Times Literary Supplement*, published in 1969, the reviewer contends that "what horrified [Trott] was not so much a war as a war that Germany could not win."[341] The *TLS* journalist provides no proof to support this contention and Astor's recollections show that Trott was fundamentally opposed to war, believing that war awakened all that was depraved and cruel in humankind. The reviewer also entirely misses the point of Trott's mission to England in the summer of 1939, which was not actually to preserve peace by "restoring the independence of Czechoslovakia, exclusive of the Sudetenland at the expense of Poland." The evidence suggests that Trott hoped that the British would use this proposal to lure Hitler into time-consuming talks.

Wheeler-Bennett levels similar charges against Trott and his co-conspirators, claiming that "the basis of opposition to Hitler's plans was that they endangered the national security of the Reich rather than that they were *unsittlich* (immoral)." Wheeler-Bennett alleges that "[w]hat bound many of the conspirators together was not only their bitter opposition to the Nazi tyranny, but also a strong sense of patriotic nationalism. What they plotted to do was no mere attempt upon a wicked ruler [. . .] but an act of salvation for Germany, an attempt to save her from future disasters and, as a corollary, to conserve as much as possible of what she already held and, perhaps, a little more." Wheeler-Bennett also claims that when Trott was in Virginia Beach in November 1939, he maintained that Germany should keep the territory that she had seized in Poland.[342] That Trott was not motivated by nationalistic aims is evidenced by the men who supported his endeavours. It was Lord Lothian, "a life-long Liberal" and Sir Stafford Cripps who later identified himself "fully with anti-Colonialism and with the United Front between Social Democrats and Communists" who

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[337] C. M. Bowra, *Memories 1898-1939* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966), 305-6
[338] A. L. Rowse, *All Souls and Appeasement* (London, 1961), 96
[339] Grant Duff, *Parting*, 209
[340] Rowse, *All Souls*, 92-3, 96; Bowra, *Memories*, 306
[341] *Times Literary Supplement* (27 March 1969), 322
[342] John Wheeler-Bennett, "The Man who did not Kill Hitler," *New York Review of* Books, 11 September 1969: 37

funded Trott's trips to China and to the United States. As David Astor points out, "[t]hese two men were among Trott's most intimate political friends and backers: and, whatever else they may have been, they were not sympathisers with German nationalism." Cripps and Lothian were under no obligation to fund Trott's ventures; indeed they did so in part from personal resources. Had they detected even a whiff of nationalistic territorial aims about Trott, they would have withdrawn their support. Trott also maintained a close friendship with Wilfred Israel, a well-to-do young Jewish man from a Berlin family, whom Trott had first met at Balliol College. According to Astor, at the outset of the war, Israel "remained absolutely unshaken in his belief that Trott would not have altered his attitude after Hitler's victories and that it was of the highest importance that Britain should try to help him and his fellow conspirators."[343] Like Cripps and Lothian, Israel would not have retained confidence in Trott had he had reason to doubt the sincerity of Trott's opposition to the aims of the Nazi régime and the means by which these were attained. Finally, Wheeler-Bennett himself would not have helped Trott to write the memorandum for Lord Halifax nor would he have written a letter to the Foreign Office urging that the British government extend support to the German opposition if Trott had made such statements about the status of Poland in Virginia Beach.[344] In fact, Trott said in Virginia Beach that Germany should have the territorial status quo *ante* 1933.[345]

Trott's semi-official attachment to the German Foreign Ministry undoubtedly aroused some suspicion. According to Klemens von Klemperer: "The very fact that Adam came in a semi-official capacity [. . .] caused a great deal of suspicion in England."[346] In order to mount an effective resistance, Trott, like his co-conspirators, had to work against the Nazi régime from within the state apparatus. Resistance from within allowed the resisters to better conceal their activities as well as to gain access to privileged information that allowed them to best direct their efforts. Trott's British interlocutors evidently had difficulty grasping Trott's dilemma and were probably incapable of distinguishing between collaboration and resistance in these circumstances.

Trott's connection to the so-called 'Cliveden set,' the circle of British leaders and other individuals of influence who were connected to Lord and Lady Astor, may also have cast doubt on his intentions. The 'Cliveden set' supported the policy of appeasement and were sometimes accused of having sympathetic leanings towards Nazi Germany. Trott's association with this circle led to

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[343] Astor, "Why the Revolt Against Hitler was Ignored," 7, 9
[344] Rothfels, "Adam von Trott und das State Department," 328; Rothfels, "Trott und die Aussenpolitik des Widerstands," 316-18; Deutsch, *Conspiracy*, 155-7
[345] Rothfels, "Adam von Trott und das State Department," 327; see above, 17-18
[346] "Editor's Note," in Grant Duff and Trott, *A Noble Combat*, 354

suspicion that he was an advocate of appeasement, a charge which was particularly damning in the tense summer of 1939 after Hitler's flagrant breach of the Munich Agreement and with war looming. Astor commented in an article that Trott had committed "the error of not fully assessing the extraordinary, almost traumatic change of national mood that occurred in Britain when Hitler shattered all hopes and illusions by seizing Prague."[347] In another article, Astor maintained that "the bare-faced fraudulence" of Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia "shook the British [. . .] The whole country seemed to reach a silent agreement that it must now be ready to face another war."[348] Thus, Trott was caught in an almost irreconcilable situation. He arrived in Britain at the moment when the prevailing attitude toward Hitler's Germany had hardened and the British were unequivocally opposed to any further concessions. Trott's proposal that Britain suggest a new round of negotiations with Hitler was therefore badly received. Trott could not reveal that he was trying to gain time for the resistance movement to launch another coup attempt. He was thus deprived of the most persuasive argument that could potentially have won his British interlocutors over to the plan.

Trott's aim was not to hand over the territory of other nations to prevent Hitler from attacking Poland, but rather to keep him talking, avert war and give the opposition the chance to orchestrate an overthrow of the Nazi dictatorship. At the end of June, Charles Bosanquet, Trott's cousin-in-law, sent him a copy of Halifax' Chatham House speech of 29 June. In a covering letter, Bosanquet informed Trott that "opinion in England has hardened still more since you were here last [. . .] The general attitude may be summed up in the words 'We're fed up with Germany' and the general impression is that Hitler will force a war this summer. This idea is becoming familiar; indeed people now look forward almost with relief to getting it over." Bosanquet stressed that "[i]t is essential that responsible people in Berlin should know that England will fight over Danzig in order to stop this gangster era in international relations."[349] Trott was jubilant upon receipt of this letter. According to Trott's friends, he declared, "'Charles has done the best thing he could! Now I've got it on paper—now I've got something to show them!'" Trott subsequently made copies of the letter and the speech and distributed them.[350]

Sykes, in his biography of Trott, describes the plan that Trott put forth in England in the summer of 1939 as an "appeasement policy."[351] Sykes misinterprets Trott's intentions. Two close friends of Trott, David Astor and Peter Bielenberg, attested that, by going to England, Trott hoped

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[347] Astor, "Revolt," 10
[348] Astor, "Plotted," 18
[349] Bosanquet, quoted in Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty*, 269
[350] Peter and Christabel Bielenberg, quoted in Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty*, 270
[351] Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty*, 258

to create conditions in which a coup d'état could take place with a reasonable chance of success. Although Sykes conducted interviews with both of these men, he disregarded their testimony in his book. Trott's jubilation over Bosanquet's letter serves as further evidence that he was trying to reactivate plans for a coup. Trott intended to use the letter and the copy of Halifax' speech, both of which contained unmistakable assertions of Britain's willingness to wage war to secure the co-operation of the military leaders in the conspiracy.[352]

Shortly after returning to Berlin, Trott submitted an official memorandum to Hewel at the German Foreign Ministry, summarising the discussions he had held while in England. Trott intended for the report to be passed to Hitler. Of necessity, the report was written using Nazi terminology. Trott's friend, Peter Bielenberg, who worked in the *Reich* Ministry of Economics, helped Trott to write this memorandum. Bielenberg's wife, Christabel recalled how her husband and Trott had "some fun with the official jargon. A sudden burst of laughter, 'all right Peter if you think so, but isn't it laying it on a bit thick?' 'You can't lay it on thick enough.'"[353] Trott had to write from the Nazi point of view, both in order to increase the chance that Hitler would take the report seriously and for self-protection.

Trott's intention was to show Hitler that he would not be able to escape a military confrontation if he forged ahead with his plans to invade Poland. At the same time, Trott offered Hitler an alternative to war by revealing that Britain would be willing to "take any really reasonable peaceful way out" if the German government demonstrated its willingness to refrain from any further acts of aggression and to negotiate in good faith.

In his report, Trott identified himself with the Nazi position and camouflaged his actual intentions. Trott reported that he had been able to present the "German point of view" and to receive British responses. He began by repeating a series of familiar expressions of outrage at the unfair treatment that had been meted out to Germany. He claimed that he had informed his British interlocutors of the "deep-seated bitterness and hostility towards British policy [which] prevailed among the German people." The British guarantee to Poland had aroused the anger of the German people. "Britain had again identified herself with a great wrong done to Germany at Versailles and had also, by the rest of her system of alliances, given new life to the conviction, born of bitter experience, that she would try everything to keep Germany down in future too."

Throughout his memorandum, Trott attempted to impress upon Hitler, that, contrary to his assumption, Britain would go to war to prevent any further German incursions onto the territory of

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[352] Astor, "Mission," 6; Sams, *Adam von Trott*, 137 and 160, fn. 95
[353] Bielenberg, *The Past is Myself*, 74

her smaller neighbours. Trott reported Halifax' assertion that Britain would "not shrink from a necessary war." Trott then outlined the proposal, which he attributed to Lothian, that Britain would be willing to negotiate the status of Danzig and the Polish Corridor if Hitler restored Czechoslovakian autonomy, excluding the Sudetenland. Lothian, who, Trott assured his readers, "exercise[d] a very strong influence" in the British Cabinet, predicted dramatic consequences if Hitler were to restore the national independence of Bohemia and Moravia. According to Lothain, Hitler "would, with one blow, disarm his bitterest enemies abroad, restore confidence in Europe, and thereby lend to the British desire for understanding, which was honestly felt, a unanimity it had never before known." Trott concluded the report by reiterating that the British government was not averse to further negotiations but that the nation was prepared to fight if Hitler committed another act of aggression. Trott recounted Chamberlain's assertion that the British people were "passionately stirred" and that "they would fight if another independent nation were destroyed." If, however, Germany were to restore the confidence of the British government by adopting a non-belligerent foreign policy, Chamberlain, who had always worked to establish a co-operative Anglo-German relationship, "would again be able to advocate a policy of coming to meet us halfway as he had hoped to do after Munich."[354]

Trott attempted to obtain an audience with Hitler, but was blocked by Ribbentrop who did not want the Führer to be exposed to any foreign policy proposals other than his own. Trott tried to circumvent Ribbentrop and gain access to Hitler through Göring. A meeting between Trott and Göring was scheduled for 11 June but Ribbentrop intervened and prevented Trott from presenting his ideas to Göring.[355]

Trott's intentions in writing the memorandum for submission to Hitler have been misunderstood by historians. Hugh Trevor-Roper, for instance, claims that Trott's portrayal of himself as an opponent of Hitler while in England is rendered illegitimate by the tone of his official report.[356] Trevor-Roper fails to understand or acknowledge that Trott would have exposed himself to great risk if he had allowed even a hint of his anti-Nazi position to show through in the report. Further, in order for the report to be taken seriously, Trott had to write from the point of view of a loyal Nazi supporter who was trying to further Germany's territorial and political aggrandisement. Trott predicted glory and prestige for Hitler if he were able to negotiate a favourable deal on Danzig and the Polish Corridor. In the hope of averting war, Trott had to entice Hitler into negotiations

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[354] *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. 6, 674-84
[355] Klemperer, *Search*, 127; Sams, *Adam von Trott*, 134
[356] Astor, "Revolt," 10

with an offer that could potentially bring greater benefits than could a successful invasion of Poland. David Astor maintains that: "Every sentence of Trott's official report [. . .] had this object of trying to delay the outbreak of war. This is especially true of his deliberate flattery of Hitler. He discussed these tactics in detail as he was staying with me in London during part of his visit."[357]

In July 1939, Astor travelled to Berlin and met with Trott. Upon returning to London, Astor submitted a memorandum to Lord Halifax summarising the prevailing sentiment of the German public concerning the status of Danzig and the Polish Corridor. Astor reported that the German people believed that Danzig should be incorporated into the *Reich* if the city's residents favoured union with Germany. Most Germans thought that a rail and road link with East Prussia was a reasonable proposition. Astor wrote of the desire on the part of industrialists, the commanders of the German Armed Forces and in the Economics Ministry to prevent war. War could be avoided if the British were prepared to negotiate certain concessions with Germany. If Hitler's attention could be diverted to, for example, colonial acquisitions and world trade, long enough for Germany to lose her chance to impose solutions by force by virtue of her superiority in armaments, "then Nazism and with it power-politics may die a natural death." Peter Hoffmann points out that similar suggestions had been made by Halifax in 1937 and by Cadogan in November 1938. [358] Now that Hitler had repeatedly acted upon his aggressive inclinations with utter disregard for international agreements, the British government did not believe that he could be trusted to honour his side of a bargain and so refused to engage in any further negotiations with him. Perhaps Chamberlain and Halifax had failed to fully understand the implication of Trott's message: if Hitler could be temporarily distracted by spurious negotiations, his enemies within Germany would orchestrate his downfall. Another factor, which may have influenced the British government against adopting Trott's suggestion, was the unorthodoxy and uncertainty of a plan, the success of which depended in part on the relatively unknown quantity of a resistance group inside Germany. Finally, Hitler had delivered a great blow to the prestige and credibility of the British government with the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement had been discredited. The British people adamantly rejected any further discussions, let alone concessions to Hitler. Astor writes that the "Chamberlain government could not possibly make any further diplomatic move after the seizing of Prague, without risking Britain's hard-won unity and determination."[359]

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[357] Astor, " Mission," 6
[358] Hoffmann, "Question," 444-5
[359] Astor, "Plotted," 18

Astor's assessment requires qualification. It would be more accurate to say that Chamberlain could not make any further official diplomatic move. By the summer of 1939, British public opinion was firmly in favour of an uncompromising stance vis à vis Germany. Chamberlain, however, had still not relinquished the hope that he could reach a peaceful settlement with Hitler. Due to the climate of public and parliamentary opinion, Chamberlain could only approach Hitler covertly. On 24 July, Helmuth Wohlthat, the deputy head of the German Four Year Plan Organisation, reported to Hermann Göring concerning a conversation between Wohlthat, Sir Horace Wilson and Sir Joseph Ball, head of the Conservative Party organisation, at the Duke of Westminster's at the beginning of June. Wohlthat recounted that Wilson had told him that if Hitler announced that he would never again use force to obtain his territorial aims, Britain would extend her good-will to Germany in the form of free access to world markets, Anglo-German economic co-operation, a "colonial condominium" in Africa and British loans to the German Reichsbank.[360] Chamberlain and Wilson also sent messages to Hitler via Henry Drummond-Wolff, a former member of Parliament. After receiving instructions from Wilson, Drummond-Wolff spoke to two officials in Göring's department, the Office of the Plenipotentiary for the Four Year Plan, telling them that economic benefits would follow a German declaration of peace.[361] These secret approaches served to undermine Britain's firm stance against any further acts of Nazi aggression. In Kennedy's view, "[a]fter Prague, making concessions to Germany" was a policy "lacking both in practical wisdom *and* moral idealism."[362] Parker agrees. "The interest of these attempts at contact lies not in their effectiveness as British attempts to prevent war," writes Parker, "but in the evidence they provide of the state of mind of Chamberlain and Halifax." The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were willing to circumvent parliament, the Cabinet, the Foreign Office and the British public in order to continue the pursuit of a policy they had officially renounced. Parker concludes that "if anything their effect on the international scene was to make Anglo-German war more likely."[363] Likewise, Watt maintains that the "net result of these well-meant efforts [. . .] was to confirm Hitler in his view of Britain: that her policy was not seriously intended and that the British guarantee to Poland was a piece of traditional British hypocrisy [. . .] not to be taken really seriously."[364]

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[360] *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. 6, No. 715, pp. 976-83
[361] Ibid., No. 368, p. 477
[362] Kennedy, "Appeasement," 156
[363] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 267
[364] Watt, *How War Came*, 407

5.2 Theodor and Erich Kordt & Ernst von Weizsäcker

At approximately the same time as Trott made his approaches to British statesmen in the summer of 1939, the Kordt brothers, acting under the guidance of Weizsäcker, conveyed warnings to the British government of the impending German-Soviet *rapprochement.*[365] In June, Theo Kordt contacted his friend, the French journalist Pierre Maillaud, Deputy Chief of the Havas Agency. Kordt argued that an Anglo-Russian alliance would virtually ensure the preservation of peace. Kordt suggested that the British issue an announcement which would inform the German people about Hitler's reckless and treacherous foreign policy initiatives. Kordt also revealed information to the British government concerning upcoming troop movements, which were scheduled to occur in Germany.[366] Canaris and Oster had given this information to Kordt when he had been in Berlin at the beginning of June.[367] Kordt's message reached the Foreign Office through William Ridsdale of the Foreign Office News Department.

Following his brother's initiative, Erich Kordt travelled to London, ostensibly for a brief stay before continuing on to Scotland for a vacation. He arrived on 15 June. Immediately upon arrival in London, Erich Kordt, together with his brother, went to see Conwell-Evans at his home. Vansittart was also there. Erich Kordt informed Vansittart and Conwell-Evans that Hitler intended to conclude an agreement with the Soviet Union. The British government should pre-empt Hitler and negotiate an Anglo-Russian treaty before the German-Russian talks progressed any further. Kordt warned that the conclusion of a pact between Hitler and Stalin would make war inevitable.[368] The next day, 16 June, Erich Kordt delivered the same message to Maillaud, who passed it along to the British Foreign Office through Ridsdale. According to Klemens von Klemperer, a secret memorandum written by Ridsdale in the files of the Foreign Office states that a German holding a high position in his country's civil service had, at great personal risk, travelled to London to inform the British government of Hitler's intention to reach a deal with Stalin.[369] The transmission of this message was tantamount to treason against Germany.

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[365] Weizsäcker , *Erinnerungen*, 234-5, 244-62; Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 188-203; Burckhardt, *Meine Danziger Mission*, 286. On Weizsäcker's actions during the summer of 1939 please see also Hoffmann, *History*, 108-110; Klemperer, *Search,* 118-19; see below, 103

[366] Kordt, *Nicht*, 310-19; Klemperer, *Search*, 118-19; Marion Thielenhaus, *Zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand: Deutsche Diplomaten 1938-1941, Die politischen Aktivitäten der Beamtengruppe um Ernst von Weizsäcker im Auswärtigen Amt* (Paderborn, 1984), 120

[367] Kordt, *Nicht*, 310

[368] Kordt, *Nicht*, 314; Theodor Kordt, Short Autobiography (I), p. 12, Kordt Papers, ED 157/4, IfZ

[369] Klemperer, *Search*, 119

In August, Theo Kordt had another meeting with Vansittart at the home of Conwell-Evans. Kordt attempted to impress upon Vansittart the urgent need for the British government to speed up its negotiations in Moscow and conclude an agreement with the Soviets in order to pre-empt Hitler. In addition, Kordt insisted, the British government must push Mussolini to use his influence with Hitler to prevent him from invading Poland. The British would have to employ harsh words to secure Italian co-operation.[370]

After the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, when any attempt to stave off war was virtually futile, Theo Kordt continued to meet with Vansittart. They were still working together as late as 31 August but their efforts were to no avail. Vansittart and Kordt agreed to stay in contact. Vansittart urged Theo Kordt to try to secure a transfer to a neutral country, which might be feasible with the assistance of Weizsäcker. Upon his arrival Kordt should send an innocuous postcard to Vansittart. The postcard would serve as a sign that Kordt was available for clandestine meetings with British officials.[371]

Erich and Theo Kordt had approached the British government with the backing of Weizsäcker, who, throughout the summer of 1939, tried to disrupt the negotiations for a Soviet-German alliance.[372] Weizsäcker believed that if Hitler succeeded in concluding an agreement with the Soviets, he "might therefore very well think that the way to Warsaw was now free, and that Poland had fallen into his hands." Weizsäcker therefore believed that a Soviet-German agreement "would have to be prevented if peace were to be preserved." Weizsäcker adopted a dual approach to the problem. First, he tried to sabotage Hitler's foreign policy. Weizsäcker attempted to persuade the British government of the urgent need to pre-empt Hitler by securing an Anglo-Soviet alliance. Second, in order to further discourage Hitler's war plans, Weizsäcker sought to make the Führer aware that Britain's guarantee to Poland was not bluff. On numerous occasions during that summer, Weizsäcker passed along comments by foreign diplomats concerning the willingness of Britain and France to fight on behalf of Poland, which, he hoped "were so unambiguous that Hitler could not ignore them and would have to believe them." In his campaign against the outbreak of war, Weizsäcker again enlisted the assistance of Carl Jacob Burckhardt, the Swiss League of Nations High Commissioner for Danzig. At Weizsäcker's urging, Burckhardt warned Hitler and Ribbentrop

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[370] Kordt, *Nicht*, 336-7
[371] Ibid., 337-8
[372] Weizsäcker , *Erinnerungen*, 234-5, 244-62; Weizsäcker, *Memoirs*, 188-203; Burckhardt, *Meine Danziger Mission*, 286. On Weizsäcker's actions during the summer of 1939 please see also Hoffmann, *History*, 108-110; Klemperer, *Search,* 118-19

on two occasions, in June and in August, that they would ignite a European war with a German invasion of Poland.

In the second half of July, Weizsäcker and the Italian Ambassador to Germany, Bernardo Attolico, conspired to persuade the Italian government to exert pressure on Hitler not to invade Poland. Knowing that Mussolini wanted peace for another three to four years, and counting on Italian reluctance to go to war for German aims, Attolico and Weizsäcker attempted to bring about a meeting between Mussolini and Hitler. Mussolini should inform Hitler that Italy would not support Germany's war policy. The Italian government proposed a meeting of the Great Powers, where the conflict between Germany and Poland could be resolved. According to Weizsäcker, Ribbentrop "sabotaged this idea" and the meeting never occurred. The Italian Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano did, however, travel to Germany. He met with Ribbentrop in Salzburg on 11 August and with Hitler in Berchtesgaden on 12 and 13 August. Although Ciano initially warned Hitler and Ribbentrop against an invasion of Poland, arguing that such an action would unleash a general European war, he did not stand his ground when Ribbentrop challenged him and Hitler insisted that England and France would shirk their obligations. Instead, Ciano conceded that Ribbentrop and Hitler were probably right. Ciano did not remind Hitler of Mussolini's expectation, which he had expressed to Hitler eight days after the signature of the German-Italian Treaty of Alliance in May 1939, that the Axis powers would keep the peace for three to four years. Nor did the Italian Foreign Minister warn Hitler that Italy would not consider herself bound to fight if Germany ignited a Europe-wide conflict Through an act of aggression. Nor did Ciano protest that Italy was inadequately prepared for war.[373] Ciano's failure to stand his ground dashed Weizsäcker's hopes of using the Italians to restrain Hitler.

At the beginning of August, Weizsäcker learned that Hitler was beginning to push harder for an agreement with the Soviet Union. At the same time, Weizsäcker was informed that Hitler would not launch an invasion of Poland without first assuring himself as to the Soviet attitude. If it proved impossible to reach an agreement, he would postpone his war plans. Weizsäcker concluded that "everything depended on upsetting the dates in Hitler's programme; and the means of doing this would be to delay, or prevent altogether, the conclusion of the pact with Russia." In mid-August, as the Soviet-German negotiations neared a successful conclusion, Weizsäcker warned Henderson that the British must, at all costs, forestall the talks and sign an agreement with the Soviet Union. In conversation with Henderson, Weizsäcker repeated the request that he had made

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[373] Mario Toscano, "Italy and the Nazi-Soviet Accords, 1939," *Designs in Diplomacy*, trans & ed. George A. Carbone (Baltimore; London, 1970), 109

the year before for a high-ranking British military man to be sent to talk to Hitler, "if possible *tête-à-tête*" and issue an unequivocal warning that Britain would respond with force to any further aggressive acts by Hitler.

On 15 August, Weizsäcker spoke to Henderson and the French Ambassador, Robert Coulondre on Ribbentrop's orders. Through the ambassadors, Weizsäcker "was able to suggest to the Governments in Paris and London what [he] held to be the right view." In other words, he warned that the British and French governments should adopt an uncompromising stance towards Hitler. Henderson transmitted Weizsäcker's message to the British government.[374]

During the summer of 1939, Hans Herwarth von Bittenfeld, the Second Secretary at the German Embassy in Moscow and private secretary to Ambassador Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, transmitted several warnings to a contact in the British Embassy in Moscow. Herwarth conveyed information to Armin Dew, Fitzroy MacLean's successor as Third Secretary of the British Embassy concerning the German-Soviet negotiations. Herwarth also passed information to Charles Bohlen at the American Embassy, who transmitted it to Cordell Hull, the US Secretary of State. According to Bohlen, Hull repeated Herwarth's warning to the British and French ambassadors in Washington. Herwarth hoped that the British and French governments would respond to this information quickly and conclude their own agreement with the Soviet Union. Herwarth believed that a German-Soviet treaty would make war inevitable and his aim was the preservation of peace. His efforts yielded no results.[375]

After the Munich Agreement and prior to the outbreak of war, the necessary conditions for a coup d'état to occur no longer existed. War had been averted. Hitler had emerged victorious from the débâcle with the Sudetenland in hand and the peace intact. The support of the army commanders for a coup, secured at such pain, was withdrawn. The resisters who approached London in the hope of persuading the British not to tolerate any more of Hitler's outrages lacked a clear plan. The opposition was not poised to attack the régime.[376] The contacts initiated by the resistance during this period are nevertheless a testament to the depth of the commitment of the German resisters: they risked compromising themselves in order to warn the British government that Hitler had not abandoned his plans for aggressive territorial conquest. They urged the British government to prepare themselves so that the nation would be sufficiently equipped to counter

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[374] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 7, No. 32
[375] Hans Herwarth von Bittenfeld, *Against Two Evils* (New York, 1981), 152-65; see also Klemperer, *Search*, 130
[376] Hoffmann, *History*, 101

Hitler's war plans. Britain, advised the resisters, should accelerate her production of armaments, conclude a defensive alliance with the Soviet Union and publicise Britain's firm policy of intolerance for further acts of German aggression. The warnings delivered by the German resistance amounted to statutory treason. The resisters revealed state secrets with the aim of sabotaging the military plans of their government. They provided intelligence material to the government of a foreign state in the hope that the British might defeat Hitler either through diplomatic or military action.

5.3 Anglo-Soviet Negotiations

Chamberlain had been under domestic political pressure to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union since April.[377] The Prime Minister was, however, disinclined to enter into close co-operation with the Soviets. His opposition rested on four assumptions. First, he believed that the Soviet Union was militarily weak and would thus be unable to function as a deterrent to German aggression. On 26 March, Chamberlain wrote: "I must confess to the most profound distrust of Russia. I have no belief whatever in her ability to maintain an effective offensive, even if she wanted to."[378] Second, as a result of the poor opinion he had formed of Soviet military capabilities, Chamberlain regarded close co-operation with Poland as infinitely more important in establishing an eastern deterrent to Hitlerian aggression. The Poles were vehemently opposed to any co-operation with the Soviets. Chamberlain, who understood and agreed with the Polish position, was happy to oblige the Polish Foreign Minister, Colonel Jozef Beck and his colleagues.[379] Third,

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[377] As Chamberlain was announcing the guarantees to Romania, Greece and Turkey in the House on 13 April, he was interrupted by Members who demanded: "What about Russia?" Clement Attlee, the Labour leader, declared that he welcomed the British guarantees to Poland, Romania, Greece and Turkey but maintained that these pacts only served to "plug a leak." Any effective policy of collective security necessitated unity between Britain, France and the Soviet Union. A declaration of solidarity between these three powers "would be a rallying point around which to bring in all the forces which stand for peace." Similarly, Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Liberal leader, stressed The need for "close and firm co-operation" between Britain, France and the Soviet Union. Churchill approved of the government's adoption of the policy of "building up a strong alliance of nations" to serve as a deterrent against acts of aggression. He urged that the government pursue its policy with "the utmost speed and vigour." The preservation of peace depended on "the full inclusion of Soviet Russia in our defensive peace bloc." Finally, Hugh Dalton, a Labour MP, forcefully stressed the need for Anglo-Soviet co-operation "at a time when, if civilisation is to be saved and the dictators halted in their tracks, it is necessary to mobilise every element of power that we can." Claiming to speak for the entire House, Dalton concluded that "we desire to see built up a clear and explicit military alliance directed against any aggressor [. . .] between the British Commonwealth, France and Russia." 346 HC Deb 5s, cols. 15, 18-19, 23, 34, 126

[378] Chamberlain, quoted in Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 403

[379] During meetings with Beck in London on 4-6 April to work out the terms of a reciprocal guarantee, Chamberlain and Halifax gladly accepted Beck's opposition to closer Anglo-Soviet ties. Beck declared that "he was not in a position to accept any agreement which would have the effect, if even only indirectly, of linking Poland with Soviet Russia." He argued that co-operation between Poland and the Soviet Union would only be

Chamberlain was instinctively averse to the Soviet political system, which he regarded as little better than the Nazi dictatorship. He wrote that he distrusted Soviet motives, "which seem to [. . .] have little connection with our ideas of liberty, and to be concerned only with getting every one else by the ears."[380] Finally, Chamberlain never considered an agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union as a serious possibility.

The Italian invasion of Albania, coupled with the pressure in the House of Commons, however, compelled the British government to make some overture to the Soviet Union. On 14 April, Halifax instructed Sir William Seeds, the British ambassador in Moscow, to suggest to the Soviets that they make a unilateral declaration stating that they would come to the defence of neighbouring countries who were the victims of aggression if Soviet assistance was requested. The British proposal was designed to obtain a Soviet commitment to counter any future acts of Italian and especially German aggression without having to publicly acknowledge Anglo-Soviet co-operation, thereby circumventing the problem of the reluctance of Poland to associate herself with the Soviet Union.[381] On 13 April, the French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet had sent a proposal of his own to the Soviet government in which he proposed the establishment of a guarantee of mutual assistance between France and the Soviet Union. In response, the Soviets sent an offer to both the British and French Foreign Ministers proposing the creation of a military alliance, including a military clause, according to which the three signatories would "render all manner of assistance, including that of a military nature, in case of aggression in Europe against any one of the contracting Powers" or against an Eastern European state.[382] Chamberlain, Halifax and Cadogan all reacted negatively to the Soviet proposal for a triple alliance. Cadogan referred to the Soviet proposal as "mischievous." He drew up a report which Chamberlain presented to Cabinet. Cadogan argued that the advantage of a "paper commitment" by the Soviet Union in the event of war did not compensate for the disadvantageous effect "associating ourselves openly with Russia" would have on Anglo-Polish relations. The Soviet terms, he predicted "would frighten the Poles." Cadogan's paper persuaded Cabinet to agree with Chamberlain's motion to reject the Soviet proposals.[383]

Thus from the outset, Britain and the Soviet Union were at cross purposes. Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, wanted a firm military

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more likely "to precipitate a conflict" with Germany. Chamberlain replied that he accepted this position. *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 5, No. 2, 9-19

[380] Chamberlain, quoted in Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 403

[381] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 5, No. 170, 205-6

[382] Ibid., No. 201, 228-9

[383] Cadogan, *Cadogan Diaries*, 175

alliance with Britain to counter German expansionism. The Soviets were not interested in sweeping but vague declarations. Geoffrey Roberts asserts that the agreement "had to be watertight" with "no room for manoeuvre by the 'appeasers' in London and Paris." The USSR wanted to secure "practical and worthwhile support in the event of war with Germany."[384] Michael Jabara Carley points out that Molotov's mistrust of the British and French was conditioned and heightened by four years of Anglo-French dismissals of Soviet attempts to form an anti-Nazi bloc, including an offer by Maxim Maximovich Litvinov, Molotov's predecessor, for an international conference during the Sudeten crisis. From the point of view of the Soviets, the British and French were guilty of a series of betrayals of the principles for which they claimed to stand.[385] If Molotov was to align the Soviet Union with the Western democracies, he did not want to leave open the possibility for Britain and France to wriggle out of their obligations.

Negotiations between the Soviet Union and the Western democracies dragged on throughout the spring of 1939. On 8 and 9 July, the British and French representatives met with Molotov. The main stumbling blocks to an agreement were the Soviet demands that Turkey and Poland sign mutual assistance pacts with the Soviet Union and the insistence that the signatory powers be allowed to intervene if any of the states included in the treaty was the victim of direct or 'indirect aggression.' Indirect aggression was defined by the Soviet Union as "action accepted by any of the above-mentioned States[386] under threat of force by another Power, or without any such threat, involving the use of territory and forces of the State in question for purposes of aggression against that State or against one of the contracting parties."[387] With the inclusion of the phrase, "without any such threat," Molotov implied that the Soviet Union would reserve the right to intervene in the affairs of a sovereign state that was seen to be moving into the German orbit.

Chamberlain remained unperturbed over the Soviet definition of indirect aggression. He was secure in the belief that the Soviets intended to sign an agreement with the British and were merely trying to make the negotiation process as difficult and unpleasant as possible. His complacency may be traced in part to Henderson's repeated assurances that there would never be a rapprochement between Germany and the Soviet Union and in part to his own continuing scepticism regarding Soviet military strength. He had difficulty believing reports from the British

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[384] Geoffrey Roberts, "The Soviet Decision for a Pact with Nazi Germany," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1: 67
[385] Michael Jabara Carley, *1939 : The Alliance that Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999)
[386] Turkey, Greece, Romania, Poland, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands. (The inclusion of Switzerland and the Netherlands was contingent upon the conclusion of mutual non-aggression pacts between the Soviet Union with Turkey and Poland).
[387] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 6, No. 282, p. 313

Ambassador to Poland and from British air intelligence that the Soviet Air Force was capable of bombing East Prussia.[388]

On 12 August, military staff talks commenced between France, Britain and the Soviet Union. On the third day of the talks, Soviet Defence Minister Marshal Kliment Efremovich Voroshilov demanded a clear and definitive answer as to whether Poland and Romania would allow Soviet troops onto their soil in case of war. The British and French Ambassadors and Military Attachés in Warsaw appealed to the Poles to allow Soviet troops to enter Polish territory in the event of a military conflict. Beck and General Waclaw Stachiewicz, the Polish Chief of Staff, refused the Anglo-French appeal, repeating their standard argument that an agreement between Poland and the Soviet Union would provoke the Germans.[389] Further, the Poles distrusted Soviet motives if the Soviet Union came to Poland's aid if she were attacked by Germany.[390]

As the tripartite negotiations foundered, Germany began to court the Soviets more aggressively. On 14 August, Ribbentrop sent a message to Molotov via Schulenburg, the German Ambassador to the Soviet Union, in which he stated that the "Reich Government are of the opinion that there is no question between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea which cannot be settled to the complete satisfaction of both countries" and proposed "political co-operation [. . .] [o]ver and above such matters."[391] While the British and French could not even promise Soviet entry onto Polish and Romanian territory, Ribbentrop offered to divide up Eastern Europe between the Soviet Union and Germany. On 17 August, Schulenburg informed Molotov that Ribbentrop would travel to Moscow whenever Molotov gave his assent.[392] On 18 August, Ribbentrop instructed Schulenburg to inform Molotov that, according to Hitler, "German-Polish relations are becoming more acute from day to day. We have to take into account that incidents might occur any day that would make the outbreak of open conflict unavoidable." In other words, a German attack on Poland was imminent. Hitler and Ribbentrop were prepared to conclude a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union immediately.[393]

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[388] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 239, based on CAB 23/100 fols 135-8; CAB 27/625 fols 269, 258
[389] *DBFP*, Third Series, Vol. 7, Nos. 87, 88, 90
[390] Poland had attacked Russia during the Russian Civil War and had seized territory east of the Curzon Line which was claimed by both Russia and Poland. Poland sought to restore her eastern border of 1772. The Treaty of Riga of 1921 fixed the Russian-Polish border. Under the terms of the treaty, Poland was awarded large sections of Byelorussia and Ukraine. Poland therefore had to expect that the Soviet Union would occupy and keep that territory when she came to Poland's aid. Donald W. Treadgold, *Twentieth Century Russia* (Oxford, 2000), 203
[391] *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. 7, No. 56, pp. 62-4
[392] Ibid., No. 75, pp. 84-5
[393] Ibid., No. 113, pp. 121-3

On 21 August Molotov consented. The Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact was signed on 23 August.[394]

Geoffrey Roberts argues that Soviet policy during the spring and summer of 1939 was equivocal and contradictory. A commitment to curb German expansion co-existed with a desire to reach a *modus vivendi* with Germany. Sincere efforts to conclude an anti-Nazi defensive alliance were tempered by suspicion of the Western democracies. The result of these conflicting impulses was a policy that tended to waver back and forth, appearing to settle on one course of action only to take flight again and settle on something else. Ultimately, according to this interpretation, Soviet policy was determined by events as they arose, rather than being driven by Stalin's decisive, iron will.[395]

In a 1992 article based on newly released documents from Soviet foreign policy archives, Roberts argues convincingly that "the Soviet decision for a pact with Nazi Germany was [. . .] a consequence, not a cause, of the breakdown of the August 1939 Anglo-Soviet-French triple alliance negotiations." Roberts dispels the notion that Soviet policy shifted in step with the German drive for an agreement between the two nations. Rather, the Soviet leadership had no clear and concrete policy. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact "was more a product of accident than design, a result of policy drift rather than goal-oriented policy direction, the consequence not of strategic calculation but of a series of tactical shifts and adjustments."[396] The German government began its pursuit of an agreement with the Soviet Union in the spring of 1939. German overtures initially met with great scepticism and suspicion on the part of the Soviets. On 9 May, Baron von Stumm, deputy head of the press department of the German Foreign Ministry, spoke to Georgi Astakhov, who was in charge of the Soviet Embassy in Berlin during Ambassador Alexsei Merekalov's absence. Stumm told Astakhov that the German government was anxious to improve German-Soviet relations. On 12 May, in a report of the conversation to the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Vladimir Petrovich Potemkin, Astakhov commented on the "exceptional superficiality" and "non-committal nature" of Stumm's suggestion and concluded that it did "not warrant any serious consideration."[397] The Soviets maintained this extremely sceptical view of the German approaches for the next three months. At the end of July, Julius Karl Schnurre, the head of the economic section in the German Foreign Ministry, met with

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[394] Ibid., No. 158, pp. 167-8
[395] Finney, "Introduction," in *Origins*, 10-11
[396] Roberts, "*Soviet Decision*," 57-8
[397] Astakhov, quoted in Roberts, "Soviet Decision," 61

Astakhov and told him that Germany was "ready to demonstrate the possibility of reaching an agreement on any question, to give any guarantees."[398] Only then, in a telegram to Astakhov on 29 July, did Molotov finally indicate his willingness at least to listen to the German proposals. He remained highly doubtful as to the genuineness of the German overtures. "If the Germans are now sincerely changing course and really want to improve political relations with the USSR, they are obliged to state what this improvement represents in concrete terms," wrote Molotov. "Not long ago," he continued doubtfully, "I was with Schulenburg who also spoke about improving relations, but did not want to propose anything concrete or intelligible." He concluded that "the matter depends on the Germans" but conceded that the Soviet Union would "welcome any improvement in political relations between the two countries."[399]

Roberts speculates that Molotov's grudging willingness to listen to the Germans was partly a result of the frustratingly slow pace of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations. Molotov had called the British and French negotiators "crooks and cheats" and doubted that an adequate agreement would ever be reached.[400] Roberts suggests that Molotov's slightly more receptive reaction to Schnurre's comments arose from the mounting crisis in German-Polish relations over Danzig. Roberts stresses, however, that Molotov did not clearly articulate the reasons for his change in attitude. "Molotov's statement of Soviet policy on 29 July indicates a lack of calculation and that Moscow did not really know what to do about Berlin's offer of political discussions." The lack of a clear Soviet policy is also evidenced by the absence of instructions from Moscow to Astakhov, who was the most important intermediary between the Soviet and German governments until the end of July.[401]

There is no doubt however, that Molotov was reluctant to give up on the hope of concluding an alliance agreement with Britain and France. On 4 August, Schulenburg cabled Ribbentrop to report on a meeting he had had with Molotov the day before. Schulenburg reported that "Molotov abandoned his habitual reserve and appeared unusually open." Schulenburg nevertheless concluded that "the Soviet Government are at present determined to conclude an agreement with Britain and France" and warned Ribbentrop that it would "require considerable effort on your part to cause a reversal in the Soviet Government's course."[402] The same day, Molotov instructed Astakhov to proceed with general conversations but not to commit

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[398] Schnurre, quoted in Roberts, "Soviet Decision," 64
[399] Molotov, quoted in Roberts, "Soviet Decision," 64
[400] Molotov, quoted in Roberts, "Soviet Decision," 65
[401] Ibid., 65-6
[402] *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. 6, No. 766, pp. 1059-62

to any specific German proposals. Molotov remained non-committal until mid-August. As Roberts points out, this vacillation lasted throughout the period of Anglo-French-Soviet military talks. Molotov's willingness to enter into discussions with the Germans increased relative to the deterioration of the tripartite negotiations. Molotov was frustrated with the lack of urgency exhibited by the British and French: the delegation travelled to Moscow by sea instead of by air, the negotiators were of a fairly low rank and arrived without clear strategic plans for a war against Germany. Only after the collapse of the tripartite negotiations did Molotov agree to Ribbentrop's visit.

Roberts provides further proof that the Soviets had no clear strategy beyond the conclusion of an Anglo-French-Soviet triple alliance. On 15 August, when Schulenburg proposed Ribbentrop's trip to Moscow, Molotov "chose a curiously indirect way to probe for the details of the kind of deal on offer" and did not state any of the Soviet terms for an agreement with Germany. Similarly, on 19 August, when Schulenburg proposed a non-aggression treaty, a joint guarantee of the Baltic states and German assistance in ameliorating Soviet-Japanese relations, Molotov would only say that the Soviet government would study the German proposals. He still refused to agree to Ribbentrop's visit. Later that same day, however, Schulenburg was ordered to return to the Kremlin and Molotov informed him that Ribbentrop could come to Moscow on 26-7 August. Schulenburg inferred that Stalin had intervened. Roberts suggests that Stalin hoped to put pressure on the British and French to concede to Soviet terms by inviting Ribbentrop to Moscow. The lack of a pre-determined Soviet policy is evidenced by Stalin's abrupt reversal of Molotov's answer to Schulenburg. As Roberts points out, "this sudden change in tactics was illustrative of how in these critical days Soviet foreign policy was being made on the hoof." Finally, on 21 August, Stalin agreed to Hitler's urgent request that Ribbentrop be allowed to arrive in Moscow two days later.[403]

Clearly, the Soviet leadership intended, at least until mid-August, 1939, To enter into a triple alliance with Britain and France. There was no secret plan to sign a pact with Germany in the event that the tripartite negotiations failed. Instead, Stalin and Molotov responded on an *ad hoc* basis to events as they occurred. As the futility of the Anglo-French-Soviet talks became unmistakably clear and the Germans exerted a concerted effort to lure the Soviets into a non-aggression pact, the Soviet leadership entertained the possibility of a German-Soviet agreement

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[403] Roberts, "Soviet Decision," 67-70

with increasing seriousness. Thus, if the triple alliance negotiations had not failed, it is doubtful that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact would have been signed.

The Anglo-French-Soviet talks broke down largely because of the Polish and Romanian refusals to allow Soviet troops onto their soil. Watt argues that Britain should have foreseen this problem and made Polish and Romanian co-operation with the Soviet Union a prerequisite for the British guarantees instead of rushing headlong into the defence pledges in a moment of panic.[404] Equally important in the failure of the talks was Chamberlain's great reluctance to enter into an agreement with the Soviet Union. Chamberlain's reticence arose primarily from his distaste for the Soviet political system and from his mistaken belief (nourished by Henderson), that Germany and the Soviet Union would never form an alliance. While Parker asserts the impossibility of gauging the motivations behind Soviet actions, he maintains that Chamberlain's efforts to prevent an Anglo-Soviet alliance were a major reason for the failure of the negotiations.[405] Given the steadily worsening crisis over Danzig, coupled with the urgent warnings issued, at great peril to their own safety by resistance emissaries, Chamberlain should have recognised the absolute necessity of securing Soviet co-operation or at least of preventing a German-Soviet rapprochement at a time when war appeared inevitable and imminent.

Chapter 6: September 1939-May 1940

6.1 British Policy after the Outbreak of War

On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and on 3 September, Britain and France declared war on Germany.[406] In the first few months following the outbreak of war, Chamberlain showed an increased willingness to negotiate with the German opposition, who seemed to offer the brightest hope of bringing about an immediate end to hostilities. On 10 September, contemplating the best means to achieve peace, Chamberlain wrote, "Of course the difficulty is with Hitler himself. Until he disappears and his system collapses, there can be no peace. But what I hope for is not a military victory—I very much doubt the feasibility of that—but a collapse of the German home front."[407] In late October 1939, Chamberlain authorised Conwell-Evans to tell Theo Kordt that the British government would be willing to negotiate with a non-Hitler government. Conwell-Evans met Kordt in Lausanne on 25, 27 and 29 October, where Kordt informed him that the

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[404] Watt, *How War Came*, 222
[405] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 224
[406] John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York, 1989), 44
[407] Quoted in Feiling, *Chamberlain*, 417-18

opposition planned to effect a *putsch* in November. Kordt's information concerning the *putsch* probably originated from the group of conspirators close to Oster. During the fall of 1939, a group of officers under Halder in the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH),[408] was preparing to launch another coup d'état. The coup was to coincide with the commencement of Hitler's western offensive. Kordt and Conwell-Evans maintained contact until mid-1940, meeting in Berne in December 1939 and in January, February and April 1940.[409]

Despite Chamberlain's increased receptivity to the German resistance, the Allies were simultaneously engaged in the formulation of policies which would later concretise into formal war aims. For its part, the French government sought to implement guarantees that would make it impossible for Germany ever to threaten peace in Europe again. France favoured the division of Germany into small states. In a letter to Lord Halifax dated 23 October 1939, Sir Eric Phipps, the British Ambassador in Paris, reported on "the strong feeling [. . .] in France in regard to what is here regarded as the fallacy of the 'two Germanies.' I have reported that when the Frenchman says 'il faut en finir' he means the end, not only of aggression by Herr Hitler, but of aggression by Germany." The French, Phipps continued, were disturbed by the distinction that the British government insisted on making between Nazis and Germans. Phipps explained that these sentiments were widespread in France and that he had received similar reports from the British Consulates across the country. The British Consul at Lyons, for instance, had reported on 14 October that the French sought "the destruction of German unity—the re-establishment of all the little states of Germany. That, they believe, is the only way to render Germany harmless."[410] Having received so many like reports from the Consuls, Phipps concluded that "these views represent[ed] the deep-rooted conviction of Frenchmen of every political colour and in all parts of France." Phipps cautioned that a "divergence of view" between Britain and France on such a fundamental issue could lead to a rift between the two countries and a weakening of French morale.

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[408] These officers included Major Helmuth Groscurth, who was a liaison officer between the OKH and the *Ausland / Abwehr* of OKW, Halder's staff officers Major Werner Schrader, Captain Dr Kurt Fiedler, Counsellor and Captain (Reserve) Dr Hasso von Etzdorf, Weizsäcker's liaison officer in OKH, General Joachim von Stülpnagel, Deputy Chief of Staff I, Major-General Erich Fellgiebel, Colonel Eduard Wagner and Lieutenant-Colonel Henning von Tresckow, head of the Army Operations Section. Hoffmann, *History*, 128

[409] Kordt, *Nicht*, 260-1, 379-83; Helmuth Groscurth, *Tagebücher eines Abwehroffiziers 1938-1940; mit weiteren Dokumenten zur militäropposition gegen Hitler*, ed. Helmut Krausnick and Harold C. Deutsch (Stuttgart, 1970), 311; Hoffmann, "Anti Nazi Conspiracy," 446

[410] Sir Eric Phipps to Lord Halifax, Paris, 23 October 1939 in Rainer A. Blasius (ed.) *Dokumente zur Deutschland Politik*, I Reihe, Band I, (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 38-41; see also Peter Hoffmann, "Die britische Regierung, die deutsche Opposition gegen Hitler und die Kriegszielpolitik der Westmächte im Zweiten Weltkrieg", in Ernst Willi Hansen, Gerhard Schreiber und Bernd Wegner, eds., *Politischer Wandel, organisierte Gewalt und nationale Sicherheit* (Munich, 1995), 315-329

He concluded his letter with a strong admonition that the belief in the existence of two Germanies was a "fallacy" and his government should therefore cease to make this distinction in the formulation of its strategy. "Germany," wrote Phipps, "whether Imperial, democratic or National-Socialist, is at its heart inspired by hatred of Great Britain and France. [. . .]The fact of allowing a suspicion of a divergence of view about Germany to be prevalent can [. . .] only have the most lamentable results."

Also on 23 October, the French Ambassador in London, Charles Corbin, gave Halifax an *aide mémoire* from Daladier proposing joint Anglo-French discussions on war aims. The French government sought to secure reparations from Germany, whose aggression had ignited the war. In addition, "the Allies should render it impossible for Germany again to disturb the peace of Europe." The French government would not consider a change of government in Berlin to be a sufficient guarantee, "since [they] could not depend upon German goodwill." France would require "effective material guarantees."[411]

The reply of the British government was approved by the War Cabinet on 20 December after consultation with the Dominion governments. Corbin received the British reply on 22 December, which confirmed the French desire to see Germany disarmed and "rendered harmless." The British also agreed to the necessity of "enduring guarantees against any further repetition of German aggression." The note echoed Phipps' assertion concerning the need to quell the intrinsic German proclivity for war:

> Two wars imposed on Britain and France in a single generation by the action of German Governments, differing in outward complexion but inspired by the same aggressive and dominating spirit, are a solemn warning that this spirit, if it be not extinguished and laid to rest by the Germans themselves, must be rendered harmless by those whom it threatens.

The British agreed that "material guarantees" should be secured so that Germany would be unable to "menace the peace of European nations and of the world." Above all, Germany should be prohibited from acquiring a preponderance of armaments. A more effective and severe means of enforcing post-war restrictions on Germany must be devised. The British reply stopped short of agreeing to France's suggestion for the dismemberment of Germany, stating that this proposal "would have the immediate effect of rallying the German people behind their present leaders."[412]

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[411] Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, Vol. 1, (London, 1970), 284
[412] Quoted in Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 284-8

6.2 The Vatican Exchanges

Between 24 October and 7 November 1939, Chamberlain and his Cabinet monitored and authorised the progression of the contacts between SIS officers and individuals who were believed by the British to be members of the German resistance. These contacts had been initiated by British intelligence officers as a result of Chamberlain's January 1939 order to establish communication with the German military opposition. In September 1939, in the hope of creating "conditions favourable to a quick end to the war," Chamberlain instructed the SIS to verify reports of discontent among German military commanders. The German contacts of the SIS were not, however, resistance emissaries but agents of Heinrich Himmler's *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD). On 9 November, Major R. H. Stevens and Captain Payne Best were kidnapped by the SD at Venlo on the Dutch border and taken into Germany.[413] Hoffmann points out that this incident did not ruin the chance for peace negotiations between the British government and the genuine German resistance. Less than two months later, Chamberlain and Halifax entered into talks with the German opposition through the good offices of Pope Pius XII.[414]

Josef Müller was chosen by Beck to go to Rome to discover if Pope Pius XII would be willing to act as an intermediary between the British and the German resisters.[415] The connection that Müller was able to establish with the British government through the Vatican was one of the most important contacts made by the German resistance movement. Müller managed to establish a line of communication which reached to the British Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. The discussions for a negotiated peace lasted for almost three months. The 'Vatican Exchanges' have been described as "[t]he most high-powered contacts between the German Opposition and the British."[416] According to Harold Deutsch "the Pope's quick consent to act as intermediary between a conspiratorial group in one belligerent state and the government of an enemy country can be reckoned among the most astounding events in the modern history of the papacy."[417]

Beck instructed Oster to commission Müller for the Vatican mission. Müller met with Oster and Dohnanyi, who outlined the proposed mission. Oster told Müller that: "'The Central Division

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[413] Sigismund Payne Best, *The Venlo Incident* (London, 1950), 7; MacDonald, 443-6, 457-9; Hoffmann, "Question," 446-7

[414] Hoffmann, "Question," 447

[415] Deutsch, *Conspiracy*, 102-48. Deutsch's account is based primarily on interviews with Father Robert Leiber, S.J. and with Josef Müller; John S. Conway, "The Vatican, Britain and Germany, 1938-1940," *The Historical Journal*, XVI, I (1973), 147-67; Hoffmann, *History*, 158-63; Hoffmann, "Anti Nazi Conspiracy," 450-1; Klemperer, *Search*, 171-80. Also applicable below.

[416] Klemperer, *Search*, 171

[417] Deutsch, *Conspiracy*, 121

of the Abwehr [. . .] is also the central directorate of the German military opposition under General Ludwig Beck.'"[418] The conspirators in the *Abwehr* were planning to prevent Hitler from launching his offensive in the west by attempting a coup d'état. They hoped to secure a guarantee of fair peace terms from the British on the condition that Hitler had been removed from power. They wanted Müller to travel to Rome to ascertain whether Pius XII would lend his assistance to the undertaking. Müller was well suited to carry out this mission. He was a Munich lawyer and devout Catholic who had been engaged in resistance activities in defence of the Catholic Church against Nazi persecution almost from the beginning of Hitler's time in power. Further, Müller had access to a wide network of connections within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Müller had become acquainted with Eugenio Pacelli, later Pope Pius XII, while he was serving as Papal Nuncio in Munich between 1917 and 1920. Müller was on good terms with Monsignor Ludwig Kaas, the former Chairman of the German Centre Party who was then the administrator of St. Peter's Cathedral and with the Jesuit Father Robert Leiber, a German who was Pope Pius XII's private secretary.[419]

As a cover for his mission, Müller was assigned to the post of first lieutenant to the Munich office of the *Abwehr*. He was sent to Rome ostensibly to monitor the situation in Italy through his contacts in the Vatican.[420] At the end of September 1939, Müller travelled to Rome in order to ascertain whether Pius XII would be willing to act as an intermediary between the German opposition and the British government. In Rome, Müller made contact with Father Leiber, who passed his request along to Pius XII. A short time later, Müller received notice that the Pope had agreed to mediate. Kaas asked the British Minister to the Vatican, Sir Francis d'Arcy Osborne, whether his government would be prepared to enter into peace negotiations with a German anti-Nazi opposition group. Osborne informed London of the peace proposal of the German resistance. The opposition was prepared to remove the Nazi régime from power if the British and French governments could provide the assurance of a "fair and honourable peace." The British government gave an affirmative response, on the condition that the Vatican could attest to the credentials of the emissary of the resistance.[421]

A line of communication between the resisters in Berlin and the British government via the Vatican was carefully strung together. The affair was strictly secret. Müller never met with the Pope

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[418] Ibid., 116
[419] Deutsch, *Conspiracy*, 114-15; Hoffmann, *History*, 158-9; Klemperer, *Search*, 172
[420] Deutsch, *Conspiracy*, 116-17
[421] Deutsch, *Conspiracy*, 117-20; Hoffmann, *History*, 159; Conway, "The Vatican," 159-60

in person, as such contact would have been far too dangerous and, if discovered by the Gestapo or the Italian authorities, would have jeopardised the proceedings and risked the lives of the participants. The exchanges were almost always made verbally. Müller destroyed any written messages that he received from Leiber as a precaution. Müller submitted proposals from the Beck-Oster-Dohnanyi group to Leiber. After consulting with London, Osborne would submit oral or written answers to the Pope who would then transmit the replies orally to Leiber.

In early January 1940, Müller informed the Pope of the imminent German invasion of Belgium and Holland, thus imbuing the negotiations with a new sense of urgency. On 11 January, the Pope presented the propositions of the German opposition to Osborne. According to the German resisters, Hitler's plans for an offensive in the west had "been prepared down to the last detail." The campaign would be "violent, bitter and utterly unscrupulous." The opposition promised the removal of Hitler and a settlement that would include the restoration of Czechoslovakia and Poland if the British would assure a peace that would not be a repetition of the Treaty of Versailles. The Pope was uneasy about the proposal from the German resistance. Although he did not fully endorse the plan, he felt that it was his duty, as he informed Osborne, to transmit the communication to the British Minister. Osborne was sceptical, declaring the plan to be far too vague and expressing doubts as to the reliability of the resisters. He reported these qualms, together with the details of his conversation with Pius XII, to Halifax on 12 January. On 16 January, the War Cabinet in London agreed with Osborne's conclusion that the proposal of the German resistance was too imprecise to serve as an adequate basis for negotiations. The Cabinet decided that there must be a change of government in Germany before any peace negotiations could occur.[422]

On 6 February, the Pope requested a meeting with Osborne on the following day. The Pope recounted the proposal of the German opposition to establish a democratic, conservative and moderate government after the elimination of the Nazis. As soon as a new government was installed, the establishment of a reasonable peace would be the top priority. The opposition requested that the Pope ascertain whether the *Reich* plus Austria would be an acceptable foundation for peace negotiations.

Osborne recounted his latest meeting with the Pope in a dispatch to Halifax. Osborne reported that he had told Pius XII that "if [the German conspirators] wanted a change of government" they ought to "get on with it. I added that even if the government was changed I

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[422] Conway, "The Vatican," 162-4. Conway's account is based on communications from Osborne to Halifax of 12 January, 7 February 1940, FO 371/C 2522/89/18 and the British Cabinet Papers 1940, 65/11, 159. Also applicable below.

didn't see how we could make peace so long as the German military machine remained intact." Osborne's record of his statement to Pius XII is the first tangible reference by an official of the Western powers to the complete disarmament of Germany. German disarmament was soon to be defined as an official Allied war aim, which would prove to fatally hinder the attempt of the resisters to establish a feasible basis for negotiations between the Western powers and a post-Hitler government.[423]

On 17 February, Chamberlain and Halifax sent a reply to Osborne, stating that the proposals of the German resistance were too vague. Chamberlain and Halifax did not, however, rule out negotiations altogether. "If any progress is to be made, a definite programme must be submitted and authoritatively vouched for," read the reply. "What his Majesty's Government would look for above all, in addition to reparation of the wrongs done to Germany's smaller neighbours, would be security for the future [. . .] In this connexion the suggestion of a decentralised and federal Germany is of interest, and might be held to go some way towards a solution of this problem." Shortly after receiving this reply from Chamberlain and Halifax, Osborne gave a report summarising the British position to Pius XII, who immediately passed the information along to Müller.[424]

The Vatican talks concluded on 20 February, at which time Müller reported to Leiber that the conspirators in Berlin were satisfied with the British assurances and that a coup would take place in February. The Pope continued to hope for a coup d'état until mid-March. By 30 March, however, he told Osborne that he was losing hope. The Pope had learnt of other approaches made to the British government by the German resistance movement while the Vatican negotiations were in progress, which he believed had "vitiated [. . .] any prospects of favourable developments from the approaches made through himself."[425] Multiple simultaneous approaches to the British government could only have weakened the force of the Pope's intervention, particularly as the different resisters did not state identical conditions for action or propose the same programme. For instance, Ulrich von Hassell, who established contact with the British just as the Vatican discussions were drawing to a close, asserted that the *Anschluss* of Austria and the incorporation of the Sudeten region should remain uncontested in future peace negotiations; an independent Poland (with 1914 frontiers) and an independent Czech Republic would be established.[426] Hassell's proposal was considered unacceptable by the British for a number of reasons. First, Britain had

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[423] Conway, "The Vatican," 163 based on communication from Osborne to Halifax, 7 February 1940, FO 371/C 2522/89/18
[424] Conway, "The Vatican,"164
[425] Ibid., 165-6 based on Osborne's reports to Halifax of 16 and 19 March and 3 April 1940
[426] Hassell, *Von Hassell Diaries*, 115-18

ostensibly gone to war to protect Polish territorial integrity according to her August 1939 borders. Thus, Hassell's demand for the German-Polish frontier of 1914 was out of the question. Further Hassell's suggestion of a "Czech Republic" implied that Slovakia would remain separate.[427] The receipt of numerous, sometimes conflicting proposals from the German opposition, some of which included disturbing demands to retain Hitler's territorial gains, could only have increased the reluctance of the British to enter into serious negotiations about conditions of peace with the resisters.

In Berlin, after the conclusion of the Vatican exchanges, the resistance initiators of the Vatican contacts composed a report, known as the 'X Report' which summarised the information which Müller had received from the British government in Rome. The report was intended to convince Halder and Brauchitsch that the opportune moment had arrived to overthrow Hitler. According to the 'X' Report, the British government had offered an assurance to the German resisters that the Western powers would stand aside during a coup d'état provided that Germany did not launch an offensive in the west. The British government added the stipulations that the Nazi régime must be replaced by a democratic German government as quickly as could be reasonably expected and the rule of law must be restored in Germany. Germany's borders of 1937 would be left intact. Austria should decide by plebiscite whether she wanted union with Germany.[428] These points were almost surely included in the report for 'the generals,' although the document is believed to have been destroyed.[429]

By the time Halder received the report concerning the Vatican talks from General Thomas on 4 April 1940, he was already deep in preparations for the western offensive which was scheduled to begin only five days later on 9 April. In his day book entry for the 4th, Halder's only

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[427] Cadogan, for example, took a dim view of the entire affair. After hearing the report from Hassell's contact, James Lonsdale Bryans, Cadogan noted contemptuously in his diary, "Lonsdale Bryans, with his ridiculous stale story of a German opposition ready to overthrow Hitler, if we will guarantee not to 'take advantage.' Let him talk and then broke it to him that this was about the 100th time I had heard this story." Cadogan, *Cadogan Diaries*, 256-7

[428] Hassell, 125; Deutsch, *Conspiracy*, 137-9; Hoffmann, *History*, 162

[429] Ritter, *Goerdeler*, 162; Hoffmann, *History*, 163. The 'X' Report contained, according to the recollections of Thomas and Halder, concessions well beyond those outlined above. Thomas maintains that, while under interrogation following the 20 July 1944 attempt to assassinate Hitler, he saw a minute which revealed that the 'X' Report indicated that all eastern disputes would be decided in Germany's favour. According to Halder's recollections, the 'X' Report contained an even greater number of concessions to Germany. Halder claims that the British did not make a demand for a change of régime. Hitler was to be ousted but the Nazi régime would only be overthrown if possible. The Czech region would remain under German influence and Germany's 1914 boundaries in both the east and the west would be restored. According to Hoffmann, it is extremely unlikely that the British would actually have made these promises. They were probably included for the purpose of persuading 'the generals' to participate in a coup.

reference to the report is: "*Gen. Thomas*: Look at Intelligence material."[430] The rest of the entries for that day concern logistical planning for the military campaign. Immersed in the preparations for the offensive, Halder was unwilling simultaneously to engage in a plot to overthrow the government.

Hassell recorded in his diary that Halder had "refused to take action for very naïve reasons. (England and France had declared war on us, and one had to see it through. A peace of compromise was senseless.)"[431] In November 1939, Halder had given Major Helmuth Groscurth, liaison officer between the OKH and the *Ausland / Abwehr* of OKW, even more astonishing reasons against action. According to Groscurth, Halder listed several reasons for his refusal to act against Hitler:

> 1. It violates tradition. 2. There is no successor. 3. The young officer corps in not reliable. 4. The mood in the interior is not ripe. 5. "It really cannot be tolerated that Germany is permanently a 'people of helots' for England." 6. Concerning [the western] offensive [that Hitler had ordered]: Ludendorff, too, in 1918 led an offensive against the advice of everyone, and the historical judgment was not against him. He, Halder, therefore did not fear the later judgment of history either.[432]

At the Nürnberg trials, Halder himself described his reasons for having refused to take part in a coup in 1940. He could not participate in the overthrow of the government when the country was at war. He believed that Britain and France would attack Germany if a "decomposition of the front" occurred due to a change in government.[433]

In fact, the account of Müller's mission to Rome impressed Halder enough that he showed it to Brauchitsch. The following morning, after having read the report, Brauchitsch spoke sharply to Halder, remonstrating with him for having passed along the document. Halder, declared Brauchitsch, ought not to have shown him the report, which was "sheer treason." Halder later remembered Brauchitsch saying: "Under no circumstances can we be involved in this. We are at war; in peacetime you can talk about contacts with a foreign power, but in wartime soldiers cannot do that." Brauchitsch insisted that Halder reveal the identity of the person who had delivered the document. Brauchitsch declared that he would arrest the person who had brought the report. Halder answered that if anyone was to be arrested it should be he. Of course Brauchitsch did not arrest

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[430] [Franz] Halder, *Kriegstagebuch, Band I: Vom Polenfeldzug bis zum Ende der Westoffensive (14. 8. 1939 – 30. 6. 1940)*, ed. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Stuttgart, 1962), 245.
[431] Hassell, *Von Hassell Diaries*, 130
[432] Groscurth, quoted in Hoffmann, "Question," 442
[433] *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Supplement B, 1573

Halder.[434] According to Otto John, Brauchitsch repeated what he had said to Halder after the war in the Bridgend prisoner-of-war camp. Brauchitsch told John that "[t]he whole thing was treason [. . .] Naturally I read the report—with great care. But I could do nothing with it [. . .] Why should I have initiated action against Hitler—tell me that."[435]

Halder's decision to show the account of the Vatican exchanges to Brauchitsch reveals that Halder took the report seriously. Halder was torn between the instinct to uphold traditional soldierly values and fulfil his duties as Chief of the General Staff of the Army on one hand and his knowledge of Hitler's criminal irresponsibility on the other. Halder could not predict whether Germany would emerge victorious from the war nor could he be certain that a coup attempt would not lead to disaster for Germany. If Halder "executed 'lawful' orders," writes Hoffmann, he was "sticking to the generally recogni[s]ed rules of the game, irrespective of the fact that the rules would multiply the loss of human life by millions. Everything had its proper place. The conspirators who were ready to embark on a *coup* to save human life could be labelled as traitors; the general who sent millions to their death was 'doing his duty' and so was honourable."[436] Halder elected to 'stick to the rules' and the chance for a coup was lost. The reasons that Halder offered to Groscurth in November 1939 for his decision not to participate in a coup attempt suggest that Halder was seeking a way to justify inaction. He recognised the just course but chose instead to 'execute orders.'

On 9 April, Germany invaded Norway and Denmark and on 10 May Winston Churchill succeeded Chamberlain as Prime Minister of Great Britain. On 13 May, Churchill declared in a speech in the House of Commons that British policy was

> to wage war, by sea, land and air with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival. Let that be realised; no survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for.[437]

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[434] Halder quoted in Hoffmann, *History*, 167. Hoffmann quotes Halder's testimony delivered before a denazification court—"Protokoll aus der Verhandlung Halder [vor der] Spruchkammer X München," 32-4
[435] John, *Twice through the Lines*, 63-4
[436] Hoffmann, *History*, 168
[437] 360 HC Deb 5s, col. 1302

A policy statement as vehement as this one, in which Churchill staked the future of the British Empire on the defeat of Germany and a public position as uncompromising as this could not retain any legitimacy if the British government simultaneously engaged in secret peace negotiations with the German resistance. Churchill was anxious to prevent further co-operation between Stalin and Hitler and to bring the United States into he war. In light of these concerns, Britain could not appear to falter in her decision to fight for "total victory." Accordingly on 20 January 1941, Churchill ordered his Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden to maintain "absolute silence" in response to any German peace feelers.[438] The basis for co-operation between the British government and the German resistance was thereby shattered.

Conclusion

Several factors account for the failure of the German resistance to secure the support of the British government in the attempt to overthrow the Nazi dictatorship during the period 1937 to 1940. The British government frequently misunderstood the territorial and political terms requested by the resistance emissaries. The anti-Nazi forces inside Germany required certain basic assurances in order for a coup d'état to have a plausible chance of success. The resistance sought a British pledge not to interfere in Germany's internal affairs during the inevitable period of chaos that would follow the overthrow of the dictatorship. Further, a post coup government of the resistance would be rendered illegitimate in the eyes of the German people if they surrendered Germany's political and territorial integrity. In particular, the commanding corps of the Army, whose participation was vital for the success of a coup, was loath to spawn a new 'stab-in-the-back' legend. Therefore, in order to secure the co-operation of the army commanders and improve the chances of success for a coup, the resistance sought assurances from Britain concerning certain key territorial issues.

While the British government was not averse to alterations to German frontiers, they were reluctant to assist in ousting Hitler only to have to make the same concessions to a different government. At least Hitler, however disagreeable, was a known entity. Most of the members of the resistance were considered reliable by their British contacts. Nevertheless British statesmen could not be certain of the resisters' chances for success in effecting a coup d'état nor of their ability to establish a viable post-Hitler régime. Moreover, the British failed to comprehend that there would be no end to Hitler's demands whereas those of the German resistance were strictly limited. Finally,

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[438] Blasius, *Dokumente zur Deutschland Politik*, 269

the British did not grasp that Hitler would not be satisfied with a few minor concessions. He was determined to launch a war to achieve his ambitions for German aggrandisement. The German resistance, on the other hand, was dedicated to preventing Hitler from launching war and sought peaceful revision of certain grievances.

British foreign policy in its idiosyncratic form as conducted by Neville Chamberlain was the major obstacle in the way of an agreement between the resistance and the British. Prior to the conclusion of the Munich Agreement at the end of September 1938, British policy was to prevent war by accommodating Hitler's revisionist demands. Chamberlain believed that by addressing Hitler's grievances and making concessions where possible, he could eliminate the causes for war and secure a general peace settlement. The suggestion from the German resistance that Britain ought to issue a firm public statement threatening military intervention in the event of a German invasion of Czechoslovakia seemed, to British leaders, likely to achieve precisely what they were trying to avoid.

Following the German invasion of Prague in March 1939, after the policy of appeasement was officially abandoned, Chamberlain undermined his government's uncompromising stance vis à vis Nazi Germany. Chamberlain failed to institute a policy of rapid rearmament and to secure an alliance with the Soviet Union, which would have served as potent deterrents to the dictator who understood only the unmistakable language of force. By continuing to make secret offers for negotiation, Chamberlain only confirmed Hitler's contemptuous conviction that Britain would not honour her commitment to fight in defence of Poland. Chamberlain's unwavering belief in the correctness of his foreign policy prompted him to override and circumvent members of his own Cabinet to ensure that nothing would interfere with his chosen approach. He made private, unilateral approaches to Hitler, deliberately avoiding his own colleagues in instances when he knew they would disagree. Chamberlain resisted implementing the measures that would have served as credible indications that Britain's unwillingness to tolerate any more of Hitler's outrages was meant in all seriousness. When German resisters urged that Britain conclude defensive alliances, accelerate her production of armaments and convert the nation to a war economy, they were no more convincing than those in Britain who advocated the same steps. Thus, emissaries of the German resistance faced an uphill, nearly impossible battle in trying to persuade the British government to adopt policies that would help to create the necessary conditions for a coup d'état.

Ultimately, the information furnished by emissaries of the German resistance movement was rejected by the British not because of doubts as to the authenticity of the facts which they

presented or the reliability of the sources, but because British foreign policy was already firmly set on a course of accommodation towards the German dictator. German resisters could not hope to succeed in effecting a reversal of British policy where even trustworthy British sources had failed. The reports furnished by German resisters corroborated the information transmitted by British sources. The German resisters who approached the British government held high-ranking positions of responsibility in the German civil service, the diplomatic corps and the Armed Forces and were thus well-placed to repeat detailed information gleaned from the ruling circles of the Third Reich. Even information provided by Germans who either belonged to or had access to the nation's rulers, substantiated by reliable British sources, was insufficient to prompt a serious re-evaluation of the direction of British foreign policy.

After the outbreak of war, Chamberlain hoped for 'a collapse of the German home front' and was willing to enter into an agreement with the German resistance to restore peace, as evidenced by the participation of the British government in the discussions mediated by Pope Pius XII. The British government did seriously consider the proposals put forth by the German resistance during the Vatican exchanges. Their confidence in the effectiveness of the German resistance was irreparably damaged by the failure of the resistance movement to launch a coup d'état in February or March 1940, following the conclusion of the Vatican talks. A more important fact was that British leaders were at the same time beginning to formulate war aims for the total defeat and disarmament and the division of Germany. This undermined the basis for an agreement with the German opposition even more than other factors.

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