

Foreign Policy Amongst Countries in World War II

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author focuses on the Munich Conference, the communication and miscommunication between Britain, France, Germany and Czechoslovakia. For example, this paper shows the details of what the leaders of these countries said and what they did in that period of time, which directly led to Germany's occupying Czechoslovakia without using military. The countries used their best wisdom to negotiate in a fierce way with each other. This paper analyses the complicated reasons behind the whole event and shows the readers a vivid picture of it.

Keywords: Munich Conference, communication, miscommunication, Czechoslovakia.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this work, we focus on the relationship between countries before the World War II broke out, which mainly focus on the Munich Conference and the communication and miscommunication between Britain, France, Germany and Czechoslovakia. This study is meaningful because it will help the other scholars better study what the foreign policies were during World War II.



Figure 1 Map of Sudetenland

In the autumn of 1938, a famous conference was held in Munich, Germany to decide the fate of Czechoslovakia. It may have been one of the strangest conferences in history, for the countries attending the conference, namely Germany, Britain and France, agreed on ceding the Sudeten Area, which was Czechoslovakia's territory,

to Germany. Thus, there are quite a lot of strange questions. Firstly, why was Germany able to occupy Czechoslovakia without military action? Secondly, why wasn't Czechoslovakia a part of the proceedings? The answer lies in part in deliberate miscommunication enabled by the communication of ethnic nationalist and imperialist ideas. This paper will show that shared ideas of ethnic nationalism allowed Germany to convince Britain and France to give up Czechoslovakia through two different perspectives: communication and miscommunication.



Figure 2 Group photo of rulers attending the Munich Conference

2. COMMUNICATION

The communication between Britain, France and Germany should be considered first, for it was these three countries that led the strange Munich Conference. By analyzing communications between nations, we can have an improved understanding of what happened at the Munich Conference. In the Munich Conference, Britain and France allowed Germany to take Czechoslovakia,

because Britain and France were—in part—persuaded that it should be German. Germany relied on a shared conception of ethnic nationalism, combined with the presence of a German majority in the Sudeten Area, to claim the region should be theirs. Ethnic nationalism, the idea that the nation is defined by a specific ethnic group, was central to Nazi German policy. In Nazi Germany, this group was sharply defined as “Germans,” and this group was distinguished from everyone else as belonging in a particular place. This perspective on nationalism justified the idea that one place “belongs” to a certain group of people, like Nazi Germany believed that more territory should be theirs.[4]

Germany justified their claim to Czechoslovakian territory mainly through two methods. The first method was demography: Germany defined German territory by a 50% or greater German population, establishing a demographic boundary. [5] This was done because there was a large group of Germans living in the area (Sudetenland). The ethnic nationalism that defined Nazi German concepts of German territory led to Germany seeing Czechoslovakia as rightfully theirs.

In addition, Czechoslovakia was by this time surrounded by Germany. Hitler believed that an independent Czechoslovak democracy “had no right to exist—it both hampered and irritated him.” [6] Hitler’s view of Czechoslovakia was derived from the idea that it should be German territory, with the demographic boundary providing an excuse that would have been more tolerable to the British and French than a simple desire for domination.

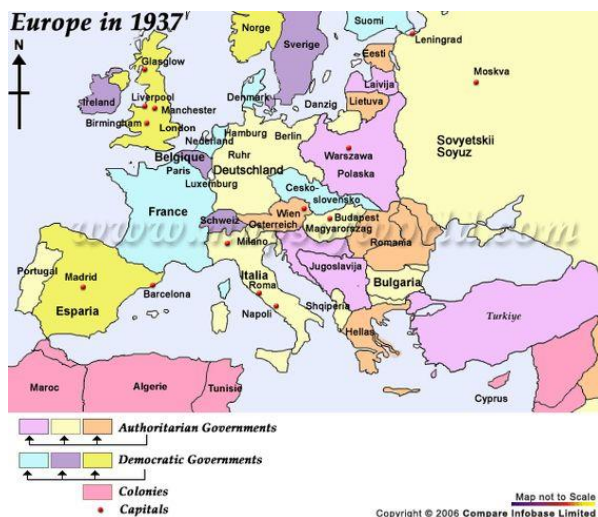


Figure 3 Map of Europe in 1937

Hitler did, of course, desire domination, and by autumn of 1938 he started to admit that his claims to other countries were the beginning stages of a war against the western countries. [4] The word often associated with these claims was *Lebensraum*. Meaning “living space,” this word indicates land that Germany believed it needed in order to develop. In the context of Europe, the British and French empires were fairly recent, and the concept of

acquiring land for development would have made sense to Britain and France.

What’s more, Germany falsely claimed that Germans in Czechoslovakia were being persecuted, and therefore Germany needed to expand its territory to protect Germans.[4] Hitler made a speech in 1938, highlighting Germany’s ethno-centric policy:

Only by continually stressing Germany’s desire for peace and her peaceful intentions could I achieve freedom for the German people bit by bit and provide the armaments which were always necessary before the next step could be taken... I have taken it upon myself to solve the German question, i.e. to solve the German problem of space...[3]

The “problem of space” is related to the idea of *Lebensraum*, where space is needed to “achieve freedom for the German people.”

The second reason relates to the idea of history at that time. Germany, along with Italy, saw itself as the heir to an ancient empire. [1] This idea provided a model and justification for German conquest. This was not a foreign idea to European nations at the time. For example, Czechoslovakia was looked down on by British ministers like the Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir John Simon, who saw the country as artificial, with no historical justification for its existence. [5] It is clear from this that the British agreed that nations needed historical justification. This understanding, along with the shared concepts of ethnic nationalism and imperial ambitions, led Britain and France to understand German claims to Czechoslovakia, a nation “without history.”

Besides the communication between Britain, France and Germany, we should also take a look at the communication between Britain and France, which is also of great importance, as these two nations agreed on the results of the Munich Conference with minimal input from Czechoslovakia. A French delegation arrived in London on 18 September for talks that led to a British-French plan for Czechoslovakia to cede some of its land to Germany.[5] This was done with some Czech input, though signals were far from clear, as will be shown later. Ultimately these diplomatic communications between Britain and France led to the Munich Agreement, in which they made the majority of the decisions, even though Czechoslovakia was the country most affected by the outcome.

To conclude, Britain and France seem to have had a similar idea of nationalism, as well as historical and imperial justifications for land claims. Because of this, they seem to have thought that Germany had at least a semi-legitimate claim. Germany communicated its land claims through demography and a concept of nationalism rooted in ethnic identity; however, Britain and France received and understood the claims wrongly, believing that Germany wanted to prevent their people from being

persecuted by Czechoslovakia and that they would stop if appeased with a section of Czechoslovak territory.



Figure 4 The Munich Conference

3. MISCOMMUNICATION

Although there was a lot of communication among Britain, France and Germany before World War II completely broke out, there was a great amount of miscommunication too, connected to the specific communications described previously. Germany deceived Britain and France through the shared concepts described in Section II. Czechoslovakia sent mixed signals to Britain and France regarding their willingness to concede territory. Czechoslovakia was left out of the Munich conference, leading to differing interpretations of the outcome. By researching the miscommunication among Britain, France, Germany, and Czechoslovakia, we can have a better understanding for why Britain and France thought the Munich Agreement would be effective.

The first answer relates to ethnic nationalism. Perhaps Britain and France thought that once Germany had protected “its people,” then they would stop claiming other lands as their own. In other words, Britain and France were lied to because the Germans (primarily Hitler) took advantage of their shared idea of ethnic nationalism and the kinds of historical justifications described in Section II. The concept that Nazi Germany had a right to more territory led Britain and France to give up more land than they would have if they knew war with Germany was unable to be avoided.



Figure 5 A scene in occupied Czechoslovakia

Neumann, a German politician, suggested that the miscommunication was a result of a generational misunderstanding, claiming that “*the Munich agreement was the product of a 68-year-old politician failing to grasp the mentality of the 48-year-old Hitler and the world he represented.*” [2] This is clearly not the only reason for the outcome of the Munich Agreement. It is clear that there was an understanding between Germany and Britain and France. However, it is also clear that neither Britain nor France anticipated Hitler’s warlike intentions, which he admitted in his previously quoted 1938 speech. Though it may not be due to a generational gap, there were clearly misunderstandings surrounding the Munich Agreement.

Besides the miscommunications between Britain, France and Germany, we should also look at the miscommunications between Czechoslovakia and Britain, France in order to have a more comprehensive picture of what happened.

The Munich Agreement featured a great deal of miscommunication between these three nations. This is most clear in the fact that the Czechoslovak government was not told about Munich Agreement and was not a participant. This made it easier for Germany to occupy Czechoslovakia without military action. This would then give rise to Czechoslovakia being occupied by Germany. How did this unimaginable development take place?

Firstly, Britain did not understand Czechoslovakia as a nation. As shown in Section II, British ministers felt Czechoslovakia was a modern creation, with no historical justification. This situation was not helped by British misunderstandings. Their political leaders did not understand the Czechoslovak political system, and disregarded their democracy.[5]

Secondly, Czechoslovakia pushed for mobilization while also telling Britain and France that they would concede—mixed signals that caused a

miscommunication over whether Czechoslovakia would need an ultimatum or would give up land willingly. Prime Minister Hodža told Britain and France they needed an ultimatum to give up land. Then, Hodža and his cabinet resigned, and were replaced by Jan Syrový and his cabinet, a new group of leaders. They then inspired hope among the Czechoslovak people for mobilization to fight back, though they privately told the British and French that they will still give up land to the Germans. Then on 25 September, the Czechoslovak government told the British that they reject Hitler's demands, though they then indicated they needed to clarify their meaning.[5] Clearly, this story is one of mixed signals all around. This miscommunication directly led to Czechoslovakia's being occupied by Germany by confusing any possible British and French help.

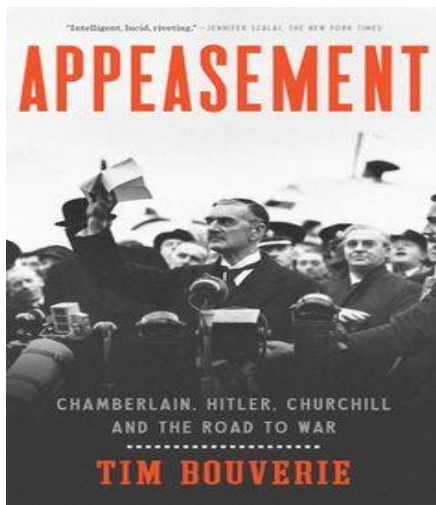


Figure 6 Chamberlain's Appeasement

These miscommunications led to a great deal of disagreement over the Munich Agreement between British and French and Czechoslovak people. The British and French thought that they had saved Czechoslovakia from destruction. In contrast, Czechoslovak politicians and people thought the Agreement was a betrayal. [5]

All the miscommunications, connected in many ways with active communication and understanding, led to the strange Munich Agreement and also to Czechoslovakia being occupied by Germany. Everything from mixed signals from Czechoslovakia to confusion over Germany's intentions to a misunderstanding of central European politics led to Germany being able to occupy Czechoslovak territory without any military action. What's more, the communication of specific ethno-nationalist ideas by Germany, which were understood by Britain and France thanks to their European context and recent imperial histories, created a sense of understanding that Germany was able to take advantage of.

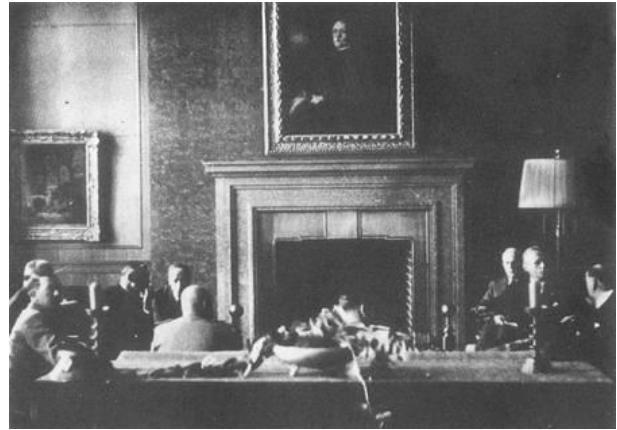


Figure 7 A scene of Munich Conference



Figure 8 German armored division

4. CONCLUSION

WWII is one of the most significant events in modern world history—studying this event at the beginning of WWII, before war had even broken out, allows us to better understand German justifications for invading Poland and other countries, along with why nations like Britain and France relatively late to intervene. We should cherish the valuable peace and build the peaceful future together.

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