German Appeasement and Aggression

European countries wanted peace after World War I. The survivors of the Great War hoped to prevent another deadly conflict. However, the rise of dictators in the 1930s threatened the post-WWI order. Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, began to test the limits of his power as he openly broke the terms of peace set by the Treaty of Versailles. Rather than punishing Hitler, other European countries like Great Britain and France decided to deal with him by adopting a policy of appeasement, a diplomatic policy of making deals with an enemy in order to avoid conflict. This policy proved to be a failure as Italian and German aggression led Europe into another conflict just 20 years after the conclusion of the “war to end all wars”.

The Rome-Berlin Axis

In 1935 Italian dictator Benito Mussolini ordered Italian troops to invade the East African country Ethiopia. While Mussolini’s actions shocked other countries, none stepped in to try and stop the invasion. Still, Italy’s aggression had soured relations between Italy and its then allies, Britain and France. Soon thereafter, Benito Mussolini ended Italy’s alliance with two countries. Seeing an opportunity, Hitler sought for fascist Italy to form an alliance with Nazi Germany. On October 25th, 1936, Germany and Italy formed an alliance known as the Rome-Berlin Axis.

The Annexation of Austria

Once in power, Hitler began to take steps to make Germany great again. One of his goals was to reunite all Germans living outside of the country to create an “all-German Reich” (Reich is a German word for empire). In his mind, the lands taken away from Germany at the end of World War I had separated millions of Germans from their homeland. One of the first areas Hitler looked to unite with Germany was his birthplace, Austria.

On the morning of 12 March 1938, the Nazi Army crossed the border into Austria. The troops were greeted by cheering Austrians. Without firing a shot, Germany had successfully annexed (add to one’s own territory) Austria.
This act was in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles, which forbade the unification of the two countries. Despite the strong protests by the prime minister of Great Britain, **Neville Chamberlain**, and the French Prime Minister, **Édouard Daladier**, neither country took action to prevent the annexation, or punish Germany after it had clearly broke one of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

**Czechoslovakia and the Munich Agreement**

Hitler next turned his attention to Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia had been part of Austria-Hungary, but had gained independence after World War I when the Allies broke up the empire. Here too, Hitler believed that the land and people of Czechoslovakia had to be reunited with Germany. By the fall of 1938, Hitler announced his intentions to take control of the country by any means necessary. Hoping to avoid a war, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and other major European leaders met with Hitler to come up with a plan.

On **September 30, 1938**, the **Munich Agreement** was announced. This settlement allowed Germany to annex a portion of northern and western Czechoslovakia, called the **Sudetenland**, that bordered Germany and was mainly populated by German speakers. The idea was to appease Hitler into promising peace, which he did. Chamberlain returned to Great Britain convinced that another world war had been averted as he describe the Munich Agreement as “peace for our time”.

“Peace for our time” turned out to be peace for only about 6 months. By mid-March of 1939, Hitler went back on his promise for peace and informed the president of Czechoslovakia that he intended to invade and conquer what remained of his country. Left with no choice, the Czechoslovakian president surrendered to Nazi Germany. On **March 16th, 1939**, Czechoslovakia fell to the Germans.
Britain and France Vow to Protect Poland

Realizing that Adolf Hitler and the Nazis could no longer be trusted, the leaders of Great Britain and France vowed to protect Germany’s next target, Poland. Both countries promised to support the Eastern European country in the event of any German aggression. On March 31, 1939 Prime Minister Chamberlain issued the following state:

“In the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty’s Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power. They have given the Polish Government an assurance to this effect.

I may add that the French Government have authorised me to make it plain that they stand in the same “position in this matter as do His Majesty’s Government.”

Germany and the Soviet Union

Tensions throughout Europe were high as another world war loomed on the horizon. As an invasion of Poland by Germany seemed imminent, the Nazis negotiated the German–Soviet Non-aggression Pact with Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, on August 23, 1939. The pact, or agreement, saw Germany and the Soviet Union agree not to attack one another, or aid their opponents, in the event of war. Further, the deal contained secret details of how Hitler and Stalin would work together to invade, and then divide, Poland and other Eastern European countries.

War Breaks Out

On September 1, 1939 Hitler ordered the military forces of Nazi Germany to launch an all out attack on Poland. In response, Great Britain and France made good on their promise to help Poland by officially declaring war on Germany on September 3, 1939. Great Britain and France’s best efforts to maintain peace in Europe had failed. Germany’s aggression destabilized the post-WWI European balance of power. World War II had now begun.
Twitter Timeline: German Appeasement and Aggression

Adolf Hitler @herrwolf1889 • Oct 25, 1936

[Blank lines for comments]

Adolf Hitler Retweeted

Benito Mussolini @ilduce-ironp3rfect • Oct 25 1936

[Blank lines for comments]

Adolf Hitler @herrwolf1889 • May 12, 1938

[Blank lines for comments]

Replying to @herrwolf1889

Neville Chamberlain @gr8britainpm • 1hr

[Blank lines for comments]

Édouard Daladier @jeanpierremarie • 1hr

[Blank lines for comments]
Adolf Hitler Liked

Neville Chamberlain @gr8britainpm • Sept 30, 1938

Replying to @gr8britainpm

Czechoslovakia @bohemianrhapsdy • 3min

Adolf Hitler @herrwolf1889 • March 16, 1939

Replying to @herrwolf1889

Translation
"Notice to the Population.
By order of the Führer and Supreme Commander of the German Wehrmacht. I have taken over, as of today, the executive power in [all of Czechoslovakia]."

Neville Chamberlain @gr8britainpm • 2min

Czechoslovakia @bohemianrhapsdy • 3min
Adolf Hitler Retweeted

Neville Chamberlain @gr8britainpm • March 31, 1939

Replies to @gr8britainpm

Adolf Hitler @herrwolf1889 • 6 min

Replying to @i_kremlinhighlander

Adolf Hitler @herrwolf1889 • 4 min
Adolf Hitler @herrwolf1889 • Sept 1, 1939

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Replying to @herrwolf1889

Poland @rzeczpospolitapolska • 1 min

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Adolf Hitler Retweeted

Neville Chamberlain @gr8britainpm • Sept 3, 1939

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Replying to @gr8britainpm

Édouard Daladier @jeanpierremarie • 2 min

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Adolf Hitler @herrwolf1889 • 8 min

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