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PHD THESIS

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‘Then what could Chamberlain do, other than what Chamberlain did’?
A synthesis and analysis of the alternatives to Chamberlain’s
policy of appeasing Germany, 1936-1939.

This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University for the award of PhD.

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ABSTRACT

Using a wide array of sources, this thesis charts the origins, development and viability of the various alternatives to Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. It provides an in-depth survey of the main advocates active in Britain at the time and details the many complexities to each rival option, largely unrecognised in the existing literature.

This study marks a valuable contribution to appeasement historiography. It is the first piece of its kind to offer a comprehensive synthesis of the alternatives available to Chamberlain, as well as illuminating the vigorous policy debate within Government itself. In so doing, the author provides a groundbreaking analysis of how realistic Chamberlain deemed each rival policy to be, as well as a bold assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. The alternatives identified are isolation, Pacifism, wide-scale colonial and economic appeasement, the League of Nations and collective security, alliances, vast rearmament, disarmament and war.

Challenging many of the lazy stereotypes deeply-rooted in the popular understanding of appeasement, the author asserts that it was entirely understandable why Chamberlain rejected the other options he had. He points out that the Prime Minister did in fact consider and explore each alternative as part of his strategy, albeit in most cases briefly. Indeed, his foreign policy often contained aspects of the various rival options.

Engaging in a degree of counterfactual analysis, this study affirms that none of the alternatives available would have prevented war in the confused conditions of the 1930s, although one or two might have affected the timing and precise circumstances of conflict. Given the rise of Hitler and the Nazi regime, war could not be averted, even by a so-called Churchillian Grand Alliance - the formation of which was highly problematical anyway. The author speculates that some of the alternatives may have only made things worse and suggests that the other options only become more attractive when considering what *kind* of war they would have bequeathed - although Chamberlain's overriding aim was to avoid this ever happening.

While admitting that a policy of standing firm against Hitler in 1938, heavily armed, in an Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance - if this was ever possible - *might* have resulted in a 'better' war for Britain, the thesis concludes that appeasement was a necessary evil; required to demonstrate to the world that war, when it came, was utterly justified - by no means the case in 1938. While recognising Chamberlain's failures and miscalculations, the work contends that he should be judged in the context of his near impossible circumstances, rather than by hindsight, and that his many successes - some crucial to survival in 1940 - should not be overlooked.

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For my parents

INTRODUCTION

In none of the books and articles that I have read have I found a coherent answer to the question: Given the circumstances of 1937 and 1938, what alternative was practicable?¹ (Horace Wilson, 1948).

(1) LITERATURE REVIEW AND GENESIS OF THE THESIS

Ten years after the Munich Agreement was signed in September 1938, Horace Wilson, Chief Industrial Adviser to Neville Chamberlain's Government and a close confidant of the Prime Minister, wrote to Chamberlain's widow surveying the verdict of history so far reached in the years since the end of the war. It had not been kind. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement during the late 1930s had provoked a wide range of deeply polarised responses from the British political elites and general public alike. Lauded with praise as the saviour of world peace at the time of Munich, he was heavily criticised from all directions when the German tanks rolled into Prague just six months later. However, if it was easy to attack Chamberlain's policy from the sidelines, it was perhaps more difficult to suggest a viable alternative course of action to the one he pursued. Like Wilson, Chamberlain's loyal Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir John Simon echoed these sentiments in his 1952 memoir *Retrospect*: 'Then what could Chamberlain do, other than what Chamberlain did?'²

The historiographical debate on Chamberlain, appeasement and the build up to the Second World War has been equally fierce as the arguments and acrimony surrounding events at the time. Yet the passing of subsequent years made workable alternative policies to appeasement no clearer to the Prime Minister's contemporaries and independent scholars alike. One could argue that this remains the case today.

The initial historical assessments of Chamberlain and appeasement - what has been termed the 'orthodoxy' on this topic - were dominated by the memoirs, diaries and commentaries of his own political contemporaries. However, it is possibly the least historical of all the pieces in this field which established the classic line on Chamberlain and appeasement better than any other single work.

The renowned polemical text *Guilty Men*, written shortly after the Dunkirk evacuations in 1940 by a trio of left-wing journalists, Michael Foot, Peter Howard and Frank Owen under the collective pseudonym of 'Cato', asserted that Britain had been brought to this lowest of ebbs by a succession of culpable Ministers during a decade of political, military and moral decline. Chamberlain headed the opening cast list as the arrogant and foolish 'Umbrella Man', as Chapter Seven scathingly labelled him, who was duped by Hitler and failed to prepare his people sufficiently for the horrors now confronting them. For Cato, Britain's soldiers were the soldiers 'doomed before they took the field'.³

Rivalling *Guilty Men* in terms of its legacy, at least where the reputation of its author's predecessor is concerned, was part one of Winston Churchill's history of the Second World War, *The Gathering Storm*, published in 1948. While Chamberlain had died of cancer in 1940 before he could dictate any memoir, Churchill had the advantage of being widely regarded as the hero of the hour, the wartime Premier who would never surrender to Hitler, the 'Greatest Living Englishman' as he had become affectionately known in some circles.⁴ As one contemporary reviewer noted, 'no man alive had more right to tell the world "I told you so"... than Winston Churchill' and the author set about doing just that in his own incomparable style and gusto.⁵ His book painted the picture of a decade in which his own repeated warnings of the rumbling clouds of Nazism were ignored, first by Baldwin and then by Chamberlain, and of the long years in which the British, 'through their unwisdom, carelessness and good nature allowed the wicked to rearm'.⁶ Surely, he speculated, there was a better policy available to those at the time?

The 1950s and early 1960s saw many of Chamberlain's contemporaries follow Churchill in a frenzy of reminiscing and recriminating about the past, each author keen to explain their own roles during this most controversial and eventful periods in our history. Conscious of the atmosphere of Cold War tension and diminished British power in which they now lived, these writers sought to reflect on the past in light of the conditions of the present.⁷ While space does not permit a discussion of these works here, Chamberlain's official biography can be addressed, which was authorised by his surviving relatives shortly after his death and received publication in 1946. Written by Keith Feiling, an eminent historian of the day known to hold Conservative leanings,

The Life of Neville Chamberlain remains to this day widely recognised as one of the most impressive accounts of its subject's life and times. Adopting an essentially sympathetic approach, his work received a fair amount of criticism at the time and unsurprisingly made little headway against the *Guilty Men* school of critics dominating the post-war era.

The professional historians John Wheeler-Bennett and Sir Lewis Namier both produced books in 1948 that amount to the first real histories of the period, though contemporary histories might be a more apt term. Both writers were very critical of Chamberlain and offer two works right from the heart of the orthodox historical school - Wheeler-Bennett's *Munich: Prologue to Tragedy* and Namier's *Diplomatic Prelude*, respectively. Full of the high-handed moral judgements and bitterness that could easily have been found within the pages of *Guilty Men*, both pieces were too close to events at the time and too steeped in condemnation to be considered truly impartial or scientific histories. Each book received popular acclaim, however, and should not be discounted by any student of the period. Both made forceful attacks, despite being written by men far removed from the upper echelons of the 1930s policy making elite.

The 1960s saw the beginnings of a swathe of historical literature on Chamberlain and appeasement that attempted to challenge many of the preconceptions and arguments so far presented by the orthodox camp. Produced in the period when Cold War tensions were at their height, each author viewed the past through the unique prism of the present. Britain was no longer the power it had once been and contemporary writers had to interpret history from an unstable and dangerous world dominated by the Superpowers and fear of impending nuclear destruction. Moreover, this 'revisionist' school also had the benefit of more available evidence than ever before. Following the 1967 Public Records Act amendment of the closure period downwards from fifty years to thirty in 1968, some two decades worth of Government papers covering the interwar period were released at a stroke.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the revisionist school begin to take form as historians feverishly digested this new material and, as the rawness of the subject matter died away, a new generation of scholars claimed the ascendancy. And yet it was one of the older guard who set the ball rolling for a new understanding of the era. A. J. P. Taylor's controversial and provocative *The*

Origins of the Second World War (1961) was perhaps the first revisionist work on this period of history, challenging as it did not only long-held preconceptions about Chamberlain's policy, but also other existing ideas on the wider causes of the conflict.⁸ On the issue of appeasement itself, Taylor saw the strategy as a logical, justified and realistic policy given the crippling circumstances Chamberlain had inherited. The Munich Agreement was, for Taylor, 'a triumph for all that was best and enlightened in British life', as it attempted to solve a legitimate German grievance and aimed to prevent a second global conflict.⁹

Though D. C. Watt's article 'Appeasement: The Rise of a Revisionist School?' (*Political Quarterly*, 1965) first begged the question explicitly, Taylor's earlier piece had sounded the call for a new understanding of the period. It is perhaps Martin Gilbert's 1966 *The Roots of Appeasement*, however, that should be recognised as the first major work of the revisionist school. This is somewhat surprising when one considers that Gilbert had collaborated with Richard Gott three years earlier on *The Appeasers*, a book critical of Chamberlain and very much of the orthodox camp in terms of its views on his policy. Gilbert had been inspired by his contemporaries and now revised his opinions somewhat, beginning his work by sagely pointing out that appeasement had existed as a policy long before Neville Chamberlain had entered Cabinet politics. In this sense it was not the product of one man's three-year premiership, but very much a mainstay of British policy throughout the entire interwar period, as successive administrations attempted to redress the injustices of the 1919 peace settlement.

Gilbert and the succeeding revisionists sought to explain Chamberlain's policy rather than condemn it, pointing out that appeasement was very much the obvious choice for a nation militarily and economically weaker than it had been for many years. It was devised over a long period by a series of men who had lived through the horrors of the First World War and were determined to stick to the mantra of 'never again'. For Gilbert, this policy was understandable and just, bold and brave even in its essential outlook: 'Appeasement was never a coward's creed. It never signified retreat or surrender from formal pledges'.¹⁰ Stressing the need for a new, detached and more analytical history of the period, Gilbert called for the emotive *Guilty Men* tradition 'to now fade away'.¹¹

If Chamberlain's historical status had, by the 1980s, seemingly come full circle - according to John Charmley, an impressive figure from the revisionist school, the original guilty man's reputation stood 'better now than it has ever done' - these academics failed to count on a backlash against their work.¹² Contributors such as Sidney Aster, writing at the end of that decade questioned some of the claims that had been gathering pace throughout the previous generation of scholars. This group felt that the drive to rehabilitate Chamberlain's reputation had gone too far and that some of the arguments from the orthodox camp still held firm and should be restated. Acknowledging the best of the revisionist's work and yet also reassessing much of this older way of thinking, the seeds of a 'post-revisionist' (sometimes 'counter-revisionist') school were thus now being sown.

In his 1989 article "“Guilty Men”: The Case of Neville Chamberlain', for example, Aster sought to resurrect the majority of Cato's earlier charges. Relying heavily upon Chamberlain's own papers, which had been used so often by revisionist writers to defend the Prime Minister, he accused Chamberlain of self-deception, poor judgement and misplaced trust in the words of Dictators. While Aster acknowledged the key revisionist theme that Chamberlain had inherited the most impossible of geo-strategic dilemmas, he still charged the Prime Minister with failing to rearm the country sufficiently. Aster was convinced that Chamberlain had ruled out considering any other possible strategies because of a flawed belief in his own powers of persuasion. Writing almost fifty years after *Guilty Men* was published, Aster concluded that 'the pendulum of appeasement historiography, with the necessary refinements, must now return closer to the position first trumpeted by 'Cato''.¹³

Perhaps the champion work of this new school of historical thought is Alistair Parker's 1993 *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*. Parker's Chamberlain was not an Aster-like reassertion of the old 'Umbrella Man' dupe, but an able and clear-sighted leader more in the vein of Gilbert's interpretation. However, he concurred with the orthodox presentation of Chamberlain as often self-delusional and frequently autocratic. His arrogant dismissal of the Russian alliance option in 1939, for example, is criticised in particular. Indeed, Parker's text is the first real work to address the question of alternatives to appeasement in any depth, devoting as he

does an entire chapter to this question alone. Here he describes the collective security measures advocated by the Labour and Liberal Opposition and details Churchill's favoured 'Grand Alliance' scheme. What emerges from Parker's work, then, is a more complex and considered understanding of Chamberlain's policy, successfully merging different ideas from the orthodox and revisionist schools, whilst also breaking new ground in itself.

Building upon the recent works of other scholars such as Geoffrey Roberts and Michael Jabara Carley, who have looked closely at the Russian dimension to appeasement, it is with Louise Grace Shaw's *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939* that this brief historiographical review shall close. Published in 2003, Shaw's particular brand of post-revisionism almost takes the student of appeasement back full circle to the *Guilty Men* position. In Shaw's eyes, Chamberlain was a dishonest figure, deviously working in the shadows in an attempt to starve Britain of a potential Russian ally. She asserts that he 'deliberately sabotaged' an opportunity to work with the Soviets, a prospect that would otherwise have been realised without his damaging efforts.¹⁴ Similar claims are also alluded to in Parker's second major work, *Churchill and Appeasement*, published in 2000.

It can be seen, then, that the old Chamberlain and appeasement arguments are far from ready to die down just yet. Over sixty years after *Guilty Men* was first published, it seems that fierce criticism of the man and his policy can still find loud voice, even after the passing of so much time and the work of a swathe of revisionist contributors. As vast as the literature on Chamberlain and appeasement undoubtedly is, then - and only the cream from the surface has been skimmed here - there nevertheless remains a significant dearth of work produced specifically on the other options the Prime Minister might have pursued.¹⁵ Wilson's challenge from the opening page of this thesis has largely gone without adequate response. With regards to the precise question of possible alternatives to appeasement, this has often merely been a side issue for academics more interested in the wider debate condemning or defending Chamberlain's tenure in general. The central question of whether appeasement was 'good' or 'bad' has dominated discussions and served to eclipse other lines of enquiry. There are only a few works that address the question of alternatives in real depth, with the solitary chapter in Parker's key study being perhaps the

best single piece to do so. There are one or two works looking closely at the specific substitute policies in isolation and there are a few that touch upon all of the main suggested alternatives, but these latter studies do so only in a sweeping or passing manner. This chasm of ignorance in what is otherwise an extremely heavily treated area of history, together with the provocative conclusions of some recent works in the field - such as Shaw, for example - have therefore influenced the undertaking of this thesis.¹⁶

Appeasement is still very much in the political vocabulary, reappearing perennially over time, and continues to be an issue debated today. For example, the current Prime Minister, Tony Blair, referring to the menace of Slobodan Milosevic, said in 1999, 'We have learnt by bitter experience not to appease Dictators. We tried it sixty years ago. It didn't work then and it shouldn't be tried now'.¹⁷ The events of 11 September 2001 and the ongoing Iraq conflict have brought the issue, albeit with varying degrees of relevance and accuracy, once more into the public sphere. The late Robin Cook appeared on the news at the time of the 2005 General Election lamenting comparisons between himself and Chamberlain over the position he took on the Iraq war. This is something he elaborated upon in his diaries, *The Point of Departure* (2003), where he noted with some consternation, that 'several papers tag me as an "appeaser"'.¹⁸ While appeasement, or perhaps, more accurately, the common perception of what appeasement represents, continues to be a live issue, the question of alternatives remains one where more work is still needed.

(2) METHODOLOGY, CENTRAL AIMS AND THESIS STRUCTURE

Somewhat frustratingly for the historian, there exists no Cabinet or Foreign Policy Committee meeting where Chamberlain and his senior colleagues openly discussed the pros and cons of all the possible options available to them. This issue has largely, as a result, remained shrouded in mystery and one has to search far and wide in many places to find enlightening references on this question. And yet, in order to fully understand why Chamberlain pursued appeasement, it is necessary to consider which alternatives he rejected and his reasons for doing so. In making any decision, human beings consider the likely

outcomes of our choices and these conclusions give impetus to our actions. Implicit in this study, then, is a degree of what has been termed ‘counterfactual history’ - assessing the likely outcomes of the paths not taken.

Variously discredited as an ‘idle parlour game’,¹⁹ or even, less eloquently, as ‘unhistorical shit’, counterfactual history is often frowned upon by academics as being too fanciful and simplistic a pursuit.²⁰ In overplaying the importance of the role of chance and contingency, they contend, it rejects history rather than contributing usefully to it. Though some of these criticisms hold true, such a damning assessment is perhaps over strong, as some historians such as Eric Hobsbawm have countered.²¹ As long as one rejects the utterly frivolous counterfactuals and limits oneself only to the plausible alternative paths actually considered by those acting at the time, a degree of such speculation can be very useful indeed. It can serve as a refreshing challenge to overly-deterministic modes of historical thought and allows us, by stepping into the shoes of those present in events, to diminish the distorting effects of hindsight from our assessments of the past. Indeed, a degree of counterfactual history can in fact be deemed a necessity when attempting to gauge accurately what drove figures such as Chamberlain to act in the way they did. The rationale for his appeasement policy can only be fully understood when one analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the other options he considered. While this study is more concerned with how viable alternatives to appeasement were perceived to be by the policy making elites at the time, rather than how viable they might actually have been if pursued, there will be some brief counterfactual speculations towards the end of each chapter.

The central objectives of this study and the main questions it is going to consider should now be examined. The author has three key aims: Firstly, to chart the origins and development of the suggested alternatives to Chamberlain’s policy of appeasement; Secondly, to survey the main literature produced on these rival strategies and make a judgement on how far the question of alternatives has been adequately addressed; and finally (and perhaps most importantly), to assess how viable the alternatives were perceived to be by the National Government and how realistic they actually were. In effect, did Chamberlain have any other options to the one he pursued?

Excluding the introductory and concluding sections, this thesis will encompass six chapters, each looking at a different identified alternative to appeasement, as suggested by critics of Chamberlain at the time. It is the most commonly advocated alternatives, as offered by contemporary appeasement detractors - and revisited later by historians - which were *also* considered by Chamberlain himself that are the main focus of this work. Each chapter will have the same broad structure. They will typically begin by identifying the rival strategy and charting its genesis and development during the late 1930s. They will then assess the most important and detailed historical contributions made so far on that specific policy. Thus, an attempt to reach a synthesis of the key works produced will be made, in order to judge whether or not a 'historical consensus' on each alternative exists.

Following on from this, each chapter will examine in depth the extent to which the Chamberlain Government actually considered taking that alternative path. They will then analyse how viable a strategy it was deemed to be by the leading policy makers within Government circles - the Prime Minister, his Cabinet colleagues, senior Foreign Office personnel and others. An attempt, therefore, will be made to judge why this alternative to appeasement was rejected, before closing with some brief, wider assessments of how viable the alternative actually would have been given the conditions of the day. It is hoped that some original observations on the nature of political opposition to Chamberlain, and on the policy making process in general, will emerge as a by-product of this work.

Many of Chamberlain's contemporary opponents asserted that the best alternative to appeasement would be to get rid of the Prime Minister entirely and purge the Government of his closest allies. However, as they would then have to replace appeasement with a constructive policy of their own, such an alternative National Government will not be considered here. Similarly, some critics of Chamberlain often postulated far bigger, more radical solutions to the crises of the era. A few, for example, claimed that a Socialist world revolution or British Popular Front would be the only way to secure a lasting peace. Such wider alternatives to appeasement as these would have constituted a wholesale change to the country in general, let alone a different policy one Prime Minister might have pursued. For this reason, such strategies will be addressed only in passing.

Bearing in mind the earlier points about the best approach to counterfactual history, it is only the alternatives that were suggested at the time and which Chamberlain himself gave at least some thought to that will be looked at here.

The first chapter of this thesis will consider the closely related alternatives to appeasement of isolation and Pacifism - the notion that Fascism could be resisted by turning a blind eye to affairs on the Continent, or the other cheek to any hostile power threatening Britain.

The second chapter will look at the alternatives of colonial and economic appeasement - that is, the idea that the Dictators could be diverted towards peace by the cession of colonial territories in Africa or similar economic inducements. While these strategies themselves made up part of Chamberlain's own policy, many critics of the National Government held that either plan, if pursued far more vigorously and to a much greater extent than Chamberlain did, might have succeeded in turning Germany, Italy and Japan away from war.

Chapter Three will examine the alternative of the League of Nations and collective security, perhaps the most consistently advocated policy of the Labour and Liberal Opposition in this period. Many members of both parties believed that peace could be secured through strict maintenance of the rule of international law as represented by the League, its Covenant and sanctions, and a multilateral approach to solving world problems.

Chapter Four will look at the alternative of alliances and address the claim made by some at the time that Hitler could only be deterred from war by the building of a bloc of hostile powers determined to resist Fascism. Particular attention will be paid to the Churchillian concept of a Grand Alliance, and to its various constituent parts, something he first advocated in opposition to Government policy shortly after the *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria in March 1938.

The fifth chapter will examine the question of armaments and defence and analyse the contention, usually made by those from the Right of the political spectrum, that peace could only have been maintained in the late 1930s through the build up of a huge arsenal of weapons to deter any aggressor. There will also be a brief examination of those who felt that the opposite route, namely total disarmament, would be the surest way to peace.

The sixth chapter will look at the origins and viability of the most obvious and yet most drastic alternative to appeasement - a war against Germany sometime before it actually came in September 1939. Similarly, the bluffer's policy of the *threat* of war shall also be examined. Did anyone in British politics openly call for battle to be joined with the Fascists in 1937 or 1938? Was this ever considered as a viable option by the Government?

The Conclusion of this study will draw together the main arguments and findings of this work as well as expanding upon many of the key themes addressed in each chapter. Summarising the counterfactual speculations as to the likely outcomes of each alternative, it will seek to arrive at a definitive answer to Simon's question as quoted in the title of this study. What were the alternatives Chamberlain had? How far have they been addressed? Were they viable? Did the Prime Minister have a realistic other option?

The more alert reader may have observed that Chamberlain's own policy indeed contained aspects, to a greater or lesser degree, of each of the alternatives to appeasement as identified in these chapters. Was not appeasement, at its core, an essentially isolationist and Pacifist policy? Did not Chamberlain approach Hitler with offers of colonies and loans in return for peace? Did Britain not, at one time or another, act through the machinery of the League, pursue alliances with other powers, and begin a vast rearmament programme in face of the growing Fascist threat? The ultimate resort to war was indeed taken in September 1939. The central questions here are those of timing and extent. It shall be demonstrated that opponents of appeasement often advocated some of the actions Chamberlain eventually took himself, though far earlier and in far greater measure than he ever did. It may be more accurate, therefore, to talk less of alternatives to appeasement *per se*, but rather of radically different conceptions of how Chamberlain's appeasement should have been carried out. This strategy, as practised by the Prime Minister, was a much more complex and ambiguous phenomenon than is often first perceived, operating on many layers and encompassing seemingly antithetical strands of policy within its framework. This is a point we shall return to again in a while.

The precise chapter order of this thesis has been dictated by two factors. Firstly, each alternative to appeasement identified differs in its level of aggression towards the Fascist states. They become more extreme,

confrontational and removed from Chamberlain's original conception of appeasement as the study progresses. Thus, Chapter One effectively considers aspects of retreat in face of the German menace, whereas Chapter Six envisages a full scale attack. Similarly, the second and third chapters essentially consider alternatives to appeasement that seek to work with, restrain or 'manage' the Dictators, whereas Chapters Four, Five and Six consider alternatives that attempt to deter them - strategies of 'standing firm' as they were often termed.

Secondly, as will become apparent, there are certain links between different chapters which lend themselves to treatment in close relation. Advocates of strict adherence to the Covenant of the League of Nations, for example, often began to merge with those calling for a Grand Alliance against the Fascist states as 1939 progressed (indeed, for many, the two policies effectively came to mean the same thing by this time, as shall be shown). The links between collective security and alliances therefore mean that Chapter Four can logically follow Chapter Three. Similar links between the chapters looking at armaments and war should be more apparent.

As already noted, each chapter of this thesis will have the same general structure and move in a vaguely chronological path from 1936 to 1939, although the approach will be thematic rather than narrative for the most part. Each chapter could also probably encompass such a study of its own, and it is only, therefore, a general and introductory summary of each alternative to appeasement that can be made in a thesis of this length. Many of the extensive number of endnotes in each chapter offer ancillary or expansive detail for further use. It is to be hoped that more comprehensive histories of the origins and viability of each rival strategy may spring from this project and that other historians may find inspiration for detailed work in more specific fields. This is not to suggest, however, that this work shall not make an original and significant contribution to knowledge in itself. It shall attempt to tackle questions largely unanswered so far and derives much of its significance from the unique synthesis approach it takes and its distinctive, overarching nature.

(3) PRECEDING ASSUMPTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

There are several assumptions and prejudices which the author holds that need to be addressed before an undertaking such as this can be made. Some of the other decisions taken about the approach and scope of this thesis also warrant explanation here. It is assumed that the reader is aware of the basics in international history from 1936 to 1939. Space limitations do not permit a chronological narrative or explanation of the story of Chamberlain, appeasement and the years before war.²² While the scope of this thesis begins in 1936, Chamberlain did not actually become Prime Minister until 28 May 1937. There are several reasons for beginning a year or so before he came to power, not least because it is widely acknowledged that Chamberlain was virtually Prime Minister in waiting for some eighteen months or so before assuming the post. He had confided as much to his sister in March 1935, when he wrote, irritably: 'As you will see I have become a sort of acting P.M. - only without the actual power of the P.M.' and he was more and more beginning to drive Government policy himself throughout the remainder of this year.²³ He was principal author of the Government's manifesto in their 1935 election victory, for example, and when Baldwin's declining health led him to announce his impending retirement, it was no secret that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, commanding in presence and dominating as he was, would be next in line for the top job.

Moreover, this study begins in 1936 because many of the key events in the drift to war occurred before Chamberlain assumed the premiership and yet held great influence over his subsequent policy. Indeed, this year, 1936, illuminated foreign affairs like no other before it during the decade. The Spanish Civil War began in July, for example, and this hung like a cloud over wider events for much of Chamberlain's period. This conflict fanned the flames of tension between Right and Left in Europe while also fusing the bonds between the two leading Axis powers. The Abyssinian conflict intensified and was debated around the world. In March 1936, Hitler ordered the remilitarisation of the Rhineland and this has been viewed as the last, missed opportunity to have checked Hitler's ambitions without resort to a world war. It therefore warrants consideration in a thesis of this kind. Similarly, the Foreign Policy Committee

was established in 1936 and this supersedes even the Cabinet as the most important forum for the discussion of foreign policy in the years before war - being essentially a slimmed-down version of the former, but devoted entirely to foreign affairs. Events occurring before 1936 and after the outbreak of war shall also be referred to in this thesis, although only briefly and where appropriate.

This study will be almost entirely concerned with the British perspective only. It is the policy of the Chamberlain Government which it seeks to illuminate and any detailed analysis of the aims and objectives of the German, Italian, French, Soviet or American Governments, among others, will be best found elsewhere. Language barriers and source access limitations play a role here, but the primacy of an Anglo-centric focus is warranted due to the Anglo-centric nature of the policy and the fact that Chamberlain often led the way in European appeasement where others tended to follow. The aims and intentions of other administrations, both perceived and actual, shall be considered from time to time in this work, but only in passing and where it is relevant.

Similarly, when assessing the policy of appeasement at this time, primary attention will be given to Chamberlain's consideration of Hitler and the Nazi German menace - hence, the precise wording of this study's title. While the simultaneous Italian and Japanese threats undoubtedly occupied the thoughts of the British Cabinet, Foreign Office and Chiefs of Staff from 1936 to 1939 and beyond, it is the author's contention that the central German menace weighed by far most heavily in the minds of the British policy making elites across the entirety of the period. One of the main driving factors compelling Chamberlain to adopt his appeasement policy lay in the avoidance of a concurrent war with Germany, Italy and Japan. The Committee of Imperial Defence had famously stated in December 1937, 'we cannot foresee the time when our defensive forces will be strong enough to safeguard our territory, trade and vital interests against Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously'.²⁴ But it was Germany which was perceived as the fulcrum of this geo-strategic dilemma and the chief, most imminent, threat to Britain in the world of the late 1930s. Italy and Japan assumed temporary primary importance to British policy makers at different times, but Germany was perceived as the overall main danger. Chamberlain's throwaway remark that, 'if only we could get on terms with the Germans I would not care a rap for Musso', for example, while oversimplifying the picture

somewhat, nevertheless reaffirms the predominance of the *Führer's* intentions over that of the other two Fascist powers in his thinking.²⁵

Reference has been made throughout this Introduction to such phrases as 'Chamberlain's policy' or 'Chamberlain's appeasement', and so on. It is also the author's standpoint that Chamberlain was by far the most dominant figure within the British foreign policy making elite during his period in power. It may, at first glance, appear unsurprising that a Prime Minister should be the leading figure in his Government. This, however, has been an area of some debate. Many contemporary critics and later academics have claimed that Chamberlain was a very autocratic leader, single-handedly dictating policy, interfering in areas beyond his knowledge and surrounded by a weak Cabinet packed with sycophantic toadies.²⁶ Chamberlain's first Foreign Secretary (until February 1938), Anthony Eden, for example, famously asserted that the Prime Minister 'deliberately withheld' information from him and routinely misled the Foreign Office about his plans, lest the experts there would disagree with him.²⁷ While this argument is perhaps overplayed somewhat - Home Secretary Samuel Hoare, for example, countered 'if, nine times out of ten, he had his way, it was because his way was also the Cabinet's way' - Chamberlain was clearly obstinate and strong-willed and the front seat driver in British foreign policy.²⁸ His command of detail and ability to get on top of business were first rate. Terms which therefore appear somewhat simplistic at first glance, such as 'Chamberlain's policy', for example, are used throughout this study for this reason. It is hoped that this prejudgment will only be reinforced or undermined as this thesis develops and that more light will be shed on the finer mechanics of the foreign policy making process as a result.

In order to consider the alternatives to appeasement we must first define clearly what appeasement actually was. Another closely related assumption made throughout this work is that Chamberlain's appeasement was just one of several appeasement strategies pursued by different British Governments, at various times, over a period of many years. To the laymen, if he has heard of the policy, it is almost always associated with Chamberlain, the man with the umbrella, and perhaps also the phrase 'peace for our time'. Indeed, Chamberlain has almost become the personification of a policy popularly perceived of as cowardly and dishonourable, its nadir being the 1938 Munich conference, where

the starry-eyed old Prime Minister was allegedly fooled by Hitler. Such myths remain popular. But appeasement was not Chamberlain's creation, as Gilbert testified. Instead, it had been a central pillar of British foreign policy throughout the entire interwar period, as successive administrations from both sides of the political spectrum sought to avoid a repeat of the calamity of the Great War. Gilbert, in particular, claimed that there existed 'old' and 'new' appeasements; one from 1919-1937 which was driven by the optimistic liberal ideal that all humans were inherently reasonable and could be satisfied if properly treated; and a latter one which began with Chamberlain as a product of pessimism, fear and encompassed a *Realpolitik* acceptance of dubious practices (the inference here being Munich) for a greater good.²⁹ Indeed, one can make the argument that appeasement of Germany was a British policy even further back than this. Had not Gladstone sought peace and closer cooperation with that country by satisfying Bismarck's colonial ambitions in the 1880s? This too was a period when Britain's resources were vastly overstretched by numerous foreign commitments.³⁰ If one ignores the wider elements of Nazi ideology, Chamberlain's position in the 1930s and the strategy he adopted in response, was not altogether an alien one to the British experience.³¹

Appeasement, which is popularly perceived of today as an almost 'dirty' word, was, therefore, in its various forms, widely supported by British foreign policy strategists over a great period of time, and as a positive strategy. In the years after the Great War, politicians from all sides of the political spectrum sought a 'general settlement' of Europe's problems. At the Imperial Conference held in London in July 1921, the Colonial Secretary stated: 'The aim is to get an appeasement of the fearful hatreds and antagonisms which exist in Europe and to enable the world to settle down. I have no other object in view'.³² That these words should come from a young Winston Churchill, Colonial Secretary at the time and traditionally perceived as the archetypal 'anti-appeaser', serves merely to illustrate the point further. A solution to the many grievances created by the 1919 peace settlement continued to be a widespread aspiration throughout the 1930s and only received wide scorn once Chamberlain gave the policy his own unique flavour in face of the Fascist threat. Thus, even Anthony Eden, supposedly another of the traditional 'anti-appeasers', was moved to state: 'I believe that nothing less, if I may say so, than a European settlement and

appeasement should be our aim' on 18 June 1936, just six months after becoming Foreign Secretary.³³ His memoirs do not record this quote. Much of the opposition to appeasement in the years before the Second World War might, therefore, be more accurately described as opposition to Chamberlain's conception of the policy rather than to the general ideal itself.

It is another of the author's preceding contentions that Chamberlain's appeasement was a fluid and multi-faceted entity, rather than a uniform and rigid one. 'Appeasement' is often used as a lazy umbrella term to describe a policy Chamberlain pursued consistently from assuming the premiership until the outbreak of war, particularly with regard to making concessions to Germany. However, this is greatly to over-simplify the picture and warrants further discussion here, especially given that this study is concerned with an examination of alternatives. To borrow a term, Chamberlain's appeasement, was 'a very hybrid creature indeed', made up of several phases each with differing aims and specific, limited agenda.³⁴ To put it crudely, before the *Anschluss* occurred in March 1938, Chamberlain's policy was perhaps aimed primarily at Italy. This was at first in an attempt to detach that country from the chief threat of Germany and to reinvigorate the 1935 Stresa Front - Britain, France and Italy united. Even as late as 1 March 1938, the Foreign Policy Committee's discussion of the forthcoming Anglo-Italian talks contained consideration of how best to win Italy back from the German sphere. A new Non-Aggression Pact with Italy and France was strongly considered here.³⁵

The *Anschluss* shook British faith in the words of Dictators and brought the issue of Czechoslovakia suddenly onto the table. Hereafter Germany became the central focus once more. Italy was now perceived of primarily as a tool with which Chamberlain, through the personal influence of Mussolini, might moderate Hitler's behaviour, Japan an even lesser consideration. The period of 'classic' Chamberlainite appeasement, if you will, occurred then between the *Anschluss* and the Prague Coup one year later, in March 1939. When most people talk of 'appeasement', it is the policy of Britain during this single year that most are actually thinking of, the zenith being the Munich Agreement in September 1938.

After the Prague Coup, this classic appeasement was effectively abandoned and Chamberlain signalled a major reorientation of his policy during a famous

speech in Birmingham on 17 March 1939. Here he asked of Germany, 'is this the end of an old adventure, or the beginning of a new?'³⁶ Hereafter, the pursuit of peace through concessions was all but over as Chamberlain sought to establish peace through deterrence. While the Prime Minister would never give up his hopes for this peace, and continued to regard appeasement as the best ultimate means to avoid war, Prague had shattered his illusions about Hitler's word. Indeed, after Prague, Chamberlain effectively turned to one of the alternatives so often advocated by his critics and began to build a bloc of alliances in a last desperate attempt to lever the *Führer* away from war.

It is not surprising that this thesis will be heavily weighted to the British political sphere rather than to the social and economic. It is the key policy-making individuals and institutions of the day that will be examined in closest detail. Notwithstanding the difficulties in assessing public or, for that matter, press opinion at this time (a point to which we shall return shortly) the central questions which this study aims to tackle are best done so by looking at the main political parties, ministers, officials, bodies and pressure groups of the era. This is not to suggest, however, that public and press opinion will not be covered in each chapter. The views of a wide range of people shall be considered if they had something important to say on alternatives to appeasement.

Not least important among the political institutions that shall be considered were the House of Commons and House of Lords, both of which have been somewhat undervalued and underused by historians working on this era. Lords, in particular, has extra value at this time considering that Halifax, Chamberlain's second Foreign Secretary (from February 1938 onwards) was a peer. The vast majority of recent works considering foreign policy at this time often refer to Parliament sparingly and usually only then as a means of introducing a well known incident or speech. The riotous scenes at the announcement of the Munich conference come to mind, for example, as does Chamberlain's fall from power, or perhaps one of Churchill's better known quotes. To an extent, the House and its often arcane procedures do not sit easily in modern day news coverage and this has been reflected in recent times. But Commons and Lords at this time are treasure-troves, a diverse mix of viewpoints and ideas about foreign policy. They allow us access to the opinions of a whole host of relatively

obscure Parliamentarians, whose important contributions to the debate would otherwise be lost.

It has already been suggested that Chamberlain is often presented by his critics as being an overly meddlesome Prime Minister, taking on sole responsibility for the running of policy. One observer has even asserted that this extended to Parliament. Chamberlain was, she claims, able to act with 'extreme secrecy and even irascibility' towards the House of Commons, deliberately starving it of information and riding roughshod over its traditional procedures.³⁷ Certainly, Chamberlain inherited a huge majority which allowed him a degree of freedom many other Prime Ministers could only dream of. However, this is all a far cry from being able to claim that one man, even one as capable and single-minded as Chamberlain, could wield a sinister and all-powerful hold over the long-held practices of democratic Government. Tellingly, it was the mood of the House of Commons which ultimately brought Chamberlain down during the Norway debate in May 1940.³⁸ In spite of his huge majority, the House of Commons in Chamberlain's day wielded considerable influence over Chamberlain's fortunes.

Though it is by no means the only source of evidence that can be consulted in explaining the motives behind Chamberlain's foreign policy, Hansard is perhaps the finest source for illustrating the rival strategies suggested to deal with the Fascist threat. While Parliament has probably declined in its importance today to consumers of foreign affairs news, no press briefing, interview or 24 hour news channel can illustrate the divergence of viewpoint like live argument across the chamber. Indeed, it is in the debate of foreign affairs that Commons and Lords come into their own as sources for historical study. This is only enhanced during times of world crisis and competing ideology such as the tumultuous years before the Second World War. The battles between the British Conservative, Labour and Liberal Parties took on a ferocity in this age that cannot be easily appreciated today, when so much of modern politics is fought out in the grey of the centre ground. The party splits which gave birth to National Labour, Independent Labour, National Liberal, and so on, served only to muddy the waters further. Commons and Lords therefore give us a flavour of the fluidity, complexity and passion of the policy debate at this time which no other source can quite match. As another scholar of British politics and foreign

affairs has astutely remarked, 'Parliament was... the forum in which tensions within particular traditions of approach to foreign policy were noted... and the shifts marked'.³⁹ Both sources shall be utilised extensively in this thesis.

(4) FURTHER POINTS ON SOURCES AND EVIDENCE USED

A few more points need to be made on some of the historical sources and research methodology used in this project. It is perhaps too obvious to even state that each source has its own particular uses and limitations in the information they can yield. It is only through a carefully selected combination of material that anywhere near a full picture of events can be gained. Space here does not permit a comprehensive discussion of the merits, strengths and weaknesses of each body of evidence used in this thesis, but a few general points can be made.

The truly vast amounts of primary source material produced at the time, and secondary literature written in the subsequent years, means that this study can only make a drop in the ocean with regards to relevant material accessed. An effort was made, therefore, to be extremely selective with the sources used and prioritise the available evidence in order of its perceived value in answering the central questions this study seeks to tackle. The author has attempted to base his work around primary source material more than secondary literature, so that he can make his own conclusions on foreign policy at the time, albeit supported by extensive wider reading.

The author has had access to almost everything he would wish to see for a project of this size and kind, although, in many cases, time and issues of practicality have meant that only a relatively small sample has been consulted. For example, there exist literally hundreds of thousands of contemporary Foreign Office political files available for access at The National Archives in Kew, all of which could have been useful in some way to this study. However, the author could only examine a few hundred of the most relevant ones in the time he had allotted for consideration of such documents. Similarly, when looking at the leading newspapers of the era, it would have been clearly impossible to have consulted every issue of any given paper published between 1936 and 1939, let alone to examine all of the main dailies of the age. The large

number of many-leafed volumes of Hansard covering three years of policy debates in Parliament, for example, provided another similar predicament.

In such cases, the author has had to prioritise and make an effort to impose a strict methodology on his research by a considered selection of sources. For example, when consulting Hansard to look at Parliamentary debates from this era, the key sittings referred to in contemporary diaries, memoirs, private papers and the best secondary literature were all accessed first. This ensured that the most important foreign policy debates of the period were covered. Secondly, the author examined a run of debates following key events at the time - the Rhineland affair, the *Anschluss*, Munich, and the Prague Coup, to name just a few - in order to get a flavour of Parliamentary responses to the biggest issues of the day. Thirdly, the author then looked at a few successive debates occurring at regular quarterly intervals throughout each year examined. It just so happens that many of the key events in this period occurred six months apart, in March or September of these years, which aided in this kind of sampling. Finally, a completely random search was then made of other foreign affairs debates, in an effort to identify any interesting references or speeches so far not found.

Comparable methodologies were imposed upon the use of other large sources accessed. Thus, when looking at the daily newspapers of the era, an effort was made to follow up key events and dates first, before a degree of more selective consultation at regular chronological intervals then took place. The newspapers selected for examination were chosen because of their circulation figures, political bias and diversity of readership, in order to sample a wide range of press viewpoints as read by many different types of people. Greater emphasis was placed upon those papers most critical of Chamberlain's Government through these years on the assumption that these would be more likely to discuss alternative policies to appeasement. Thus it will be seen that *The Times*, for example, being a consistent supporter of the Chamberlain regime, will almost certainly feature less in this work than, say, the *Manchester Guardian*, despite the predominance of the former in terms of readership and international standing. Some regional and weekly press was also examined - the *Yorkshire Post*, for example, was chosen because of its anti-appeasement bias - to give a wider flavour of views and greater geographical spread. The key

consideration when selecting which sources to use was always relevance to the central questions this thesis is concerned with.

The extensive work carried out on Cabinet, Foreign Policy Committee, Foreign Office, Embassy and Chiefs of Staff papers, among others, was greatly aided by the comprehensive indexes, descriptors and guides on hold at The National Archives at Kew. Thus, this otherwise vast body of material could be managed quite easily in order to locate relevant files and the more useful material. The diaries, memoirs, biographies and private papers of key individuals active in politics in the late 1930s were chosen because of the importance or position of the individual concerned. Therefore, known critics of appeasement or leaders of parties or pressure groups from the era received extra attention on the basis that they would be more likely to articulate other strategies for the Government to follow. Similarly, the large amount of contemporary political pamphlets and leaflets which were accessed tended to focus around influential bodies which had a specific cause to promote or most to say on a particular alternative. Much Pacifist and League of Nations Union literature was read, for example. It is to be hoped, therefore, that even when dealing with the most unwieldy of historical sources, one can recognise a degree of reasoning and methodology behind what was sampled.

There are no real body of documents which were not accessed and which would have greatly improved this work. The major source that all appeasement scholars would like to have access to unfortunately does not exist. Chamberlain's death in November 1940 has robbed us of any memoir the Prime Minister might have published and which would have been invaluable to us in assessing his motives and innermost thoughts on policy at this time. The private letters which he wrote every week to his sisters, in which he expanded upon events and decisions, are the next best thing available and these have been consulted extensively. The author would have perhaps liked to have been able to look more closely at archives from the Treasury and Board of Trade from this period, which may have expanded upon issues of economic appeasement, rearmament and so on. Similarly, the many papers from the various military experts and bodies of the day could only be looked at briefly. In both cases, the limited, though selective, samples taken will have to suffice given the time, travel and financial restraints under which the historian has to labour.

Newer research practices, such as discourse analysis, for example, have been largely rejected here in favour of more conventional methods. These new practices tend to lend themselves more to the political scientist rather than the 'traditional' historian, but do have some value to us. While a close examination of rhetoric and phraseology - particularly given their transient nature - may have illuminated this study further, the central questions it is attempting to answer can generally be tackled without great consideration of such factors. Nevertheless, it has already been demonstrated how words like 'appeasement' need to be defined clearly and how the precise meanings of terms are so important to this study. Indeed, as Eden pointed out, the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of 'appeasement' changed significantly in the years after Munich, taking on more negative connotations hereafter.⁴⁰ It shall be seen throughout this work that what the leaders of the Labour Party took the expression 'economic appeasement' to mean was often very different from the Government's own interpretation, for example. Similar wrangles over terms like collective security also exist. The effects of time gave these phrases new meanings as well. Such questions of terminology shall be addressed where relevant in the main text.

As previously stated, public and press opinion in the late 1930s has proved a particularly difficult phenomenon to gauge. Because of the war, Chamberlain never faced a General Election as Prime Minister. By-elections were held during his premiership, although the results were contradictory and the issues debated often diverse. Gallup Polls were only in their infancy during this period (the first one conducted in Britain was in 1937) and lacked the sophistication of their modern day equivalents. Mass Observation data is prone to inaccuracies and oversimplification, designed, as it was, not to give a scientific measure of opinion, but rather a qualitative snapshot of working class lives. Acknowledging the obvious limitations of each source, they nevertheless remain among the best indicators of public opinion in this era. Claims have also been made that the National Government manipulated and deceived public opinion in the late 1930s and that Chamberlain courted the press for his own political ends. However much one buys this argument - championed, perhaps, by Richard Cockett - it clearly muddies the waters somewhat and serves as another indication of the major difficulties in assessing press and public opinion at this time.⁴¹

The relationship between public opinion and the press is a curious one. Did the press reflect or mould opinion? There was clearly a complex interplay between the two. On the one hand, according to Mass Observation, more than a third of the general public at this time based their opinions on what the papers told them; whereas on the other, the press had an obligation to report and reflect on what it perceived public opinion to be.⁴² It has to be remembered that homes did not have televisions in the 1930s, and the internet was not yet even a dream. Aside from the press, radio and cinema newsreels had to suffice. Perhaps the central problem with popular thought, however, is intrinsic to its character. It can often be seen that certain demonstrations of public opinion express views counter to those of the nation at large. An angry demonstration from a crowd of five thousand protesters, for example, may seem to point to large-scale opposition to a particular policy. However, the volume of the silent majority who stayed at home is greater than that of the noisy but atypical minority. The evidence available on public opinion almost never tells the whole story.⁴³

Furthermore, did public opinion even actually *matter* to the National Government? After all, Chamberlain did not have to face an election as Prime Minister. In an era when Gallup Polls had just been invented, did politicians even have an accurate conception of what public opinion was? Eden, for example, famously judged the mood of the nation on what his taxi driver told him on any given morning.⁴⁴ There is also the wider factor that the public are often simply ignorant, apathetic or uncertain about big issues. Mass Observation records numerous examples of the people of 'Metrop', an unnamed London borough, admitting, 'I don't understand it' or 'I don't take that much interest' when asked about the Czech crisis in September 1938.⁴⁵ A significant number of Gallup Poll respondents 'expressed no opinion' on any question asked. Such factors as these should be considered when attempting to gauge the ambiguous phenomenon of popular thought. A comprehensive list of all of the sources used in this thesis can be found in the bibliography following the main body of this work. And it is to that main body we must now turn.

1. Horace Wilson, Chief Industrial Adviser to Chamberlain's Government, to Annie Chamberlain, Neville Chamberlain's widow, 19 July 1948, Neville Chamberlain Papers (NC), NC11/1/925, Special Collections Department, University of Birmingham (BU).
2. Viscount Simon, *Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Viscount Simon* (London: Hutchinson, 1952), p.253.
3. CATO, *Guilty Men*, 21st edn (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940), p.66.
4. The exact origins of this sobriquet are unknown, although it was widely used by many of his peers. For a recent and interesting account of the writing of Churchill's memoir, see D. Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).
5. Preston Slosson, 'Review of W. S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*', *American Historical Review*, vol.54, 1948, pp.102-3 (p.102).
6. W. S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1948), p.4.
7. Chief amongst these works were the memoirs and autobiographies of figures like Anthony Eden, Alfred Duff Cooper, Leo Amery, Samuel Hoare, John Simon and Edward Halifax, among others, all but one of which had served as members of Chamberlain's Cabinet at one time or another.
8. 'Quasi-revisionist' is perhaps a more accurate description here. Taylor, for example, refuted the traditional notion that Hitler operated within a predetermined ideological grand plan as mapped out in the pages of *Mein Kampf*. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 1961 edn (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961).
9. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p.189.
10. M. Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p.177.
11. Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement*, p.13.
12. John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p.212.
13. S. Aster, "'Guilty Men': The Case of Neville Chamberlain', in R. Boyce and E. M. Robertson (eds.), *Paths to War: New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp.233-68 (p.261).
14. Louise Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p.189.
15. A comprehensive review of appeasement historiography can be found in Robert J. Caputi, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (London: London Associated University Press, 2000). David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Arnold, 2001) also has an extensive discussion of appeasement literature.
16. See R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the coming of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1993) and Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*.
17. *Newsweek*, 19 April 1999. Quoted, Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*, p.87.
18. Robin Cook, Diary, 10 March 2002, *The Point of Departure* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2003), p.121.
19. This phrase was coined by E. H. Carr. Quoted, Robert Cowley (ed.), *What If? The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.xi.

20. This quote is attributed to E. P. Thompson. Quoted, Niall Ferguson (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Papermac, 1998), p.15.
21. See, for example, Hobsbawm's defence of counterfactual history in his *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), p.150.
22. A brief look at a standard historical textbook should suffice to explain key events referred to or terms used, should the reader be unfamiliar with them.
23. Neville Chamberlain, British Prime Minister, to Hilda Chamberlain, sister, 23 March 1935, NC18/1/910A.
24. CID paper 1366-B, 8 Dec. 1937. Quoted, FO371/20702/C8477, The National Archives (TNA). Foreign Office (FO) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
25. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, sister, 4 July 1937, NC18/1/1010.
26. See, for example, Earl of Avon, *Facing the Dictators: The Eden Memoirs* (London: Cassell, 1962) or Ian Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet* (New York: Taplinger Publishing, 1971).
27. Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p.556.
28. Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), p.375. Christopher Hill, *Cabinet Decisions on Foreign Policy: The British Experience, October 1938 - June 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) offers a strong counter-argument on this question.
29. Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement*, p.185.
30. A good elucidation of this point is made in Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism: 1850-1995*, 3rd edn (London: Longman, 1996).
31. For example, in all of these periods - the late nineteenth century, the interwar years, the late 1930s - British policy makers were driven by the same belief that European statesman were intrinsically rational and open to compromise in pursuit of peace. The same altruistic moral ideals in foreign policy were ever present.
32. The speech was on 7 July 1921. Quoted, Martin Gilbert, *Churchill's Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.71.
33. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Commons*, vol.313, col.1209, 18 June 1936.
34. Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London: Harper Collins, 1985), p.285.
35. Foreign Policy Committee Proceedings, 1 March 1938, CAB 27/623/FP(36)/24, The National Archives (TNA). Cabinet (CAB) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
36. Quoted, *The Times*, 18 March 1939. There is, of course, some debate over the extent to which Chamberlain 'gave up' his classic appeasement and the precise timing of his adoption of a tougher line.
37. Marion L. Kenney, 'The Role of the House of Commons in British Foreign Policy during the 1937-38 Session', in Norton Downs (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Conyers Read* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp.138-85 (p.157).

38. The Parliamentary outburst on the day before war, when the House balked at the repeated delays in ratifying the Polish alliance, left Chamberlain, according to one witness, 'as white as a sheet', and convinced him that his Government would fall unless he declared war the very next day. N. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters, 1930-39* (London: Collins, 1966), p.421.
39. Jeremy Black, *Parliament and Foreign Policy in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.8.
40. Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, pp.323-4.
41. Cockett, for example, asserted that an 'incestuous relationship between Whitehall and the press' had developed in the 1930s. By the outbreak of war, he contends, the press had become 'not so much the watch-dogs of democracy as the harlots of democracy - at every level forfeiting their independence for power and fortune (and frequently a peerage)'. For what it is worth, the author's view is that Cockett overplays his case somewhat. While Chamberlain undoubtedly practiced a hitherto unparalleled degree of media manipulation, opposition to appeasement in the press was still widespread. Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p.1., p.187.
42. The precise figure is put at 35%. Quoted, Charles Madge and Tom Harrison (eds.), *Britain: By Mass Observation* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1939), p.31.
43. For example, can a by-election result in a Scottish constituency in November 1938 be said to fully represent British opinion in the winter of this year? In the same way, the faceless Member of Parliament, who votes 'Aye' with his party, does not tell us the full extent of his feelings on the issues involved. Questions of party loyalty and the influence of Whips all play a crucial role.
44. Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, pp.346-7.
45. Madge and Harrison (eds.), *Britain*, p.40.

ONE: ISOLATION AND PACIFISM

I believe that we should gradually and honourably detach ourselves from all these commitments which we have. I believe that by our own strong arm, and by that alone, we shall win through and be a power for peace in the world.¹ (Rupert de la Bere, 1936).

(1) INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested by some of Chamberlain's critics, amongst both contemporaries and historians, that the National Government should have pursued a policy of isolation as an alternative to appeasement in the years before war. Unlike the Prime Minister, they envisaged a country which deliberately chose to have no ties in Europe and which would withdraw its input from continental affairs. 'Splendid Isolation' had, of course, been a traditional foreign policy strategy for Britain, an island nation, since the late nineteenth century.² However, the belief that the best way to secure peace would be an armed detachment from Europe remained the avowed preference of a small number of staunch advocates even as late as the troubled Chamberlain period.

This chapter will examine the origins and viability of the strategies of isolation and, later, Pacifism as alternatives to appeasement. Advocates of both policies were committed and vocal critics of Chamberlain's Government, as will become apparent, convinced that their cause was the only one that could avert war. And yet neither isolation nor Pacifism have received great attention in the historical work on this period and the extent to which the National Government considered these options remains largely a mystery to us. Were they ever considered as viable policies in the late 1930s? There are also links between the two strategies and their advocates which explain why they are treated together here and these shall be demonstrated. The justification for a chapter of this kind, therefore, should now be more apparent.

The term isolation, rather than 'isolationism', is used largely throughout this chapter for reasons of simplicity and consistency, though the two phrases can be interchanged and regularly are. Either can loosely be defined as the consciously chosen act of withdrawal from all but the most basic of commitments or

entanglements in continental Europe and sometimes beyond. For some isolation advocates such as Leo Amery, for example, isolation meant separation from Europe to enable closer relations with the Empire. The more subtle ambiguities and nuances of the term will be explained where appropriate. Comments on the definition of 'Pacifism' and associated terminology will be made in the relevant places of the main text. The exact origins of the term 'limited liability' are unknown to the author, though the meaning and popular use of this expression shall be detailed where necessary. It shall also be shown that there were various levels to these policies - total and partial isolation, extreme and more commonplace calls for the cause of peace. Such distinctions are important and will be made apparent to the reader throughout.

The chapter will begin by charting the origins and development of isolation and Pacifism as suggested alternatives to Government policy. It will then consider the main historiography produced on these topics before closing with an assessment of how viable they were perceived to be.

(2) ORIGINS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

This section will chart the development of isolation as an alternative to appeasement by focusing on some of the main proponents of the cause active in politics at the time. While the policy was largely discredited in Britain by the mid-1930s as a relic of the pre Great War era - an age before the League of Nations, Locarno, the rise of Fascism and aerial warfare - echoes of isolation nevertheless still resounded. British policy was to remain aloof from the Manchurian and Abyssinian hostilities. The Government's strategy of Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War also ensured that the issue of isolation remained relevant and at the forefront of discussion.³

The opening statement at the beginning of this chapter, by Conservative MP Sir Rupert de la Bere on 18 June 1936, was typical of the type of sentiment still expressed, albeit now sparingly, in the House of Commons by the few remaining advocates of isolation. International events at the start of the period covered by this thesis - that is, in the year or so before Chamberlain came to power - served to crystallise policy debate. The German reoccupation of the Rhineland in March 1936 was a case in point, prompting a reconsideration of Britain's role in the world by the political elites. Tory peer Lord Lothian, for example, speaking in Parliament on 24 March, asked, 'is there any necessity for us to be scared into further military commitments in Europe? Europe has immense reserves for the defence of the *status quo* if it likes to organise them without calling on us at all'.⁴

Advocates of isolation tended to promote their cause with greater volume in the earlier part of Chamberlain's premiership, before events like the Czech crisis and Prague Coup suggested that worst fears about Hitler might soon be realised. Calls therefore tended to peak throughout 1937 and the first half of 1938, fading slightly in the latter part of that year (although a few diehards were still calling for isolation in the wake of the Munich Agreement in September 1938). Supporters of this policy also tended to be almost exclusively Conservatives or from the Right of the political spectrum, usually of a certain age, old enough to recall the glory days of British Imperial grandeur in the late Victorian period.

One only needs to look at the birth dates and political bias of many of the main characters appearing throughout this chapter to validate this. Harold Macmillan, recalling foreign policy opinion across the political sphere during the 1930s, confirms in his memoirs, that it was mainly ‘the Right’ who would have ‘preferred a policy of semi isolation, relying on the reserve power of the still potent Empire’.⁵ Indeed, almost all isolation supporters were also committed advocates of strengthening ties with the Empire, rather than, say, the League of Nations, which was predominantly supported by those on the political Left. In January 1937, when Tory MP Sir Arnold Wilson addressed the British Universities League of Nations Society meeting in Oxford, for example, he controversially urged that the League be sidelined and the way ‘of isolation’ be studied, ‘not merely as a practicable policy for Great Britain, but for all great powers’.⁶ This did not go down well with his audience.

Two of the most famous advocates of isolation during the Chamberlain period demonstrate such classic hallmarks, being both right wing and passionate supporters of Empire. Conservative MP and former Colonial Secretary Leo Amery was never short of an opinion on Government policy and, amongst several proffered solutions to the world’s problems, advocated a high degree of isolation during much of the Chamberlain era. In his work *The Forward View*, written in 1935, Amery summed up his continental policy in one neat sentence:

Detachment from European affairs; subject only to the proviso, embodied in our Belgium and Locarno undertakings, that we will not look with unconcern upon purely aggressive military operations within short air range of Dover.⁷

In November 1937 Amery lectured Chamberlain in a letter calling for Britain to concede parts of Europe to German domination and withdraw from affairs therein.⁸ Even as late as 10 October 1938, shortly after the Munich conference, he expressed similar views in a note to the late Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden:

There is much to be said for the policy of deliberately withdrawing France and ourselves from Central Europe. Germany will undoubtedly be much stronger materially, but psychologically and strategically, France and ourselves will now be in a much simpler defensive position.⁹

It can be seen here that Amery, in common with many other isolation advocates, was not, in fact, calling for Britain to distance itself totally from every nation on the Continent. The traditional close relationship with France - indeed Britain effectively depended on the French army - and strategic importance of the Low Countries were usually regarded as sacrosanct for obvious geographical reasons as likely staging-posts for an invasion of Britain from the Continent. Isolation, therefore, rarely meant wholesale abandonment of the Continent root and branch, even for the most ardent supporter of the cause. Instead, there was often an element of strategic retreat and limiting commitments. This shall be shown again later when Chamberlain's response to such calls is considered.

The other most noteworthy advocate of isolation at this time was the Tory press baron Lord Beaverbrook, owner of the *Daily Express*, Britain's most widely read newspaper of the era.¹⁰ In what amounts to probably the most vocal, comprehensive and long-running campaign for isolation in this decade, the *Express* had been preaching the particular gospel for some time. An extract from 15 July 1935 was typical and once more underlines the Imperial preoccupation of many isolation supporters:

Interference in Europe means war for certain... If we stand out of European commitments, we are given the hope and expectation that there will be no war for Britain... Interference in Europe divides us from the Dominions. It is a policy which means the break-up of the British Empire.¹¹

Hitler's remilitarisation of the Rhineland was met in the *Express* with an appeal for Britain to 'Keep Calm! ... We should stand aside. There is no need whatever, *no British need*, to take a part. No interest of ours will be challenged'.¹² A day later, Beaverbrook underlined how domestic concerns were his priority: 'Leave the French and Germans to keep watch over the Rhine. Our watch should be along the Tyne. Better days are coming there. We could make them better still'.¹³ And two years later, in response to the March 1938 *Anschluss* and elevation of Czechoslovakia as the issue of the summer, the *Express* was still calling for Britain to 'Mind our own business!' Czechoslovakia, it proclaimed, 'is not our business. If we tie ourselves up there we may one day have to cut our losses as hurriedly as we are doing now in Austria'.¹⁴

As old friends and colleagues, and two of the most vocal advocates of the isolation alternative to more interventionist policies like Chamberlain's appeasement, Amery and Beaverbrook often corresponded at length. On 10 November 1936, for example, Beaverbrook wrote:

One great advantage of Isolation is... that it is the only means of bringing our foreign policy in line with that of the United States. I say nothing about the Empire, because it is most obvious to most people that Isolation is the only policy on which we can hope to maintain unity with the Dominions.

Why don't you lead the movement? There is nobody in politics more competent to do it than you are.¹⁵

Two days later Amery replied:

I appreciate the compliment you pay me when you suggest that I should lead a movement for which you regard yourself already too old! The trouble is, one cannot simply step out one day and say "I am going to lead". Leading requires a devil of a lot of spade work and presupposes both a band of followers and support in the press and elsewhere... Tell me, my dear Max, what more I could have done in the way of leading, or establishing my claim to lead? What I want is more support. You can do a lot in your Press for our campaign.¹⁶

This exchange, between perhaps the two leading advocates during the late 1930s, is particularly useful in shedding light on the strength of support for their cause. It strongly suggests not only that the ranks lacked coherence and leadership, even before Chamberlain became Prime Minister or the Czech crisis had broken, but that approval was lacking in general for the policy from all areas. Beaverbrook's reference again to the Empire and United States is further evidence that supporters of isolation often reinforced its strong connotations of 'otherness' and separation from Europe by emphasising closeness to friends away from the Continent. America, of course, as well as being an old ally, had its own strong isolation agenda in the late 1930s (at least with regards to Europe and conflict) and was often held as a yardstick for Britain to aspire to.¹⁷

Wider Advocates: Other Groups, Press and Public Opinion

The above point about wider approval for isolation is upheld when one makes a brief survey of broader opinion at the time. The following section will focus on the advocates of isolation active in the press, public and other groups. Support for isolation from other newspapers in the Chamberlain period was almost non-existent, references usually limited to the occasional letter page contribution or survey. When Mr L. Taddy-Eriend wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* in the wake of the Munich Agreement, his complaints that Chamberlain's actions were not in line with traditional Tory policy - which in his words stood for 'putting our own interests first and avoiding European commitments' - did not receive much support.¹⁸ It is difficult to believe, therefore, that Beaverbrook's estimate that around 60% of British people were keen isolation supporters at the close of 1936 was anywhere near accurate.¹⁹ Such a figure was surely wishful thinking on his part - though no exact count has been made, the number of letters sent to his paper backing this policy amounted to much less than two thirds of the total printed - or based upon the paper's highly dubious estimations of public opinion. For example, the *Express* confidently proclaimed that 'Business Leaders Want Detachment' in March 1936. The accompanying survey asked a tiny sample of four industry leaders the particularly tendentious question of whether or not they backed the 'watchful and sympathetic' isolation of Britain from 'the disputes of Europe'. In this case, four answers in the affirmative were considered representative of the measured views of all British industry bosses at the time.²⁰

Gallup Polls and Mass Observation data for the period are no more illuminating on the question of public support for isolation, with no single question from the former source shedding any light on the issue. The latter, as vague and unscientific a measure as this was, yielded merely one or two relevant quotes. Here, a survey of the citizens of 'Metrop', an unnamed London borough, produced just one individual who called for Britain to 'keep out of entanglements' in the troubled weeks before Munich.²¹ It would seem, therefore, that, while difficult to accurately gauge given the methods available at the time, backing for isolation was very limited - aside from its appeal to some committed Imperialists. Wide-scale popular support seems highly questionable. In

Parliament, as shall be shown, the vast majority of speakers who discussed the issue spoke against isolation as a dangerously outdated policy from a bygone era. Moreover, there were few other political groupings which actively or enthusiastically promoted the cause. Some elements of what might be called the Pacifist community (as discussed below) were also supporters for a time, on the simplistic assumption, more often than not, that the less Britain meddled, the more likely it was to avoid war. The extreme Right also often backed isolation as it suited their pro-Fascist leanings to acquiesce with the activities of the Dictators in Europe. Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, for example, ran a campaign in wake of the Abyssinian conflict under the banner 'Mind Britain's Business', which urged no involvement in the dispute - despite their general support for the Italian cause.²² Campaigns of this type, however, were the rare exception and support for isolation remained the choice of a select few.

Late Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

This section will further examine the cause of isolation as an alternative to appeasement by looking at how calls developed and progressed over time. It has been shown that the promotion of isolation as an alternative to the Government's foreign policy continued well into the Chamberlain period, through 1937 and into 1938. Parliament was not immune to this trend. Chamberlain's conversations with Italy at the beginning of 1938 and close consultation with France and Germany throughout the summer of that year were interpreted by many isolation supporters as a foolish attempt to draw closer to the powers on the Continent and entangle Britain in European affairs. The *Anschluss*, in particular, brought Czechoslovakia onto the table as the likely next target for Germany and discussion was rife over whether or not an offer should be made to guarantee its borders, and thereby ward off a possible German advance. Fears were so high that even one or two non-Conservatives spoke up in alarm in support of isolation. National Liberal MP George Lambert, for example, addressed the House of Commons on 24 March 1938:

I do not want commitments on the Continent. I want to keep out of them. I believe in being strong and being a good neighbour. Good neighbours are not always interfering in the affairs of their neighbours... I would far rather be left alone than to have to stand for other people's commitments.²³

When Britain finally guaranteed rump Czechoslovakia as part of the Munich Agreement, the epoch of Chamberlain's policy in Europe, there followed perhaps the last real call for isolation. Invoking a powerful literary metaphor, Tory peer Lord Saltoun bitterly attacked appeasement on 5 October 1938:

Our Government is not a Sancho Panza, to stretch its arm and say that, after all, it is a fine thing to ride about the world righting wrongs, and to go out and take counsel with its donkey... Let us right the wrongs at *our* doors, and learn from the Bible who is our neighbour.²⁴

That Munich represented the last real protest call for isolation was essentially down to two factors; Firstly, international events hereafter drifted quite sedately, at least by contemporary standards, through the 'Munich winter' until the Prague Coup in March 1939, a watershed event which seemed to convince even the most ardent isolation advocate that the time was now ripe for commitments on the Continent. The Nazi orchestrated pogrom of *Kristallnacht* in November 1938 also further demonstrated to Britain the hitherto largely under-recognised true character of that regime; Secondly, because in excluding the League of Nations from his foremost act in foreign policy to date, and in signing the accompanying Anglo-German declaration, essentially a one-on-one agreement between two men and two countries, Chamberlain seemed to want to draw a line under European affairs. This confirmed in the minds of some isolation supporters what one or two had been suspecting for some time - namely that the Prime Minister had adopted the policy of isolation himself. This point shall be returned to again in a while.

The Pacifist Dimension

If advocates of isolation can be said to have favoured turning a blind eye to the march of Fascism, there were also those who recommended turning the other cheek. Together with the policy of isolation must go a brief discussion of Pacifism, not least because many campaigners for the former were also supporters of the latter. Isolation and Pacifism fit neatly side by side for treatment in a study of this kind because both philosophies, at their most basic level, encompassed stepping aside from the conflicts of Europe. The links between Pacifism and isolation in the late 1930s were not obscure and many Pacifists often supported isolation as the best means to achieve their own particular end. As a leading historian on Pacifism in this period contends:

The more optimistic Pacifists believed that avoiding provocation would encourage a positive response... And even those more pessimistic about European passions could hope for isolationism at least.²⁵

Lord Lothian, for example, has variously been labelled by critics, among other things, as an isolation *and* Pacifism supporter, and it was common for membership of both groups to merge in this era. Pacifist thinkers in the 1930s often adjudged isolation as the best of all the alternatives proffered to guarantee peace. Bertrand Russell, for example, considered the merits of the policy in some depth in his 1936 work *Which Way to Peace?*, before settling on what amounted to an international police force as his advocated solution.²⁶ One-time Labour MP Wilfred Wellock also neatly illustrates the regular convergence of the two policies at this time. Contributing to the leading anti-war journal of the era, the Peace Pledge Union's *Peace News*, he wrote in wake of the Rhineland affair: 'It may be that the catastrophe of a Second World War is unavoidable, but should it occur I think it is supremely important that this country should not be involved in it'.²⁷

A full discussion of British Pacifism in the late 1930s, in all its many forms and guises, could well constitute a thesis of its own.²⁸ It is, therefore, only a very particular brand of what might be termed 'pure' Pacifism that shall be

considered here. As Martin Ceadel has observed, Pacifism in the Chamberlain period was a vague and ambiguous phenomenon, a catch-all label that was often applied to a great many different people who might more accurately be described as being part of a peace movement. He draws particular distinction, for example, between what he terms Pacifists - the advocates of this pure Pacifism, who held that all war was always wrong - and 'Pacificists', those that took the more general and widespread view that war, while generally irrational, was sometimes necessary but always best avoided.²⁹ As this latter, more vague and much larger body encompassed many people from numerous different groups, across all shades of political opinion (most Christians, for example, would come under this banner, or those campaigners within bodies like the League of Nations Union) they will not be addressed in any great detail here.³⁰ Rather, the 'Pacificists', to borrow Ceadel's term again, will appear and reappear where appropriate in different chapters throughout this study.³¹

Given all these subtle nuances and ambiguities, then, can there be said to have been a Pacifist alternative to appeasement? Perhaps not strictly speaking, but there is certainly a case for claiming that there was a very particular Pacifist take on the isolation option which was greatly at odds with Chamberlain's policy. This form of isolation would be accompanied by a non-violent resistance to any hostile or invading force which threatened Britain and was essentially the favoured strategy of some of the leading members of the largest Pacifist movement of the day, the Peace Pledge Union.³² Building upon some of the major expressions of anti-war sentiment in the early 1930s, such as the famous Oxford Union debate in 1933, or Viscount Cecil's Peace Ballot in 1935 (in which over 11 million people voted) the Peace Pledge Union was formed by Canon Dick Sheppard in May 1936, following the wave of support he received for his 'Peace Letter', published in the national press in October 1934.³³ After Sheppard's sudden death just three years later, figures like George Lansbury, former leader of the Labour Party, took on the leadership of the PPU and sought to spread the message of peace through more mainstream political channels like Parliament.

It was the senior figures and founding fathers of the PPU, like Labour peer Lord Ponsonby or the writer Aldous Huxley, who most favoured this policy of non-violent resistance. Interviewed by a fellow Pacifist during the Abyssinia

crisis, for example, Huxley asserted that: 'The only practical way of dealing with the problems of war is the organisation of what Gregg in his recent book on the subject calls Non-Violent Coercion - the method of Gandhi and so many others'.³⁴ This policy hence sometimes became known as 'Greggism', after Richard Gregg, the influential American Pacifist who had studied figures like Gandhi for many years, and it continued to be advocated by many leading Pacifists within the PPU even after Chamberlain became Prime Minister. While he preached rearmament and reconciliation with the Dictators, supporters of Greggism began calling for the formation of crack Pacifist cells throughout the country, to organise the peaceful resistance of the masses against any future invader.

Unsurprisingly, this 'pure' Pacifism died out in the late 1930s as Sheppard's death and the events in the approach to war took their toll on the movement. Greggism became discredited even within the PPU's own ranks, and the majority of Pacifists fell in behind appeasement as the best means to avoid war.³⁵ By mid-1938 the official policy of the PPU *was* appeasement, though heavily emphasising the economic aspect, and this was eloquently expressed through the speeches of figures like Lansbury and Ponsonby in Parliament throughout the remainder of that year. However, after the Prague Coup in March 1939, when Chamberlain effectively ended his pursuit of appeasement through concessions in favour of deterrence and alliances, there were still one or two demands for the Pacifist alternative. Such calls can be seen as a product, in most cases, of a last, desperate attempt to avoid war. During a speech in Lords on 20 March, for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, accompanied support for alliances with a plea for all leading figures in the European Christian community to issue simultaneous anti-war declarations.³⁶ In others, however, such late Pacifist calls can be seen as perhaps another alternative to Chamberlain's own policy, namely advocating appeasement *after* the Prime Minister himself had effectively rejected it - what contemporary critics derided as a 'peace at any price' policy. For example, on the same date as Lang's speech, Liberal peer Lord Arnold asserted: 'I know it is the custom nowadays to sneer at Pacifists... In my view Pacifists are much more in touch with realities than those urging the nations on to another war'.³⁷

Less than a month before the outbreak of this war, the then PPU Chairman Stuart Morris gave an interview to the *News Chronicle* in which he controversially proclaimed: 'I am all for giving a great deal more away. I don't think that Mr Chamberlain has really started yet on any serious appeasement'.³⁸ Many extreme Pacifists of this type were even unaffected by the beginning of hostilities and urged peace negotiations with Hitler well on into 1940. Some even became Conscientious Objectors. It should be noted, however, that not all arch-appeasers were Pacifists.³⁹ While this form of intense Pacifism was not really, then, an alternative to appeasement in itself, it was clearly a rival conception of how the Prime Minister ought to have carried out the policy. It therefore bares consideration in a thesis such as this.

(3) HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historical debate on isolation and Pacifism as alternatives to appeasement fails to encompass any more than a handful of major works, and this suggests an obvious area for further research. While both issues have been studied in much wider, more general contexts, often over periods spanning several centuries, treatment of either position in the late 1930s is severely lacking, still more so any sort of viability assessment. Excluding, then, all those books and articles which make merely one or two passing references to either alternative, the works of the orthodox school on appeasement rarely discuss these issues at any length. This is perhaps a reflection of the limited support for such strategies at the time - the orthodox camp is dominated by the memoirs of Chamberlain's own contemporaries after all - and the preference of these authors to discuss what they considered the much larger issues of the day.

Unsurprisingly, it is perhaps Amery's memoirs and published diaries, *My Political Life* and *The Empire at Bay* respectively, which offer most in the way of discussion of isolation as an alternative to appeasement.⁴⁰ However, these serve merely to describe and explain their subject's devotion to this policy at the time - something which has already been covered in this study. The memoirs of Lord Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office between 1930 and 1938, offer a more considered assessment. The author, whose opinions on foreign policy in this period more often than not converged with those of Amery, not least on the later question of allies, nevertheless holds that neither isolation nor Pacifism were realistic options for Britain to pursue in the Chamberlain era. Looking back on events before the Second World War and, one senses, seeking to draw lessons for the future, *The Mist Procession* judged Pacifism in the 1930s to be an underachieving ideal and contends that isolation actually brought war nearer:⁴¹ 'Nothing is more certain to provide the eventual cataclysm than the policy of implied, let alone proclaimed, isolation advocated by such people as Lord Beaverbrook'.⁴² Harold Macmillan offered a similar perspective in his own memoirs, asserting that the actions of the Pacifists throughout the 1930s (and 'Pacificist' sentiment throughout the country in

general at this time) helped bring on the war.⁴³ In his view they undermined British defence preparations and hamstrung efforts at deterrence.

It is not until much later, however, in what might be termed the 'revisionist' period of appeasement literature, that works of real focus on isolation and Pacifism in the late 1930s were produced. A. J. P. Taylor's 1972 biography of Beaverbrook offers a stoic defence of his subject's devotion to isolation (they were also close friends) and asserts, albeit with the benefit of hindsight, that it was probably the most sensible option available at the time.⁴⁴ Did not appeasement and policies like collective security fail? Had not Britain actually been forced into isolation by the summer of 1940, and did the country not survive?⁴⁵ These were the provocative and challenging questions Taylor posed. While articles such as Christopher Howard's 'The Policy of Isolation' (1967) served to explain the strategy in its wider historical context, they offered little on the Chamberlain era in specific and add hardly anything to the debate on viability.⁴⁶ Similarly, new articles on Pacifism from this period, such as David Lukowitz's 1974 'British Pacifists and Appeasement: The Peace Pledge Union', merely emphasise how understandable it was that Pacifists turned to appeasement given their hostility to the other suggested policies of the day.⁴⁷ Whether or not Pacifism itself was a worthwhile option is rarely explored and the inference must be made that, because Chamberlain rejected the path, it was probably not. Even the most comprehensive study of twentieth century British Pacifism, Martin Ceadel's *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1995*, merely explains the genesis and background of the movement rather than looking at the adequacy of the philosophy itself in face of the march of the Dictators.

Most recent work on isolation and Pacifism, in what might be termed the post-revisionist (or counter-revisionist) period of appeasement historiography, have failed to add much more to our knowledge, although consideration of alternatives to Chamberlain's policy in general are now a little more common. Alistair Parker's influential 1993 work *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* devotes an entire chapter to this question and touches upon isolation as the favoured strategy of many Conservatives at this time.⁴⁸ Parker does not develop this line, however, and neglects to make any sort of judgement on the feasibility of isolation as a strategy the National Government could have pursued. He also does not address

how much Chamberlain himself considered a policy of this kind practical and fails to address the Pacifist element altogether. Given that Parker's central thesis is that a Churchillian Grand Alliance would have been an acceptable and, most likely, successful alternative to appeasement, one can assume that the author would be sceptical of the value of either isolation or Pacifism.

No doubt influenced by the earlier work of John Charmley, addressed in the conclusion of this chapter, which speculated on the subject of Britain peacefully coexisting with Nazi Germany, Roy Denman produced *Missed Chances: Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century* in 1996.⁴⁹ Drawing heavily on hindsight and counterfactual assertions, this work resurrects some of Taylor's claims about the likely success of isolation. He claims that Chamberlain would have been able to carry Parliamentary support with him for a policy of this type at the time of the Czech crisis and this would have resulted in Germany turning on Russia, leaving France and Britain alone, after invading Czechoslovakia and Poland.⁵⁰ These claims are obviously rather difficult to substantiate, however, and add little to Taylor's original assertions.

Considering their obvious lack of treatment, then, can there be said to be a historiographical 'consensus' on the viability of either isolation or Pacifism as rival policies to appeasement during the years before war? Aside from those contentions from the occasional individual like Taylor or Denman, the general lack of attention paid to these topics (and the majority of hostile appraisals in those works that do so) suggests that history, or perhaps rather hindsight, has adjudged neither option to have been worthy of discussion in this respect. The inference must be that they are deemed unrealistic options for this period. An argument could also be made, therefore, regardless of one's views on either strategy, that history has yet to ask all the important questions when seeking to explain the genesis of Chamberlain's policy.

(4) VIABILITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Links between the Alternative and Government Policy

How viable were isolation and Pacifism considered to be as alternatives to appeasement during the late 1930s? To what extent did Chamberlain and company see these policies as realistic strategies for pursuit? In order to answer these questions we must first return to an earlier point and consider the extent to which isolation and Pacifism were actually related to, or facets of, appeasement itself. In the months after Munich, the Opposition regularly scolded Chamberlain for cowardice and implied that the Government was strongly Pacifist, pursuing a 'peace at any price' strategy. Labour leader Clement Attlee's attack on the Munich settlement in the House of Commons on 3 October 1938 was typical of the sort of charge. Here he expressed a certain admiration for Lansbury's 'complete Pacifist position', but inferred that Chamberlain, his Government and appeasement supporters were only 'pleasure-loving people... Pacifists because they will not take up any reasonable position'.⁵¹ This is illustrative of how critics of Pacifism often loaded their attacks with implications of self-interest, laziness and even hedonism, as if their targets were letting down their fellow countrymen or shirking responsibilities.

As previously stated, some isolation supporters also came to believe that Chamberlain's policy was moving increasingly towards their own as 1938 progressed. Beaverbrook confided to the Tory MP Edward Grigg on 20 June: 'As we have isolation in fact, although not in name, I have not much to complain about. Later on, if the Government tries to change its policy, then I must try to do something'.⁵² The Opposition parties also often tried to paint Chamberlain's appeasement as this old strategy in an effort to win popular support in condemnation of the Government. As early as 17 February 1937, before Chamberlain even assumed the premiership, Labour MP Sir Stafford Cripps claimed to have 'no doubts in my mind as to what the foreign policy of the Government is. It is a policy of remaining in loose isolation'.⁵³ Less than a couple of months after Chamberlain became Prime Minister, Liberal Party leader Sir Archibald Sinclair echoed these sentiments, accusing the Government of 'swinging towards' isolation during a House of Commons debate on 4 July.⁵⁴

Such accusations should be seen, in most cases, as a wilful misinterpretation of the facts - in order for isolation supporters to give their own policy extra credence, and so critics of the Government could rob the Prime Minister of it.

At first glance, there are many similarities between appeasement and isolation, and Chamberlain's policy did indeed have elements of the latter strategy in it. The Prime Minister sought to avoid alliances, at least before the Prague Coup, and to reduce Britain's commitments on the Continent and further afield. Similarly, his strategy seemed to be aiming at the rejection of the multilateral machinery of the League of Nations, which of course infuriated the Opposition, in favour of direct contacts with the Dictator powers and the pursuit of one-on-one deals. British policy in the Spanish Civil War was non-intervention, whilst commitment to the Commonwealth and Dominions, the last vestige of Empire, seemed unbowed. However, Chamberlain's appeasement differed from isolation in several key respects. Seeking to limit military commitments on the Continent, such as an expeditionary force, for example, should not be confused with the isolation supporters' favoured strategy of withdrawing all input from Europe, lock stock and barrel. What became known as a strategy of 'limited liability' - due to the weakness of Britain and the vulnerability of the Empire in face of the simultaneous rise of Germany, Italy and Japan - became a central pillar and driving impetus of Chamberlain's policy.

Sir Alexander Cadogan, who succeeded Vansittart as Permanent Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office in early 1938, explained the basic rationale:

We have inherited responsibilities all over the world, which have become onerous with the rise of power of other nations such as Japan... [The] Dominions make some contribution towards their own defence, but it is very much to be hoped that... they may find it possible to take a rather larger share, and to that extent leave us with a freer hand to deal with the menace nearer home.⁵⁵

Limited liability also, of course, encompassed Europe and behind this lay a recognition of Germany's 'natural' position of dominance at its heart. Chamberlain's second Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, for example, confided to his Private Secretary on 19 March 1938, that he had 'no objection to Germany having economic hegemony in Central Europe. What he objected to was the methods employed'.⁵⁶ Based upon a harsh assessment of the strategic position,

limited liability effectively sought to cut losses and concede areas of the globe to the Dictator powers (isolation advocates such as Amery, of course, also favoured this) but it did not envisage the wholesale abandonment of all Europe to German domination.⁵⁷ The same was true of Britain's non-intervention in the Spanish Civil war, as Halifax's predecessor Anthony Eden was keen to point out. In a speech in Llandudno on 15 October 1937, the Foreign Secretary stressed that there was 'a clear distinction between non-intervention and indifference. We are not,' he claimed, 'indifferent to the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Spain... We are not indifferent to vital British interests in the Mediterranean'.⁵⁸ Removing a foot from the water did not mean that Albion was stepping out of the pool entirely - and both isolation supporters and the Opposition knew this. Indeed, in many ways, limited liability represented a sort of halfway house between pure isolation and Chamberlain's preferred strategy of dialogue. It allowed aspects of retreat from Britain's unwieldy and burdensome commitments, something many isolation supporters would have approved of, while avoiding tying the Prime Minister down to total isolation and still affording him the means to exert an influence in Europe.

Chamberlain's appeasement also differed from isolation in an important theoretical sense. Whereas the vast majority of advocates of the latter envisaged a bolting of the doors, turning their back on Europe and ending all diplomacy with the Dictators, Chamberlain most certainly did not. Furthermore, isolation often implied a measure of drift, of 'wait and see', of indifference or even apathy to the issues of Europe and this again was a characteristic that appeasement did not share. Chamberlain was all business, a proactive and dynamic figure - some thought overly so - and watching affairs go by was simply not in his nature. 'Lasting peace is not to be obtained by sitting still and waiting for it to come,' he asserted after Munich; 'It requires active, positive efforts to achieve it'.⁵⁹ Others shared the Prime Minister's views. A month before Chamberlain assumed power Cadogan considered policy options: 'It's no use shutting our eyes and hiding our heads in the sand and doing nothing'.⁶⁰ Allowing events to progress in Europe while closing his eyes or watching from the outskirts was not to be a feature of Chamberlain's policy. In many ways, appeasement was a meddlesome strategy, a bold and even brave policy (in going directly one on one with the Dictators) given how the League of Nations had

sought to re-write the rules of international diplomacy over the past twenty years. To return to Lambert's 'good neighbour' metaphor, it is clear that Chamberlain would have been the very worst kind - inviting himself for tea with the man next door.

Where Pacifism was concerned, the shared characteristics with appeasement are even more obvious. The whole *raison d'être* of Chamberlain's policy was to maintain peace. However, such policies as 'Greggism' and non-violent resistance would have been abhorrent to the Prime Minister and he was always ready, although very reluctant, to fight in order to resist an attack upon any of Britain's vital interests. In Ceadel's terminology, Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement might be described as 'Pacificist', but not Pacifist.

It is telling that some of those who most fiercely backed appeasement at this time were keen to draw distinctions between that policy and either isolation or Pacifism. It suited advocates of these strategies to align themselves with Government policy more than it suited the Government to be linked with them. Lord Londonderry, for example, was at pains to make sure that it was known that he was 'not for an isolation policy', in Lords on 16 March 1938, shortly after the *Anschluss* had occurred.⁶¹ The Earl of Darnley, meanwhile, who as a Tory peer was similarly passionate about Chamberlain's policy, was moved to comment: 'The policy I am advocating is not a policy of Pacifism or idealism, nor is it a vision of utopia' when he addressed the House on 13 April 1939.⁶²

The Extent to which the Government Considered the Alternative as Viable

Given that Chamberlain's appeasement, while embodying some of the characteristics of isolation and Pacifism, can be seen as distinct from them, is it possible to make an assessment of how far his Government considered either as viable options? Isolation had been a policy considered by Baldwin, Chamberlain and their senior colleagues through the summer of 1936, when the Cabinet and Foreign Policy Committee discussed reform of the League of Nations. The Abyssinian affair was progressing so badly at this time, that the Government secretly contemplated effective British withdrawal from the League and was considering likely future strategies in such an event. However, in this case,

isolation was posed as a question for contemplation, rather than presented as a solution to the problem. A Foreign Office memo prepared on 13 July 1936 and circulated in the Cabinet and Foreign Policy Committee asked:

Is it not best that nations should know exactly where they stand and should make their own arrangements for self-defence in accordance with their national interests either in isolation or in conjunction with others?⁶³

Given that Britain remained a member of the League for the entirety of this decade, a decision was never taken on this issue. Such a document, however, is evidence that isolation was still up for consideration as a policy option at this time and often seen in a favourable light. A Foreign Office memo also discussing Cabinet views on Britain's role in the League, dated 24 August 1936, echoed this point. Here Eden's Private Secretary Oliver Harvey recommended that 'the greater our detachment from European entanglements the better'.⁶⁴

On 2 October of that year, in a speech to the Annual Party Conference, Chamberlain explained Government foreign policy:

We covet no one else's territory and we have no wish or intention to interfere with the internal affairs of any other nation... The dangers of interventions could not be more forcibly illustrated than by recent incidents in connection with the struggle now going on in Spain.⁶⁵

Just four days later, in response to being sent a copy of *The Forward View* by Amery, Chamberlain penned in reply: 'I think you know that limitation of commitments in Europe is the policy which commends itself to me'.⁶⁶ Before Chamberlain had even assumed the premiership, then, he and many of the senior figures in the Government had given consideration to isolation, or at least some degree of it, as a real foreign policy issue. Even at this early time, the Prime Minister-in-waiting clearly recognised that an element of isolation and a limiting of commitments would have to be a part of any future strategy he would drive. In the very month Chamberlain became Prime Minister, for example, Orme Sargent, Assistant Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, reiterated that Britain might still have to 'abdicate our position and go into isolation'.⁶⁷

However, accepting that some degree of isolation would be a feature of his policy - and one can perhaps see the genesis of limited liability in some of the above quotes - did not mean that Chamberlain wanted to go the whole hog when power eventually came his way. On the contrary, evidence strongly suggests that he and his colleagues deemed isolation and Pacifism as largely unrealistic strategies given the condition of the world they inherited. The crux of the question is perhaps best illustrated in a letter Chamberlain wrote to his distant cousin in Boston, Mrs Morton Prince, on 16 January 1938. Here the Prime Minister discussed American isolation and expounded his opinions on the issue:

I can well understand this frame of mind... Indeed we have a similar school of thought here... Yet, though my people are haunted by a constantly recurring fear of war, we are too close to the danger spots for any but a few cranks to hope that we could remain safe in isolation. We are a very rich and very vulnerable Empire, and there are plenty of poor adventurers not very far away who look on us with hungry eyes.⁶⁸

While seemingly expressing a certain sympathy with the general ideal, then, Chamberlain's fear of the Dictator powers being able to take advantage of Britain's far flung commitments and proximity to mainland Europe - this was, after all, the first age of the much-feared bomber and the English Channel now offered scant protection - seemed to render isolation as impractical from the outset.⁶⁹ As the Austrian crisis broke, for example, shortly after he had assumed the position of Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax reaffirmed this particular feature of the Government's fast-evolving policy. In a speech to Lords on 29 March 1938, he asserted: 'I do not believe in any short cut...or by resting on the theory of the balance of power, or isolation'.⁷⁰

That Chamberlain's new direction also considered Pacifism as an unrealistic option is strongly implied in a Conservative Research Department paper from the summer of this year. For example, in the 'Points for Propaganda' files, which essentially encompassed documents and evidence collected by the Tories with value for use against political opponents, a newspaper article had been pasted which illustrated the impracticality of the cause in face of Britain's need to rearm. On 5 July the *Daily Telegraph* had reported how Socialist MP Ernest Thurtle, a committed Pacifist, was reconsidering his views:

He said that he used to cry, “No more war”. The world had changed, and we now had no alternative but to take precautions to preserve our liberties from would-be tyrants in Europe. “You can be the finest Pacifist in the world and still take part in ARP [Air Raid Precautions] with a clear conscience”, Mr Thurtle said.

“It is purely humanitarian, in the same category as the St John Ambulance Brigade and the Red Cross”.⁷¹

In storing this article in this particular file, it was evident that the vast majority of the Conservative Party considered Pacifism worthy of derision in view of the needs of the day. Pacifism was almost always associated with disarmament (which had support from many Labour MPs) and the Government was keen to underline the necessity of the programme they had recently introduced.

There was still some impetus for isolation during the Chamberlain period from those closer to the policy making fold - that is military planners and war strategists. Admirals, in particular, often readily backed isolation, as Alistair Parker has observed. For example, he cites both the Chief of Naval Staff Ernle Chatfield and retired Admiral Sir Barry Domvile as committed supporters of the cause. The latter, who was once President of the Royal Naval College but was imprisoned in 1940 as a collaborator with the Germans, remarked in 1937 that ‘it is quite certain that the man in the street is not going to be led into any wild business in which his own country’s interests are not directly involved’.⁷² Chatfield would later become Chamberlain’s Minister for the Coordination of Defence. Admiral Reginald Drax, who was to come to prominence by leading the 1939 mission to Moscow for Soviet alliance talks, was no exception to this rule and indeed could be considered a diehard. In a 1936 Admiralty paper, entitled *British Foreign Policy* and written shortly after the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, he had asserted his belief that Britain should ‘withdraw from the muddle to the fullest extent that we can... make pacts and alliances with none, merely using our utmost diplomatic influence in favour of all who are supporting Right against the use of Might’.⁷³ By October 1937 he had come all out in favour of a policy which he entitled ‘Modified Isolation... the policy of America’, in which Britain would remain aloof from European affairs but stand by the general principles of international cooperation and sanctions against any power who pursued an ‘unjustifiable’ policy on the Continent.⁷⁴

It is clear that Chamberlain's Government had to perform a delicate balancing act. The limited liability dimension of appeasement emerged, therefore, almost as a concession to the strategic needs of the day. Britain, the defence Ministers and Chiefs of Staff constantly warned, had to reduce its commitments in Europe and retreat from its liabilities around the world. At the same time, Chamberlain and his senior colleagues recognised that total isolation was a dangerous policy - for the 'cranks' - given these responsibilities and the nation's vulnerability to attack. Appeasement can be seen, in part, as an attempt to tackle this dilemma and make the best of a bad situation.

Wider Judgements on the Viability of the Alternative

Was Chamberlain's Government correct to regard isolation and Pacifism as non-viable policies in the years before war? A wider survey of contemporary opinion seems to concur with this decision and suggest that it was. As previously stated, the vast majority of speakers on either policy from all sides of the House of Commons were overwhelmingly hostile. Both were deemed outdated strategies given the escalating threat to Europe and the Dominions and the extent to which Britain was over-stretched. The Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Viscount Cranborne's assertion that 'until somebody can find a method of detaching this island from its foundations and towing it away to a less vulnerable position it seems to me that the policy of isolation is the policy of an ostrich', in February 1936, was variously echoed by the leaders of the Opposition parties.⁷⁵ Sinclair's claim on 23 June that isolation is 'not to reduce our liabilities. It is greatly to increase them', was accompanied by Attlee's attack on both isolation *and* Pacifism on the same day.⁷⁶ The former, he asserted, gave no security, the latter position, while afforded respect, he could not understand.⁷⁷ Even Winston Churchill, who was by no means a warm supporter of his Government's foreign policy at this time, seemingly defended Chamberlain's more realistic outlook when he derided George Lansbury for putting on 'his rose coloured spectacles' whenever he looked at the world's problems, during a House of Commons debate in December 1937.⁷⁸

The press and public opinion in the late 1930s were similarly critical. The *Daily Herald*, a strong supporter of the Labour Party, described the ‘blank reasonable futility of Pacifism’ which it witnessed in the days after the Munich Agreement.⁷⁹ It had earlier asserted that isolation would bring ‘no peace, either for ourselves or the world’ shortly after the *Anschluss* in March 1938.⁸⁰ The *News Chronicle*, just a few days earlier, had concurred:

How can Lord Beaverbrook talk in the same breath of preserving the Empire and isolating Britain from Europe? If Lord Beaverbrook glances at a map he will see that the Mediterranean is part of Europe. And the Mediterranean happens to be a vital artery to a large part of the Empire, the peace of which he hopes to secure.⁸¹

A letter to the *Manchester Guardian* from Mr Harold Picton of Hertfordshire on 16 March serves as an example of how public opinion generally followed suit: ‘There are both voices and silences luring us towards isolation... The man who says, “I will never fight to defend anyone but myself” is not admirable’.⁸² A day earlier, Pacifism, too, received a damning verdict from one *News Chronicle* reader, Mr Archibald Robertson of Bournemouth:

It is hard to follow the logic of Pacifists. They think it wicked to resist aggression, and yet they seem to be never tired of making excuses for the aggressor!... It is a dirtier creed than I supposed.⁸³

The colourful view of one young ‘Metrop’ man, meanwhile, interviewed by Mass Observation on 26 September 1938, just before the Munich conference, was that ‘some of these bloody Pacifists want an operation and inject some British blood into them’!⁸⁴

Contemporary support for the rejection of isolation and Pacifism can also be found from further afield. For example, it is perhaps surprising that Gilbert Murray, Chairman of the League of Nations Union (what Ceadel would term a ‘Pacifist’ organisation) came out so strongly in favour of rejecting the pure Pacifism of the type advocated by Gregg and his supporters. Asserting his belief in the collective security ideals of the League of Nations, he also poured scorn on the cause of isolation. On 31 May 1938, during the height of the Czech crisis,

he put down his thoughts in a letter for the Executive Committee of the LNU, entitled 'Statement of Policy':

How, then, can security be attained?

If we rule out a policy of absolute Non-resistance as neither practicable, nor likely to discourage an aggressor, nor compatible with the obligations of human brotherhood, there remain two possibilities, Isolationism and Collective Defence.

Isolationism has immense attractions to conventional and unpractical minds. It enables a nation to indulge its prejudices, to ignore foreign complications, and to pursue a purely selfish policy. But clearly it cannot bring security to any European nation weaker than Germany, nor yet to an Empire so vulnerable and so tempting to the spoiler as the British.⁸⁵

It should be fairly evident, therefore, that neither policy was popular throughout the country during the Chamberlain era.

(5) CONCLUSION

Isolation and the Pacifist conception of isolation were clearly-stated policies advocated in the Chamberlain period by a small, but devoted band of enthusiastic supporters. Chamberlain's policy contained elements of both of these rival strategies (the path of strategic withdrawal from commitments as represented by limited liability being the major factor where isolation is concerned) but can *also* been seen as a distinct entity, separate from them, containing aspects to its nature which the other two did not. While Chamberlain and his Government considered isolation briefly - and the whole point of appeasement, moreover, was to secure the Pacifist ideal - both were eventually rejected as unrealistic strategies given the actions of the Dictators in the late 1930s. Ironically, it was that which was favoured by so many isolation supporters - the Empire - which was perhaps the decisive factor in the demise of isolation. The fact that bomber aircraft had rendered the defensive qualities of the English Channel a pale imitation of what they used to be also played a role. This was the age when 'the bomber will always get through', as Baldwin stated in a House of Commons speech as far back as 1932.⁸⁶

Moreover, It was almost impossible to be apathetic from the affairs of Europe in the conditions and mood of that period, an era of conflicting international ideologies so graphically illustrated by the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, Europe as a whole could be said to have been fighting a Civil War at this time. Given that social and political movements in this decade often transcended national borders - members of the British Left fought to rid Spain of Franco's Right, for example - would public opinion have been able to tolerate isolation or Pacifism indefinitely? When war eventually came, the mood of the nation and Commonwealth was determined and united. The shelf-life of isolation or Pacifism, therefore, given the advent of Hitlerism, has to be considered very short indeed.

Wider support for the rejection of these strategies from non-Government sources was also apparent and backs up the assertion that the pursuit of either of these lines by Chamberlain would have been extremely unpopular, not least viewed as very risky ventures indeed. Isolation was damned from all quarters as

unrealistic and extreme Pacifism of the utopian kind was discredited even amongst the PPU's own ranks by the middle of 1938. It is understandable therefore, why, without the benefit of today's hindsight, Chamberlain rejected these alternatives. While Taylor's assertion that isolation had effectively helped Britain win the war does hold some credence, this was only because Munich and appeasement had bought time for rearmament before the Battle of Britain took place - whether or not this was Chamberlain's intention.⁸⁷ The country found itself in isolation during the war because of the lottery of events; its leadership did not consciously choose to take that path - indeed Chamberlain attempted to act with allies long before 1940. To have pursued isolation *instead* of appeasement, say in 1937 or 1938, would have been a very different matter and the results cannot be certain. Furthermore, neither Taylor nor Denman, enjoying as they do the benefit of hindsight, ever contend that isolation would have averted a war and the central aim of appeasement was to *avoid* the great catastrophe happening altogether. Indeed, it could even be claimed that isolation or Pacifism, pursued vigorously by Chamberlain's Government, might have only brought war earlier than it actually came. Britain's key role in securing the Munich conference, for example, avoided a European war in late 1938 which looked so certain had Chamberlain's personal influence not induced Hitler to come to the table.

What, then, might have happened in the late 1930s had the Prime Minister been able to steer Britain towards either isolation or Pacifism, as unlikely as this was given public opinion? Fascist militarism in Europe would have been in no way diminished and may very probably have been emboldened. Events, therefore, might have taken a similar course through 1937 and much of 1938. The *Anschluss*, after all, was carried out despite Anglo-French protests and so a pacific or isolated Britain would have hardly been likely to have deterred Hitler from acting. Had Chamberlain stayed at home during September 1938, however, it is likely that war would have erupted at this time. In Britain's absence, France would probably have been forced to take a more prominent role in events, but it is difficult to believe that that country alone, without Britain at its side, could have deterred Hitler from marching into the Sudetenland or convinced him to hold a conference and settle the matter peacefully, as Chamberlain did. Indeed, France might have just acted even more timidly than it did at Munich without its

partner across the Channel standing firm, despite its direct commitment to Czechoslovakia. The chances of Russia joining France and Czechoslovakia in a stand against Germany in 1938 - which are questionable anyway, as later chapters will suggest - would be even less without British assistance.

Had the Prime Minister remained aloof, it is probable that Hitler might have attempted to secure a deal or alliance with Britain himself at some stage. It is known from the pages of *Mein Kampf*, for example, that this was considered favourably by him. Unless Britain was prepared to pursue an utterly cynical policy and acquiesce with Nazi Germany's attempt to dominate the Continent then this could not have been accepted, and indeed it is extremely unlikely that it would have been. Would Hitler have left Britain alone during any resulting war which it was isolated from? Once France had fallen, which might have occurred even more quickly without British assistance, it is possible that the *Führer* would have attempted an invasion given his treatment of other neutral states during the war itself. More likely is the fact that some vital interest of Britain's - perhaps a colony or Dominion - would have been menaced by one of the Axis powers and Britain would then have had to join the struggle lest it roll over completely and surrender.

Would the resulting war have been better or worse for Britain than actual events as they happened? On a purely selfish basis, it may have been possible for Britain to have survived invasion during some hypothetical 'other' war, as the events of 1940 proved. John Charmley has even contended that a policy of peaceful coexistence with Germany might have been better, militarily speaking, for Britain and its Empire.⁸⁸ However, the moral basis for such a line would have been almost non-existent and the Charmley thesis takes little account of the wider factors undermining Empire. It is doubtful, however, that the country would have been induced to rearm sufficiently enough to survive had appeasement not been tried and failed to sway Hitler from militarism - and therefore demonstrated the *need* to prepare for war vigorously. The year's grace secured by Munich, in which most of the Hurricanes and Spitfires which won the Battle of Britain were built, might not have come about without Munich itself, which in turn would not have occurred without British interference in European affairs. Finally, it is doubtful whether an isolationist Britain would have gained the sympathy and eventual assistance of its many later allies such as

the United States, whose own isolationist tendencies would have been reinforced by Britain's detachment from affairs (rather than eroded by that country's efforts to appease and then resist Nazi Germany). It is difficult to believe that war would have been averted, or that the eventual outcome would have been more favourable, had isolation or Pacifism been pursued by this country at that time.

1. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Commons*, vol.313, col.1691, 18 June 1936.
2. It has to be noted that the definition of 'isolation' and its history as a policy is a somewhat contentious issue. See Christopher Howard, 'The Policy of Isolation', *Historical Journal*, vol.10 (1), 1967, pp.77-88. For a more recent discussion of this policy, see, for example, John Charmley, *Splendid Isolation? Britain and the Balance of Power, 1874-1914* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999).
3. Chamberlain had reaffirmed the Government's policy of Non-intervention in the conflict shortly after he succeeded Baldwin as Premier at the end of May 1937.
4. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Lords*, vol.100, cols 531-2, 24 March 1936.
5. Harold Macmillan, *The Winds of Change, 1914-39* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p.578.
6. Quoted, R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the coming of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p.317.
7. Quoted, John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, vol.5, 1929-45* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp.345-6.
8. Leo Amery, Conservative MP, to Neville Chamberlain, 11 Nov. 1937, AMEL 2/1/27, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Leo Amery (AMEL) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
9. Amery to Anthony Eden, former Foreign Secretary (1935-38), 10 Oct. 1938, AMEL 2/2/10.
10. For contemporary newspaper circulation figures see Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), pp.25-6.
11. *Sunday Express*, 15 July 1934.
12. *Daily Express*, 9 March 1936.
13. *Daily Express*, 10 March 1936.
14. *Daily Express*, 14 March 1938.
15. Lord Beaverbrook, owner of the *Daily Express*, to Amery, 10 Nov. 1937, AMEL 2/1/26(1).
16. Amery to Beaverbrook, 12 Nov. 1936, AMEL 2/1/26(1).
17. See, for example, Admiral Drax's later comments on the USA.
18. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 4 Oct. 1938.
19. Beaverbrook to Amery, 8 July 1936 and 10 Nov. 1936, AMEL 2/1/26(1).
20. *Daily Express*, 14 March 1936.
21. Charles Madge and Tom Harrison (eds.), *Britain: By Mass Observation* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1939), p.46.
22. British Union of Fascists, *Mind Britain's Business: B.U.F. Notes for Speakers* (1936).
23. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 1433-4, 24 March 1938.
24. HL Deb 5s, vol.100, col.1465, 5 Oct. 1938 (my emphasis).
25. Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp.248-9.
26. Bertrand Russell, *Which Way to Peace?* (London: Michael Joseph, 1936).
27. *Peace News*, 10 April 1936. Quoted, Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-45*, p.249.

28. Indeed, there exist a number of such studies. See, for example, Ceadel's thesis on which his subsequent book was partly based: M. Ceadel, '*Pacifism in Britain, 1931-1939*', unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge University (1978). B. G. Burzan, '*The British Peace Movement, 1919-31*', unpublished PhD thesis, London University (1973) is also useful for the earlier period.
29. See Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945*, particularly his introduction.
30. Here is an illustration of why Ceadel's distinction is so useful. Before it was made, many of those who might have previously been simply labelled 'Pacifists' - for example members of the League of Nations Union - were actually advocates, at one time or another, of military sanctions against Germany and Italy. The religious dimension of Pacifism and foreign policy in general during this period has been discussed in several articles. See, for example, Andrew Chandler, 'Munich and Morality: The Bishops of the Church of England and Appeasement', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.5 (1), 1994, pp.77-99; Alan Wilkinson, 'Thanking God for Neville Chamberlain: Appeasement and the English Churches', *Modern History Review*, vol.1 (2), 1989, pp.26-7; or Philip Williamson, 'Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge, 1933-40', *English Historical Review*, vol.115 (462), 2000, pp.607-42.
31. Lord Saltoun's quote earlier in this chapter is perhaps an illustration of the cross-over between isolation, Pacifism and Christianity.
32. According to Ceadel, the Peace Pledge Union had a peak membership in 1940 of around 136,000. While the League of Nations Union had a larger membership at its peak (over 400,000 in 1931), this group would, under Ceadel's definition, be considered 'Pacificist'.
33. Here the Oxford Union unanimously adopted the resolution *not* to fight for King and country.
34. Quoted, Alan Campbell Johnson, *Peace Offering* (London: Methuen, 1936), pp.154-5.
35. Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, pp.254-9.
36. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, cols 323-4, 20 March 1939.
37. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.342, 20 March 1939.
38. *News Chronicle*, 11 Aug. 1939.
39. There was a small band of figures, such as the Tory Earl of Darnley, among others, who advocated the continuance of appeasement after Chamberlain himself had effectively abandoned it, not from Pacifist convictions *per se*, but from a committed belief in the moral good of the cause - faith in diplomacy, international justice and a revision of Versailles. There were also, of course, some who wanted appeasement continued who were pro-Nazi or had links with the extreme Right. For more information these, see Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933-39* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
40. See Leo Amery, *My Political Life*, vol.3, *The Unforgiving Years, 1929-40* (London: Hutchinson, 1955) and Barnes and Nicolson (eds.), *The Empire at Bay*.
41. Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), pp.503-4.
42. Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, p.481.
43. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.581.
44. A. J. P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), p.350.
45. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, pp.343-4.

46. Howard, 'The Policy of Isolation'.
47. David C. Lukowitz, 'British Pacifists and Appeasement: The Peace Pledge Union', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.9 (1), 1974, pp.115-27.
48. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp.316-9.
49. See, for example, John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989).
50. Roy Denman, *Missed Chances: Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), p.151.
51. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.65, 3 Oct. 1938.
52. Quoted, Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p.383.
53. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, col.1458, 17 Feb. 1937.
54. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, col.2949, 4 July 1937.
55. 'Policy Review', 14 Oct. 1938. Quoted, D. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45* (London: Cassell, 1971), p.116.
56. Quoted, J. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-40* (London: Collins, 1970), p.121.
57. Limited liability had particular impact on the debate about Britain's Expeditionary Force and the role of a land army on the Continent. For a good discussion of the origins and theory behind limited liability see M. Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London: Temple Smith, 1971).
58. Quoted, Earl of Avon, *Facing the Dictators: The Eden Memoirs* (London: Cassell, 1962), p.472.
59. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.49, 3 Oct. 1938.
60. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.14. Cadogan makes similar comments on other dates. See, for example, his entry on 7 Nov. 1938, p.123.
61. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, col.143, 16 March 1938.
62. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.628, 13 April 1939 .
63. Foreign Policy Committee Memoranda, 13 July 1936, CAB 27/626/FP(36)/5, The National Archives (TNA). Cabinet (CAB) papers are located at the National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
64. FO371/20475/W11340, 24 Aug. 1936, The National Archives (TNA). Foreign Office (FO) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
65. Conservative Research Department papers, CRD 1/24, fol. 2, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Conservative Research Department papers (CRD) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
66. Chamberlain to Amery, 6 Oct. 1936, AMEL 2/1/26(1).
67. FO371/20735/C3621, 10 May 1937.
68. Quoted, Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1946), p.322.
69. The fear of aerial bombardment in Britain at this time was widespread and substantial. See Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics, 1932-39* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980).

70. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, col.485, 29 March 1938. The concept of a 'balance of power' in Europe was a long held one and rested upon the centuries old tradition of British Statesmen not wanting to see the Continent dominated by any one nation. It linked to the issue of isolation in that many policy thinkers during Lord Salisbury's period, when the issue was debated and the term 'Splendid Isolation' first coined, thought that Britain should stay out of Europe while the continental powers balanced each other out. Britain should only become involved, they contended, to act as the counterweight itself, when certain states or collections of states began to claim the ascendancy and dominate. This became a sort of unwritten rule of foreign policy in the minds of many isolation advocates coming years.
71. Quoted, CRD 1/78/1, fol. 96, p.3.
72. Quoted, Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p.318.
73. 'British Foreign Policy', 18 March 1936, DRAX 2/18, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Admiral Drax (DRAX) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre.
74. 'Relations with Germany', 24 Oct. 1937, DRAX 2/18.
75. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, col.160, 24 Feb. 1936.
76. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, col.1634, 23 June 1936.
77. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, cols 1613-5, 23 June 1936.
78. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1829, 21 Dec. 1937.
79. *Daily Herald*, 3 Oct. 1938.
80. *Daily Herald*, 12 March 1938.
81. *News Chronicle*, 11 March 1938.
82. *Manchester Guardian*, 16 March 1938.
83. *News Chronicle*, 15 March 1938.
84. Madge and Harrison (eds.), *Britain*, p.87.
85. Gilbert Murray papers, MS Gilbert Murray 232, fol. 214, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Gilbert Murray papers (MS Gilbert Murray) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
86. HC Deb 5s, vol.270, cols 632-8, 10 Nov. 1932.
87. There is some debate on this issue. Chamberlain did make one or two references to playing for time, although there is little evidence that he sought to postpone war now in the hope that he could fight a 'better' war later on after rearming. It is probable that he felt a war postponed might never occur.
88. John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*.

TWO: COLONIAL AND ECONOMIC APPEASEMENT

Economic questions should be thoroughly and systematically studied with a view to large changes in... the economic and colonial layout of the world... It may well be, in the course of these discussions, that a large number of special British privileges will have to be surrendered for the sake of the peaceful and prosperous future of the world as a whole.¹ (Hugh Dalton, 1936).

(1) INTRODUCTION

Many of Chamberlain's contemporary critics asserted that the National Government should have pursued the colonial and economic aspects of appeasement with far more energy and to a far greater extent than it ever did. Opponents such as Hugh Dalton, Labour spokesman on foreign affairs, in this case addressing Parliament on 16 March 1936, contended that this strategy would have averted war by removing many of the major grievances of the Dictator states. A sizeable minority of Britons, who were suffering under the Great Depression of the 1930s and had recently been introduced to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, held that economic strangulation bred global resentment and fostered the causes of war, as shall be demonstrated.² Many believed that by removing trade restrictions, reducing commercial barriers and increasing access to raw materials and living space - the famous Nazi demand for *Lebensraum* - certain 'Have-Not' powers could be satisfied and Britain would be making a vital contribution to world peace. Others felt that Chamberlain, although undertaking limited colonial and economic appeasement himself, did not go anywhere near far enough.

This chapter will examine the origins and viability of the closely entwined strategies of colonial and economic appeasement as alternatives to the policy Chamberlain pursued in the late 1930s. Colonial appeasement was one specific aspect of the wider economic sphere. It was principally concerned with Hitler's demands for a return of the former German territories in Africa which were confiscated as part of the 1919 peace settlement and placed under a League of Nations mandate. Areas like Togoland, Tanganyika and the Cameroons, entrusted to British administration by the League, were particularly contentious.

Mussolini, too, had colonial grievances and the successive Japanese regimes of the late 1930s also had ambitions in this field, but the colonial aspect was essentially an Anglo-German facet of the economic realm. After all, this was the one question in which Hitler's complaints were levelled primarily at Britain, rather than to the victor states in general - because Britain was still the world's foremost Imperial power - and the issue was discussed in both countries as a result. Throughout this chapter priority will be given, as it was at the time, to Anglo-German relations when considering economic appeasement, though other countries will also be considered when appropriate.

While these aspects of the appeasement question have received a fair amount of scholarly attention, particularly in the revisionist and post-revisionist literature, there has been scant consideration of how viable colonial and economic appeasement were as options the National Government might have pursued further or in a radically different way. Indeed, because such strategies were facets of Chamberlain's own policy, wider contemporary criticism of the Prime Minister's actions in the economic sphere has often been ignored. The life that these policies enjoyed as non-Government peace strategies has remained largely alien to the student of international affairs in this period. A chapter such as this is justified, therefore, for several reasons.

In many ways this will be a somewhat peculiar endeavour, in that some of the 'alternatives' discussed were indeed carried out to a large extent by the Government. Advocates of colonial and economic appeasement were as likely to be found amongst Cabinet circles as across the chamber of the House of Commons. However, whereas non-Government critics of Chamberlain's policy often advocated wide economic appeasement measures as the end, if you like, rather than the means, those within the policy making elite saw it usually only as one aspect of, and complementary to, the main strategy. As shall become clear, there were also radically differing conceptions of what 'economic appeasement' actually meant, and how it should be carried out, from both within and outside Government circles.

A word or two about definitions is needed before beginning. It will become apparent as this chapter progresses that colonial and economic appeasement were complex phenomena, with many facets, often encompassing seemingly different characteristics. Gustav Schmidt, in particular, is keen to stress the

difficulties in defining what exactly 'economic appeasement' towards Germany was.³ He has identified nine separate facets of the policy as being existent in the British Government's mind at this time. These include, in no particular order, (1) the granting of economic concessions to Germany in order to foster closer cooperation and remove grievances; (2) the return of Germany to a global system of multilateral trade; (3) an attempt to win Germany over towards the economic systems of Western Europe, as opposed to the Soviet sphere, where Russo-German economic cooperation was feared; (4) the recognition that certain areas of influence in Central and Eastern Europe were to be left to German economic domination; (5) the settling of debts, granting of loans and potential cession of raw materials or colonies between Britain and Germany; (6) the creation of a unique Anglo-German economic partnership to shield mutual recovery from the wider effects of the world Depression; (7) the desire of Britain to revise any of its own economic practices which were disadvantageous to Germany; (8) the aim of Britain to identify and promote peaceful ways in which Germany could alleviate its internal economic problems; and (9) the fostering of closer relations between British and German industrialists in order to oil the cogs of diplomacy.

It will also be seen that different individuals and groups active in foreign policy debate during the late 1930s had varying perceptions of what economic appeasement meant. The notion regularly constituted many, often shifting aims dependant on who was promoting it and when and where it might be enacted. Thus, many figures, usually on the Left of the political spectrum, like Attlee, essentially envisaged economic appeasement as being a grand strategy aimed at all of Europe and parts of the wider world, designed to cure a continent's economic ills and lessen causes of global friction. This could be done, for example, by easing trade restrictions across borders and regions or by opening up the vast resources of the British Empire to the world. Others, however, usually among Chamberlain's own circle, who were formulating Government policy, often interpreted economic appeasement as a more complementary strategy, encompassing essentially limited and specific agenda targeted at, say, Germany, Italy or Japan in isolation. Vansittart would be one example or even the Prime Minister himself. A trade deal, colonial concession or a loan between two countries would be the order of the day here. This would be designed to win

favour with or modify the aggressive behaviour of the targeted party. In this respect, then, the policy was conceived of as operating on both macro- and micro-scope levels, dependant on who was promoting the cause and when they were doing so.

Similarly, what most people at the time simply termed 'economic appeasement' could, in fact, be a double-edged sword, encompassing concessionary and pacific characteristics as well as aggressive and restrictive ones. Thus, it will be seen that in 1939 the Chamberlain Government tried to ply Germany with loans so that it would behave more amicably. Within the space of just a few months, however, it also tried to pump financial resources into Germany's neighbours and thereby cage the tiger by building a bloc of economic dependents which could encircle the Nazi regime. A blurring of the lines between economic appeasement and a more cynical, *Realpolitik* economic warfare was often apparent but the two contrasting strands of this 'one' strategy, if it can be considered thus, were not always clearly distinguished.⁴ This has resulted in an overly-simplistic and inaccurate understanding of the policy. Economic appeasement was, in fact, all of these things and more. Careful attention must be paid to the nuances and ambiguities of the strategy as they are identified throughout this chapter.

The chapter will begin by charting the origins and development of colonial and economic appeasement as suggested alternatives to Government policy. It will consider the main historiography produced on these topics before closing with an assessment of how viable they were, in both perception and actuality.

(2) ORIGINS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

This section will chart the development of colonial and economic appeasement as alternatives to Chamberlain's policy by focusing on some of the main proponents of the cause active in politics at the time. Colonial and economic appeasement had been discussed in Britain and the wider world long before Chamberlain had assumed the premiership. Discontent with the 1919 peace settlement was rife and it was not long before those on both sides, the victors and the vanquished, expressed a desire to revise some of its terms. At the Locarno negotiations in 1925, for example, German Chancellor Gustav Stresemann had unsuccessfully enquired about the possibility of having a colonial mandate awarded to Germany. This then brought wider economic factors onto the table. Colonial claims were at the heart of more general economic questions through the issue of raw materials, minerals, living space and territories for commercial exploitation. Discussion of colonies also opened up the bigger questions of Empire and Imperial trade, with many amongst both the winners and losers of the war convinced that Britain's place at the heart of a huge Commonwealth monopoly was unjust. At a time when most of the globe was suffering from unparalleled economic hardships born from the Wall Street Crash in 1929, the existence of a system of British Imperial Preference was a bitter pill for many to swallow.

After the subsequent Great Depression had given the Nazis a platform to come to power in Germany, it was not long before Hitler began to tie up economic issues like these with aspirations of dismantling the Versailles system and securing German national resurgence. When the British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare made a statement to the League of Nations in September 1935 calling for an enquiry into the issue of fairer access to raw materials, such questions were brought to the fore once again. Hitler capitalised on the opportunity. He linked his March 1936 offer to rejoin the League of Nations - a 'peace' gesture following the reoccupation of the Rhineland - with a vague *quid pro quo* insistence that 'within a reasonable time... the question of colonial equality of rights will be cleared up'.⁵

Calls for colonial and economic appeasement as a means to ease international tensions and avoid a future war thus began to surface throughout Britain around this time. The former Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George was one of the first to raise the issue of a new colonial deal with states like Germany in the House of Commons on 5 February 1936. He cited the injustice of that country having no colonial territories in Africa to utilise, while smaller powers like Belgium, Holland and Portugal did. He also pointed out that the territories which passed into British administration under the Treaty of Versailles were not its possessions to exploit in the way of the old Empire, but belonged instead to the League of Nations: 'I do not believe that you will have peace in the world until you reconsider the mandates,' he concluded.⁶ A few weeks later the Liberal leader, Archibald Sinclair, broadened the discussion further. Any economic adjustments he favoured would have to be wider than just colonial:

Markets are as important as raw materials, and if we are to solve the great question of migration and the economic suffocation from which many countries are suffering, we shall have to take a wider view of the task than merely facilitating access to raw materials.⁷

As the Rhineland crisis broke, former Labour leader George Lansbury carried this line on further, attacking Baldwin's policy of increased arms expenditure:

I want the Government led by the Prime Minister to go to the world, even in the midst of this terrible upheaval with Germany and France, and say that... we are willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary; not to share out bits of land here and there, but to find a means of pooling the resources of the world, sharing the markets and the territories of the world for the service of mankind. It is the only way to peace. No other way is possible.⁸

Even the earliest calls for wide measures such as these demonstrate that the policy was backed mostly by the Left or Centre-Left ranks of the political spectrum at this time, though by no means exclusively. It also found favour within some Tory circles - Lord Lothian wrote a letter to *The Times* on 11 February 1936, for example, extolling the virtue of reduced trade barriers and increased access to raw materials - as well as broad support from many

Pacifists.⁹ Indeed, apart from the League of Nations option, as shall be shown, extreme colonial and economic appeasement marks perhaps the most consistently advocated alternative to Government policy as suggested by Labour and the Liberals throughout this period.¹⁰

Calls for colonial and economic appeasement gathered momentum in Parliament throughout the rest of this year with one or two Conservatives also expressing sympathy for the cause. Sir Rupert de la Bere, for example, who has already been seen as an isolation advocate, favoured reform and reorganisation of the League of Nations to make it more along the lines of a 'vast chamber of commerce'. Its central purpose, he contended, when addressing the House of Commons on 18 June 1936, should be non-political - to 'develop the trade of the world' and 'prevent that terrible hunger for land' which was afflicting the Dictator states.¹¹ In response, Labour MP Sir Stafford Cripps firmed up what had so far been largely vague proposals for economic appeasement in a call for a new 'international economic organisation' to be established, which would aim at fostering global cooperation in such matters.¹² By the end of the year, other states like Japan were also being referred to explicitly as aggressive 'Have-Not' powers who should be targeted for such measures.¹³

By the time Chamberlain came to power in May 1937, advocates of radical measures of colonial and economic appeasement formed a substantial body in British foreign policy thinking. The new Prime Minister's long and successful spell as Chancellor of the Exchequer offered hope to such people that these issues would be tackled soon. The Labour and Liberal Opposition, in March and June of that year respectively, produced literature outlining their policies in the economic field. Labour demanded shared global wealth and their MP David Grenfell called for 'world cooperation in the development of raw materials and trade facilities' in the House of Commons during March.¹⁴ This, he saw, as 'the only alternative to war.'¹⁵

The Liberals, meanwhile, called for 'the abandonment of economic Imperialism, the relaxation of trade restrictions, the relief of the economic terrorism in the world and the restoration of peaceful overseas trade'.¹⁶ These goals would be achieved through a termination of the Ottawa system, the scheme established in 1932 which created preferential trade relations for Britain and its Empire and closed the door to outside influence. This policy statement

had followed on from Liberal peer Lord Noel-Buxton's motion in the House of Lords on 17 February 1937 calling for the existing non-mandated colonies belonging to Britain and other Imperial powers to be given over to the League for global utilisation. The occasional Tory advocate of colonial and economic concessions, such as Brigadier General Edward Spears, for example, also continued to criticise the Government's policy. Baldwin, who was soon to depart as Prime Minister, was seen off in the House of Commons on 25 February with a stern rebuke: 'Can we stick our heads in the sand while day in and day out in Germany - and among reasonable people too - they are saying that they rearm to have their colonies back?'¹⁷

Chamberlain's accession to power was to give a dynamic new impetus to the policy of appeasement and the colonial and economic spheres were not to be excluded from this strategy. However, critics of the National Government's policy continued their attacks on the new Prime Minister, asserting that only truly radical and wide-scale concessions in the economic field would avert a future war. After a few months grace, while Chamberlain settled into his new job, the criticism of Government policy resumed. On 21 December 1937 Labour leader Clement Attlee went on the offensive, echoing Noel-Buxton's call for all colonies owned by the major powers to be sacrificed for a wider peace:

It is surely time that we tried to get a new settlement. With regard to colonial territories, we do not believe in a re-dividing up. We believe that all colonies of all powers should be held on the principle of a League mandate, first for the peoples of those territories, and, secondly, for the whole world.¹⁸

It is significant how Attlee distinguished between a 're-dividing up' of colonies and the policy he suggested. Such a point is indicative of how the majority of even the most ardent pro-colonial appeasers were keen for territories and their inhabitants not to be handed straight over from Britain to direct German rule.¹⁹ This point was echoed on the same day by Winston Churchill, who, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, given his later views, actually backed a degree of colonial appeasement at this time if it would avert war.²⁰ However, the only scheme he favoured was on the basis of a wide and general settlement with every major colonial power giving lands over to a League mandatory system.

There would be no cession from Britain alone and no return of any territory to direct German control. Sinclair, meanwhile, echoed Attlee's main points, although he referred more specifically to Imperial Preference and called for Britain to 'break the shackles of Ottawa and Protection' during this debate.²¹

Sinclair also placed high importance on securing closer cooperation with the world's foremost economic power, the United States, in the realms of economic appeasement.²² A potential trade deal with that country was often seen as the best means to bring America into the international fold at this time.²³ Secretary of State Cordell Hull was one of the world's foremost advocates of economic appeasement as a means to secure peace. He pushed harder than most for Anglo-American initiatives in the direction of freer trade at this time, as shall be seen. Many Pro-American elements in Britain often used the economic sphere as a way to encourage closer Anglo-American relations in general. Tory rebel Leo Amery, for example, who is traditionally understood as being an arch anti-colonial and economic appeaser (despite actually pressing Chamberlain to give financial aid to Italy and Japan and recommending the Cameroons as a potential 'sweetener' for Germany in a letter to the Prime Minister in November 1937) advocated ending Imperial Preference at this time, not so much to better Anglo-German relations as to improve Anglo-American ones.²⁴ He explained these views in a letter to his old friend Jan Smuts, who was soon to be South African Prime Minister, just a month before this House of Commons debate.²⁵

The cause of colonial and economic appeasement was to receive new impetus in early 1938 with the *Anschluss* in March of that year and the publication of the van Zeeland Report in January. Commissioned by the Governments of Britain and France in March 1936, this plan of economic recommendations designed to avert war was produced by the Belgian Prime Minister Paul van Zeeland and received widespread attention across the Continent.²⁶ Among other things, it advocated an economic conference to be attended by all the world's major powers, while supporting moves towards an internationalisation of the existing mandate system. It also backed liberalised access to raw materials as well as a Pact of Economic Collaboration to be agreed by as many countries as possible. van Zeeland's suggestions received backing by the main Opposition parties, with Attlee echoing the suggestion for a 'calling together of the nations' and deriding Chamberlain's early performance in

foreign affairs in a speech to Commons on 24 March 1938: 'He has not been very successful with the political difficulties. Perhaps he had better turn and try to deal with the economic difficulties'.²⁷ Sinclair, meanwhile, on the same day, outlined Liberal policy:

We will cooperate with them [Germany and Italy] in setting up international commissions to consider their grievances... such as the problem of colonies... On the lines of the van Zeeland Report, we would, in cooperation with Germany and Italy, set about curing the disease of economic nationalism with all its symptoms of quotas, tariffs and exchange restrictions.²⁸

As the summer of 1938 progressed, the House of Commons witnessed the first real calls for the more limited, targeted and vaguely aggressive economic appeasement measures of the type briefly covered in the introduction to this chapter. The majority of economic appeasement demands so far had been in the wide colonial sphere and were often concerned with the improvement of the financial position of many powers. Those in July, however, were largely of direct loans from the League or Britain to one specific country alone, China, with a view to the financial power of another state, Japan, being kept in check.

The full scale Sino-Japanese hostilities, which had broken out in the Far East one year earlier, had been progressing badly from the Chinese point of view.²⁹ As a fellow League member suffering from aggression at the hands of an increasingly militaristic Japan, there was widespread sympathy for China in Britain. Some MPs called for a cash loan to be granted in order to bolster that country's war effort. The appeasement of one country's economic troubles was therefore being envisaged by British foreign policy thinkers with the aim of defeating, or at least sending a strong message to, another aggressor power. The famous suffrage campaigner and Independent MP Eleanor Rathbone addressed the House of Commons in July, scornful of the Government's efforts so far and calling for a League-sponsored loan to be arranged: 'Could the Chancellor have told Japan more plainly that we were too afraid of her to do what is our duty as a member of the League?'³⁰ The distinctions between appeasement in the traditional sense of the word (that is, in satisfying an aggressive nation) and this particular form of economic appeasement, which deliberately undermined the aggressive nation as a by-product of helping another pacific one, become more

apparent here. These two almost antithetical strands to what has traditionally been understood as ‘one’ policy, illustrate some of the complexities one faces when discussing economic appeasement.

The Munich Agreement in September 1938, as the zenith for supporters of appeasement, unsurprisingly breathed new life into calls for more radical colonial and economic concessions. Even the harshest critics of Chamberlain’s political efforts at Munich felt that wide economic appeasement held a good chance for future peace, if efforts were now made to build on the new mood of cooperation. On 3 October, the first day of the great Munich debate in the House of Commons, Attlee called for a new economic conference - a sort of monetary Munich, if you like, but without the Czech sacrifices - to follow on from what had just been achieved. The Labour leader derided the settlement, calling for ‘a *real* peace conference to which people will not come merely to rattle the sabre’. Its central aim would be ‘to deal with the colonial question, to deal with the question of raw materials, to deal, above all, with the great economic question... to build a new world’.³¹ Such a strategy was also echoed in the House of Lords, with the Archbishop of Canterbury Cosmo Lang, for example, calling for a new economic conference.³²

Lord Strabolgi, Labour’s Chief Whip in the House of Lords, also agreed, but added his wish for a general colonial settlement to result from such a gathering when he addressed the House on 4 October.³³ Perhaps the most striking contribution to the debate in the upper House, however, came on 5 October from Liberal peer Lord Arnold. He used some telling statistics to powerful effect in promoting his cause:

It is the great inequality in the distribution of economic wealth and territory throughout the world which is one of the chief causes of international unrest. As a matter of fact, six powers, if I may so call them, the British Empire, France, Russia, the United States, Brazil and China have about two-thirds of the territory of the world, leaving one-third to the other sixty nations, including Italy and Germany... The British Empire and the United States have about two-thirds of the economic mineral wealth of the world... Any sacrifices which the “Have” powers may have to make to the “Have-Not” powers... would be infinitesimal compared with the devastation and horror of another world war.³⁴

The year ended with the most concrete proposals for colonial and economic appeasement to date, when Labour MP Philip Noel Baker brought a new motion for all the major world powers' colonies to be mandated and given to the League for re-allocation. In a House of Commons sitting on 7 December 1938, devoted almost exclusively to the question of colonial policy, he asserted that 'Militarist Imperialism' - which he claimed was at the heart of the recent conflicts in Manchuria, Abyssinia, China and Spain - was driven by economic injustice and would only be defeated with a re-division of territories and raw materials.³⁵

In a debate of diverse opinion, the notion of an international colonial 'pool' was suggested by George Lansbury, as an alternative to the existing mandates system. This would be administered by an International Civil Service, with all the major powers - including the Fascist states - taking their turn to watch over the pool, into which every country could dip.³⁶ While some Ministers expressed a preference for the mandatory system, and some indeed voiced their opposition to colonial appeasement root and branch, as shall be seen, Lansbury's pool idea emerged as an ambitious new compromise between these two positions. It gained tacit approval from other figures in Parliament, such as Labour MP Arthun Creech Jones, for example, who concurred that a wholesale mandatory system was not the fairest method for progression.³⁷ United in opposition to Government policy and convinced that Chamberlain should have been doing much more in the economic field, critics of the Prime Minister were nevertheless often divided over the best way to proceed in reaching their goals.

Wider Advocates: Other Groups, Press and Public Opinion

So far this chapter has been mostly concerned with Parliamentary views on colonial and economic appeasement, but a brief survey of wider opinion must also be taken. This allows us to gain a fuller picture of the development of these notions as alternatives to Government policy. Many of the British far Left were also firm advocates of such strategies, and especially of wide colonial re-division and eventual liberation. Much of their support often came from Marxist anti-Imperial convictions, however, rather than from more straightforward economic arguments. In this sense, such groups were often *against* the economic

appeasement of great European powers, including Germany and Italy, which they believed often promoted purely selfish wars. They tended to view such organisations as the British Empire and the League of Nations as the traditional gaolers of the enslaved colonial masses. However, in clamouring for the eventual liberation of natives from such bonds, they believed that opening up trade with the colonies and a broader allocation of their administrative rights would be an improvement on the current *status quo*. As far back as 1936, for example, the British Communist Party, in a widely-disseminated political pamphlet, claimed that wars could only be stopped by ending Imperialist rivalry. This could only be achieved by scrapping the present ‘fallacy’ of the mandate system, which would be attained by supporting the liberation of the natives.³⁸

In Parliament, the tiny Independent Labour Party concurred with these sentiments. In a 1939 pamphlet entitled *The Socialist Challenge to Poverty, Fascism, Imperialism, War*, for example, it advocated colonial redistribution to help the native peoples in their struggle for freedom. Fairer access to raw materials for states like Germany and Italy was not their concern, and indeed this would have been repugnant to them.³⁹

Pacifist groups also strongly backed colonial and economic appeasement. It has already been seen how Lansbury was one of the most vocal advocates in this period, and bodies like the Peace Pledge Union, of which he was some-time president, also promoted the cause. In a statement of policy issued just before Munich, for example, the PPU asserted:

We believe that the tension in Europe could be relieved at once if our Government was willing to make considerable sacrifices of our own imperial interests for the purpose of securing economic and political justice all round.⁴⁰

The National Peace Council was another long-term campaigner on the issue. In a statement of policy ratified by its Executive Committee on 18 February 1937, the NPC called for ‘resolute action in the economic sphere to loosen the bonds of international trading and to increase general prosperity’.⁴¹ Indeed, many Pacifist groups around the world were supporters of such radical measures. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom called for Britain to give up parts of its Empire to a mandate system in January 1937 and

asserted that, in trade, 'the Open Door must be the aim'. It continued: 'The door that is open will not need to be battered down'.⁴²

The League of Nations Union also, unsurprisingly, promoted the cause of economic appeasement and many of its members backed the call for all colonial powers to give their territories over to a mandate system. In the month that Chamberlain became Prime Minister, the LNU asserted that freer world trade would be the foremost contribution he could make to world peace through economic methods, and called for efforts to reduce quota restrictions and end the system of Imperial Preference.⁴³ LNU Chairman Gilbert Murray, in private correspondence with Leo Amery during October 1937, confessed that, while he was not optimistic of great success in appeasing Hitler in the colonial sphere, it was certainly better to explore the issue than not.⁴⁴ By the winter of 1938-39, the General Council of the LNU had adopted a number of resolutions in the economic field, echoing the widespread calls, earlier that year, for a cash loan to China. The Council also backed revision of exchange tariffs within the Empire and a wholesale reconsideration of the colonial problem as the best means to build upon the Munich Agreement.⁴⁵

There was also support for colonial and economic appeasement among large sections of the press throughout the Chamberlain era, usually among those most in favour of general political measures in this respect. Thus, long-term pro-appeasement newspapers such as *The Times* often advocated similar measures in the economic field. For example, it printed one of the earliest articles backing economic appeasement by Tory peer Lord Lugard, in January 1936, which called for an end to Imperial Preference and the adoption of an 'Open Door' policy in colonial Africa.⁴⁶ Its editor, Geoffrey Dawson, while being opposed to the return of all of Germany's former colonies, confessed in private correspondence to a friend in Berlin during May 1937, that handing over a mandated colony to German rule would be a positive step for peace.⁴⁷ However, even some of those dailies which did not favour political appeasement could also support colonial and economic concessions and frequently demanded much more action from Chamberlain in this field. As the Labour Party mouthpiece in the press, the *Daily Herald* unsurprisingly backed the internationalisation of colonies in the wake of the *Anschluss*.⁴⁸ It then echoed Attlee's calls for a world economic conference, to settle such issues as access to raw materials, shortly

after Munich.⁴⁹ The *Manchester Guardian* concurred with this strategy and, on 3 October 1938, challenged the Prime Minister over his future policy:

Is Mr Chamberlain prepared to propose that colonies and raw materials and the other grievances of the “Have-Nots” be dealt with in the only reasonable and just way, in association with all interested States and the League?⁵⁰

A minority of the general public evidently backed colonial and economic appeasement for the duration of Chamberlain’s premiership, though Gallup Poll data is somewhat ambiguous on this issue. For example, in October 1938, just after the Munich Agreement, only 15% of those asked supported a return of Germany’s pre-war colonies, though a larger number of 22% did not want to risk a war over the issue.⁵¹ Whether or not the public would have approved of, say, freer access for Germany to the resources *in* these former colonies was a question never asked. One would suspect that this would have met with higher levels of approval, given that the general support for Chamberlain (and thus, by inference, his policy of appeasement) stood at 57% at this time.⁵²

There were many letters written to newspapers backing colonial and economic appeasement in the late 1930s, though issues of editorial policy and so on must obviously be considered here. Such letters perhaps came in greatest volume just after the *Anschluss*, though not exclusively, and can be found across all the main papers of the day. Thus, H. Wilkins of Tooting Bec wrote to the *Daily Herald* on 16 March to explain, ‘it is no use trying to escape the certain demand for restoration of mandates that were formerly German colonies’.⁵³ Manchester’s Horace Alexander was more thoughtful, suggesting a pooling of vital economic arteries in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian*:

Economic appeasement is the first need, and the van Zeeland Report shows the way. The British Government, without waiting for others, might declare its readiness to extend the sphere of the Open Door... to all its dependent colonies, and it might propose a new international treaty to embody this principle. It might offer to extend the mandates system... What about world control... in which, of course we should share, of world highways - the Suez Canal, Singapore, Gibraltar?⁵⁴

Even the more aggressive facets of economic appeasement could receive backing from the public. In the wake of the Prague Coup, for example, Hugh Wilson of South West London urged that Britain should help ease Romania's economic problems, in a letter to the *Telegraph*.⁵⁵ By purchasing oil from that country Britain could also deal a blow to German economic influence in the region, as well as reducing the temptation of Hitler to invade Romania himself in pursuit of such resources.

The occasional individual possessing particular expertise also came to prominence in making such demands. Political Economy Professor Noel Hall of University College London, regularly lobbied the Government on such matters and recommended the following in a letter to the Foreign Office in July 1936:

A solution... can only be made possible by a redefinition of the Economic policy of the Empire as a whole as distinct from the separate parts of it... Only a series of coordinated measures taken as a whole are likely to be sufficient to make fruitful the use of economic initiative for political appeasement. ⁵⁶

Professor Hall continued to write articles and papers on the subject of an Open Door policy throughout 1937 and 1938 and his views were recorded, if rarely followed, by the Government.

Late Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

This section will examine how these strategies developed and progressed further in the last few months before war. The Prague Coup in March 1939 dramatically shook any remaining faith in the words of Hitler. Indeed, from now on, Chamberlain effectively abandoned concessions in favour of deterrence and alliances. While this event and the subsequent policy reorientation influenced calls for colonial and economic appeasement - in the last six months of 1939 vocalised support diminished substantially - there were still numerous voices advocating such measures as the best way to avoid war. Some of the immediate responses to the crisis were as if little had happened in Czechoslovakia. Thus Labour's David Grenfell, on 15 March 1939, was able to assert that 'the

underlying issue in Europe... is largely a question of land and economic resources'.⁵⁷ A few weeks later, on 3 April, James Maxton of the Independent Labour Party echoed that 'the basic problem of the world today is not the problem of frontiers but the problem of poverty'.⁵⁸ Both advocated economic appeasement as the solution, while at the same time being fiercely critical of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement in general which, they believed, had brought Europe to this new low. Labour MP Alfred Edwards, meanwhile, on the same day, demanded a raw materials deal with Germany which effectively bordered on a policy of sanctions. Broadly speaking, his plan was to withhold all mineral supplies to that power unless the Nazis modified their behaviour in Europe, but to offer them substantial amounts of material if they behaved.⁵⁹

Nor were such calls absent from the House of Lords in support of these measures at the same time as the Government was shifting its own general policy. Liberal peer Lord Arnold, for example, on 20 March 1939, called for a reconsideration of the colonies in order to aid a Germany which had 'nothing like her fair share of the wealth and territory of the world'. He went on: 'If she cannot expand one way then she will expand in another way where she can, and that is in Central and South-Eastern Europe'.⁶⁰ Tory peer Lord Lothian, meanwhile, called for increased efforts in conjunction with America to secure a new round of talks with the Dictators when the House met a few weeks later on 19 April. Easing tariffs and trade restrictions would be top of the agenda.⁶¹

By the summer of 1939, both Attlee and Sinclair, despite the tide of events and their criticism of political appeasement in general, reiterated their demands in the economic sphere. Attlee made a new call for all the world's colonies to be handed over to a League mandate system in May, while in July Sinclair backed a reduction of tariffs and quotas and fairer access to raw materials.⁶² However, this would only be for those powers which joined an Anglo-Franco-Polish 'Peace Front' - that is, not the Fascist states.⁶³ By now, for the Liberals and the majority of speakers in both Houses, economic appeasement increasingly came to mean measures designed to keep Germany at bay. By the late summer, as the Government continued its alliance talks with the Soviets, even Labour die-hards were modifying their demands to incorporate a more aggressive edge. Hugh Dalton, for example, on 31 July 1939 emphasised his wish for continued discussion with the Dictators on the issue of trade, but also recommended

supplementing the Polish Guarantee of 31 March with a loan, designed to bolster that country's defences.⁶⁴ Inevitably, the occasional individual sailed against the prevailing tide. Tory MP Sir Arnold Wilson, for example, called for the internationalisation of colonies and a loan from Britain to Germany during this debate. He continued: 'We ought not to allow the bad manners of the plaintiff to blind us, as judges in our own cause, to the elements of justice and reason in his claim'.⁶⁵ However, for the vast majority of speakers, as war loomed closer, economic appeasement was used increasingly as a tool to close ranks against Hitler.

(3) HISTORIOGRAPHY

Colonial and economic appeasement have been heavily treated in the general historiography on the Chamberlain era, especially in more recent years, where they have been the subject of several detailed studies - covered below. However, assessments of their viability as alternatives to Chamberlain's policy - that is, essentially carried out in the more radical and comprehensive manner as favoured by Government critics - are much harder to come by.⁶⁶ Because colonial and economic appeasement *were* carried out to some extent by Chamberlain, these studies have been more keen to explain the motives and impetus behind such policies, or to analyse the extent to which economic questions affected pre-war international diplomacy. However, inferences can be made on the issue of viability as an alternative to the Prime Minister's policy.

References to colonial and economic appeasement are very limited in the memoirs and diaries of Chamberlain's contemporaries which encompass the main body of the orthodox historical camp on this subject. Even the works of those who were most critical of Chamberlain's policy at the time, or very much in favour of economic approaches to the Dictators - Attlee's memoir, for example - barely make more than a few passing comments.⁶⁷ Similarly, the majority of the first historical works produced in this period, such as *Guilty Men* or the studies of Namier and Wheeler Bennett, make almost no mention of such questions. Is this indicative of the limited extent to which these policies were aspects of Chamberlain's appeasement, or because they were not considered big enough issues to warrant inclusion in such retrospective accounts? Perhaps many contemporaries, with the passing of time and increased knowledge of the true nature of Hitlerism, now saw that economic appeasement would have been an unrealistic option for exhaustive pursuit? The answer is not a clear one but is probably found in a combination of all these factors.

Robert Boothby's 1947 memoir *I Fight to Live*, despite the fact that its author was one of the most consistent Tory rebels and a vehement anti-appeaser, did claim that wide-scale economic appeasement was a missed opportunity which should have been pursued further and may have averted war. Assessing the main turning points which led to World War Two, Boothby

asserted that the failure of Britain and the USA to make real efforts in improving the world economic situation was one contributing factor.⁶⁸ The state of Europe's economy in the 1930s was another of his listed points and the strong inference here must be that Anglo-American measures in opening up Imperial resources, eradicating trade restrictions and so on, would have lessened the causes of friction on the Continent.⁶⁹

It is surely an historical irony that while an ardent anti-appeaser like Boothby later came to believe that economic appeasement should have been pursued to a greater extent as a viable alternative to political appeasement, Clement Attlee, one of the most fervent advocates of such measures at the time, later came to view it as a mistaken cause. While not, strictly speaking, belonging to the orthodox historical school on Chamberlain and appeasement, the former Prime Minister gave a retrospective interview to Francis Williams in the 1961 work *A Prime Minister Remembers*. In this illuminating book Attlee undermined Boothby's claims by admitting that the Labour Party was wrong in the late 1930s to have thought such measures could have averted war:

(Williams) Do you still think, as you suggested then, that offers of economic cooperation or development in the colonies, or anything of that kind, might have kept Hitler from war?

(Attlee) No, I don't think so. I think he would have had to show something worthwhile.⁷⁰

Attlee's frank admission that the policy he campaigned for over many years would have failed to keep the peace is to his credit. Coming from the source it does, such a claim is a strong indication that most people were now increasingly coming to judge colonial and economic appeasement as unrealistic strategies in the late 1930s given the conditions of the day and Hitler's intransigence.

It is in the revisionist period that these questions were first looked at in great depth as a series of authors produced works closely analysing the importance of the financial dimension to Chamberlain's policy. Chief amongst these works were those of Berndt Wendt, Gustav Schmidt and Andrew Crozier. Though these historians had differing precise aims and agendas, they all more or less agreed on several key points which suggest that the historical consensus was increasingly viewing economic appeasement as an unviable alternative to

Chamberlain's policy. They all claimed that economic appeasement had hitherto been an overplayed aspect in understanding Chamberlain's strategy and that, in truth, it was just one small part of the much bigger picture. Crozier asserts, for example, that the National Government 'had no intention of allowing the colonial question to become a serious issue' in his 1988 work *Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies*.⁷¹ These historians also claimed that radical economic approaches would never have worked because of a flawed belief in British policy making circles that there existed 'moderates' in the upper echelons of the Nazi Party - Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht, for example - who could influence Hitler to accept such peace deals. As Wendt claimed in his *Economic Appeasement: Handel und Finanz in der Britischen Deutschland Politik* (1971), Hitler was not really interested in economic questions and could not be persuaded otherwise.⁷²

Gustav Schmidt, in his impressive 1986 work *The Politics and Economics of Appeasement: British Foreign Policy in the 1930s*, concurred with this general line but was also keen to play up domestic factors in his assessment of why the economic dimension to appeasement never really took off. Schmidt believes that the absence of a cross-party alliance in trying to make such measures workable hamstrung these initiatives.⁷³ A conflict of interests and ideas within the Government - between those seeking the primacy of political measures over economic ones, and a smaller group backing the financial dimension as the best way forward - also meant that this latter approach was usually kept at bay.⁷⁴

Journal articles by C. A. McDonald and A. Edho Ekoko written in this period support these authors' general arguments, with the former asserting that Chamberlain and company failed to grasp the fact that men like Schacht had no real power to influence Hitler. This claim was made in his 1972 article 'Economic Appeasement and the German 'Moderates', 1937-39'.⁷⁵ Ekoko, meanwhile claimed that colonial appeasement, in particular, failed because by 1938 the 'issue had receded into secondary importance in Germany... colonies had become peripheral to Hitler's career'. This was eloquently expressed in his 1979 offering, 'The British Attitude Towards Germany's Colonial Irredentism in Africa in the Inter-War years'.⁷⁶

In the best post-revisionist literature on colonial and economic appeasement, historians have merely tended to reinforce rather than undermine the revisionists. Neil Forbes, for example, who produced *Doing Business with the Nazis: Britain's Economic and Financial Relations with Germany, 1931-39* (2000), echoed Schmidt's concern that domestic political factors should not be underplayed in understanding why economic initiatives were not viable alternatives to Chamberlain's policy:

The Board of Trade was highly suspicious of the activities of the Foreign Office, while the extreme hostility the latter showed to the attitudes of the Bank of England... has been underestimated... The paper schemes of the economic appeasers counted for nothing against the harsh realities of the commercial world.⁷⁷

Scott Newton, meanwhile, restated that Germany was the main reason such approaches did not get very far and would have been unviable as an alternative to mainstream political appeasement:

The hopes of a settlement based on colonial appeasement were dashed. Indeed, they never really existed outside the minds of British Ministers and civil servants and, perhaps, Hjalmar Schacht. The fundamental difficulty was Hitler... There is no reason to believe he ever believed their restoration, in whatever form, would be acceptable as part of a general settlement.⁷⁸

Even more recently, in his article on Leo Amery's foreign policy, Richard Grayson has addressed the idea that conceding spheres of economic influence to Germany in Eastern Europe may have diminished the chances of war. While conceding that such a gesture would have been attractive to Hitler, and possibly may have reduced the need for German expansion, he asserts that it would have had 'little impact' on the *Führer's* ultimate thirst for territorial aggrandisement.⁷⁹ Land, and not money, was his overriding aim.

It is clear then, that, while rarely addressing the question of viability explicitly, the main historiography on colonial and economic appeasement is convinced that such approaches were only ever piecemeal and subservient to wider political measures - whether viewed from the British or German perspective. Moreover, the results of such strategies are deemed to be highly

questionable. It has to be said, therefore, that the verdict of history reached so far has adjudged contemporary Government critics in this field to be wrong and their alternative to appeasement unviable.

(4) VIABILITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Links between the Alternative and Government Policy

The following section will examine the relationship between actual Government policy and suggested colonial and economic appeasement. This is a necessary prerequisite before an assessment can be made of how viable these strategies were deemed to be. Colonial and economic appeasement were perhaps the alternatives to Chamberlain's policy that the Government experimented with most, certainly before 1939 anyway. Indeed, as the introduction of this chapter makes clear, such measures were significant facets *of* Chamberlain's strategy, though pursued far more sporadically and to a much more limited extent than many critics had called for.

Space is too limited for a detailed narrative of the extent to which the Government actually pursued the financial dimensions of appeasement.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, a brief assessment of some of the main factors and decisions Chamberlain and his most senior colleagues considered must be undertaken. The economic aspect to solving Germany's grievances had existed in Chamberlain's mind long before he had become Prime Minister. Hitler first made colonial claims in early 1936, as has already been noted, and Chamberlain, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, had to address the issue in the House of Commons and state Government policy. In what was to become the reoccurring official line on this topic, he poured cold water on the question of any transfer of a colony direct to Germany but hinted that the issue could be discussed at a later date as part of a general settlement.⁸¹ This strategy of ruling out a direct cession, but never ruling out the question of colonial readjustments in general, in both public and private statements, was to become a regular feature of his policy.⁸²

It is evident that Chamberlain hoped such questions might be a perpetual bargaining chip in any later dealings with Hitler.⁸³ A few days after addressing the House, he wrote a letter to his sister explaining his recent statement. It is illustrative of his uncertainty about the value of such an approach but willingness to consider the question, in Germany's favour, at some future point:

It was clearly impossible to declare that in no circumstances and at no time would we ever consider the surrender of our mandate over a territory that we hold now... I don't believe myself that we could purchase peace... by handing over Tanganyika to the Germans, but if I did I would not hesitate for a moment to do so.⁸⁴

Following the Rhineland affair in March 1936, Stanley Baldwin set up the Plymouth Committee (named after its chairman Lord Plymouth, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office) to consider the question of colonial cessions to Germany. The subsequent Plymouth Report, which was produced three months later, questioned the logic of colonial concessions but warned against a blanket refusal to address the issue. This led to further discussion within the Cabinet and Foreign Policy Committee about future strategy. Crucially, while the majority of those attending the committee were hostile to the notion of transferring mandates to Germany, it was Chamberlain and Lord Halifax (then Chancellor of the Exchequer and Lord President respectively) who were most keen not to close the door on the question entirely. When Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden produced a draft statement of policy for consideration in the Committee on 27 July, in which he proposed to rubbish the notion of transferring any mandates, Halifax and Chamberlain spoke up, the latter claiming to be 'gravely alarmed by the wording' of the memo.⁸⁵ They both requested that the statement be watered down so as never to completely rule out future adjustments, and a decision was subsequently taken to do so. Almost a year before he became Prime Minister, then, Chamberlain was prepared to consider the issue of colonial appeasement in a favourable light, even to the point of clashing with his senior colleagues including the Foreign Secretary.

While being opposed specifically to colonial concessions at this time, Eden was a firm advocate of more general economic appeasement measures. As early as August 1936, for example, he penned a Foreign Policy Committee memo recommending further consideration of the issue of raw materials and close attention to van Zeeland's early work. He concluded that 'no review of the international situation which ignores the economic problems with which we have to deal, can be complete'.⁸⁶ The Foreign Office as a whole had given a great deal of consideration to economic and colonial appeasement in the wake of the Rhineland crisis. For example, Roger Makins from the Western Department

had claimed on 15 April that there was ‘everything to be said’ for the maintenance of friendly economic relations with Germany and suggested demarcating spheres of financial influence in Europe. He concluded that: ‘A free hand in Central and Eastern Europe should at least be equal in value to a colony’.⁸⁷ This had followed on from the suggestions of Frank Ashton-Gwatkin and Hubert Gladwyn Jebb in the Economic Relations section of the Foreign Office, who had produced a detailed memorandum on colonial and economic appeasement at the end of January. They had also earmarked Central and Eastern Europe as a sphere of economic influence to concede to Germany but accompanied this with a call for the revision of Britain’s commercial policy and a consideration of a return of colonies as possible measures to avert war.⁸⁸

By the time Chamberlain had become Prime Minister in late May 1937, measures of colonial and economic appeasement had many advocates within both the Cabinet and Foreign Office, not least Chamberlain himself. Such issues had been the subject of much discussion in Britain and the wider world during that spring, with conversations between Britain and France taking place over possible joint economic initiatives to alleviate tension in Europe. In the Foreign Policy Committee, Chamberlain had pressed for conversations with German Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht in order to thrash out a deal based on a possible Anglo-French surrender of colonies like Togoland and the Cameroons. This would be accompanied by broad trading concessions (the Anglo-German Payments Agreement was revised in Germany’s favour in April) and measures to open up the British Empire in Africa to freer German access.⁸⁹ He explained his general rationale in a Committee memo penned on 2 April:

We cannot afford to miss any opportunity of reducing the international tension... and alleviating the economic difficulties with which these countries are faced... Any Government which turned down this invitation would incur a very heavy responsibility. Even a slight improvement in the... situation may lead gradually to a general *détente*, whereas a policy of drift may lead to a general war.⁹⁰

By June 1937, influential figures in the Foreign Office were recommending that Britain adopt an Open Door policy in the Empire as a means to avert war. Following meetings in February between Schacht and Frederick Leith-Ross, the Chief Economic Adviser to the Treasury, an Inter-Departmental Committee on

Trade Policy was established within the Foreign Office, reporting on 7 June. The committee recommended that ‘every possibility should be examined’ of reducing impediments to world trade, though not abandoning Imperial Preference altogether.⁹¹ Gladwyn Jebb, again, who sat on the committee, penned an accompanying memo which clarified some of its views, while also spelling out the domestic benefits of the policy suggested:

Nobody has yet explained how a country whose whole civilization and *raison d’être* rest on her exporters, bankers and merchants, can for long maintain her existing standards in any ‘closed system’; and the more intelligent of the economists agree that, if the international system collapses, the condition of the people in this country - even if war is avoided - will be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”.⁹²

Accordingly, the Foreign Policy Committee met on 11 June to discuss these initiatives, with Eden, in particular, keen to make progress along the lines suggested.⁹³ He felt that such measures would also improve British relations with both the USA and Japan as well as satisfying Hitler’s monetary demands. Chamberlain and Halifax also came on board, but only on the condition that the ‘appeased’ countries like Germany give specific assurances of good behaviour in return.⁹⁴ In a follow-up meeting, however, Chamberlain ordered that this caveat be dropped in order to quickly set the wheels in motion for detailed Anglo-German conversations. Nevertheless, the majority of the committee, including the new Prime Minister, was still concerned that Britain should not be the only power acting in this respect, and that any moves should be part of a broad agreement underwritten by the League.⁹⁵ These talks were effectively killed before they could begin, however, when the French Government vetoed the British plan and refused to concede its own mandates in Africa to Germany.

By the turn of the year colonial appeasement was firmly back on the agenda. Following Halifax’s visit to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden during November 1937, in which the colonial issue was again brought up as a possible means of improving relations, Chamberlain wrote to his sister with his thoughts on how best to give new impetus to the pursuit of a general settlement:

They want Togoland and Kameruns... but they do not insist on Tanganyika, if they can be given some reasonably equivalent territory on the West Coast... Now here, it seems to me, is a fair basis of discussion, though no doubt all these problems bristle with difficulties. But I don't see why we shouldn't say to Germany "give us satisfactory assurances that you won't use force to deal with the Austrians and Czechoslovakians, and we'll give you similar assurances that we won't use force to prevent the changes you want if you can get them by peaceful means".⁹⁶

On 21 December 1937 Chamberlain spelt out how the economic aspect of appeasement would have to be a major part of his wider strategy. In a speech in the House of Commons which welcomed the forthcoming van Zeeland Report and speculated about general initiatives to follow, he concluded: 'I do not think it is possible entirely to separate economic from political conditions'.⁹⁷

By the end of January 1938 Chamberlain brought together his most ambitious economic appeasement project yet when he unveiled a plan in the Foreign Policy Committee to repartition large parts of Central Africa. Expressing his conviction that 'no satisfactory general settlement with Germany was possible which excluded some colonial concessions', his scheme envisaged that country joining a consortium alongside the current colonial powers in that region, in a freshly drawn up division of territories.⁹⁸ A new set of over-riding rules and regulations - which would include provisos on free trade and the welfare of the natives - would be established to bind the administrative powers. The scheme received a mixed reception in the committee, but was eventually accepted, subject to refinement and conditions, as a means of making progress towards a lasting peace.⁹⁹ Neville Henderson, the Ambassador in Berlin, presented the terms of a settlement along these lines to Hitler in March, despite being pessimistic about the chances of success. In the event, the *Führer*, by one account, sitting 'glowering in his chair', was unresponsive to the initiative and cold to the Ambassador.¹⁰⁰ A few days later Germany carried out the *Anschluss* with Austria which suspended colonial appeasement talks indefinitely and brought the Czech crisis onto the agenda as the main issue of the summer.

Differing Conceptions of the Policy

While it has been shown that Chamberlain carried out a degree of colonial and economic appeasement as part of his wider strategy, it is necessary to understand that this was not always in the manner envisaged by opponents advocating the cause. A few wider points are appropriate here, therefore, on how the Government's conception of the policy regularly differed from that of critics and other outside agencies, and how separate, wider factors often illuminated its thinking. It has already been demonstrated that the colonial question was an important part of the vast majority of Chamberlain's initiatives. This is evidence of how economic appeasement, for the Government, usually centred on piecemeal efforts at satisfying Germany in specific - though not exclusively - ahead of efforts to improve the world situation in general. This *Realpolitik* and usually quite limited approach is in contrast to the often more idealistic, altruistic flavour given to the policy by the Labour and Liberal Opposition, or those on the extreme Left. Whereas the British Communist Party, for example, was concerned with the liberation of colonial natives, Government figures were more likely to speak in the old language of Victorian Imperialists and to consider the colonies as pawns in a huge Anglo-German chess game. Attlee, however, as we have seen, sought to 'build a new world'. Whether this is indicative of conflicting ideological priorities between the British Left and Right (or across classes) or because those in power simply had to adopt a different, more immediate focus to those criticising and postulating solutions from the sidelines is not clear, though the answer probably lies somewhere between the two.

The 1936 Makins memo is one demonstration of how a substantial part of the Government's conception of economic appeasement involved conceding spheres of influence to Germany in Central and Eastern Europe - a sort of financial limited liability, if you like. For example, while the German share of Turkey's export trade more than doubled from 18% to 44% between 1930 and 1937, Britain almost halved its own portion from 12% to 7%. The figures were similar for Bulgaria.¹⁰¹ Sometimes known as a *Mitteleuropa* strategy, the notion of acquiescing with or even encouraging Germany to expand its markets

eastwards (even at the expense of other powers in these regions) often underpinned wider Government measures such as colonial deals - especially for the early part of our period. This trend was eclipsed somewhat, as shall be demonstrated, by a tougher British economic policy in the region as events progressed and war loomed large.¹⁰²

Another consideration of the Chamberlain Government which influenced much of its economic appeasement strategy, and indeed wider policy in general, was a perception - in the event, this was proved incorrect - that the German economy was on the brink of collapse. It was often thought that Hitler would want to seize upon such initiatives from Britain as a means to alleviate his country's dire economic situation. Public statements which the *Führer* regularly made - such as Germany 'must export or die' on 30 January 1939, for example - served only to fuel this view.¹⁰³ Similarly, as has already been mentioned, many senior figures within the Cabinet and Foreign Office wrongly believed that 'moderates' within the Nazi hierarchy would be able to convince Hitler to agree to a general settlement along these lines. Gladwyn Jebb's June 1937 memo, for example, which was discussed earlier, concluded that economic appeasement might appeal to those more rational elements within the Dictator states:

There is the consideration that even in Germany and Italy action on such lines by His Majesty's Government might encourage those (and they still exist!) who hope that the rigours of 'autarky', Nazism and Fascism may be diminished by an increase in international trade.¹⁰⁴

Such beliefs filtered through the Foreign Office to the top of the chain of command, with Chamberlain himself, as late as 30 November 1938, stressing that in Cabinet that Britain should, 'do all in its power to encourage the moderates'. He sanctioned discussions between Schacht and Montagu Norman, the Governor of the Bank of England, shortly after.¹⁰⁵

There was also a domestic sphere to economic appeasement, as Gladwyn Jebb's 1937 memo also testifies. Although space does not permit a comprehensive discussion of this issue, C. A. MacDonald points out that Halifax's visit to Hitler in November 1937, for example, directly coincided with widespread concerns of a developing balance-of-trade crisis in Britain. Unemployment had also risen by 8% between December 1937 and January 1938

and the Government's decision to give new impetus to economic measures at this time was doubtless influenced by such factors.¹⁰⁶

If domestic influences partially drove the Government to pursue colonial and economic appeasement, so too did international ones. Many important figures within the USA, for example, were often advocates of such measures and indeed it was probably the area where America sought to work most closely with Britain in solving world problems.¹⁰⁷ Secretary of State Cordell Hull was perhaps the most famous advocate of economic appeasement on the world stage during the late 1930s. While he hoped that the banding together of nations like Britain and America in the economic sphere would convince the Fascist powers to join with them, many people in Britain thought the help of the world's most powerful nation would only buttress general efforts for peace. Joint initiatives along the lines of an Open Door policy in their territories, vast in raw materials and capital resources, seemed an obvious, albeit problematical, way to proceed.

Numerous memos on this issue were produced in both the Foreign Office and State Department for the duration of Chamberlain's premiership. As the Ambassador in Washington, Sir Ronald Lindsay, told Eden on 23 January 1936, 'if Goods cannot cross frontiers, armies will'.¹⁰⁸ In reply, Eden informed Lindsay about a conversation he had recently had with the US 'Ambassador-at-Large', Norman Davis, on 7 February. It is illustrative of the issues being considered:

Mr Davis spoke of Anglo-American relations in general... and wondered whether it would not be possible for His Majesty's Government and the United States Government jointly to consider the economic situation... with a view to seeing what contribution, if any, could be made by them... Unless some outlet could be found for Germany economically, there was bound to be trouble sooner or later. There was much talk of a Conference on Raw Materials, but... what Germany wanted was markets. He wondered, for instance, whether anything could be done in the way of giving Germany a special economic position in South-East Europe.¹⁰⁹

By the time Chamberlain became Prime Minister in May 1937, talk was rife in the two countries of an Anglo-American Trade Agreement as a means of benefiting both powers and serving as a model for the wider world. Joint initiatives in the 'progressive adjustment of trade problems in the Far East' were

also suggested in a memo from Cordell Hull to the Chancellor John Simon in June.¹¹⁰ The famous Roosevelt 'Peace Initiative' of January 1938, when the President approached Britain with a secret plan for a world conference, also contained a financial dimension, especially in the field of raw materials. The Anglo-American Trade Agreement was ratified in November of that year and the economic sphere continued to be the one where cooperation between the two powers was most discussed over the coming months until the outbreak of war.

There was also a degree of support for colonial and economic appeasement from some influential figures within the Dominions. Stanley Bruce, for example, the Australian High Commissioner in London, was a firm advocate of such measures and produced several detailed plans which were circulated in the Foreign Office across the duration of Chamberlain's premiership. On 1 March 1938 he wrote a letter to Oliver Harvey, Halifax's Private Secretary, viewing 'early action in the economic sphere as imperative' and calling for, among other measures, 'a resumption of international lending,' as well as 'a reduction of the more extreme barriers to trade... especially exchange controls and quotas'.¹¹¹

Among the Dominions, South Africa was most enthusiastic about Britain pursuing economic appeasement measures. On 9 December 1937, for example, Jan Smuts, who was to become South African Prime Minister in 1939, wrote a letter to Leo Amery calling for closer Anglo-American relations in the economic sphere as a contribution to world peace: 'A real gesture is becoming necessary, and that gesture should be economic'.¹¹² A year later, Malcolm MacDonald told the Foreign Policy Committee about a conversation the South African Defence Minister, Oswald Pirow, had recently had with Hitler. In this discussion the former had apparently stated that Germany could 'have' South-West Africa, if it 'was essential to world peace'.¹¹³

It has already been shown how economic appeasement could have a much more aggressive edge to it through the subject of loans to China, discussed in the summer of 1938. Though Chamberlain's critics here recognised that the financial assistance of one power could be used as a weapon against another, the Government itself, as policy maker, was compelled to explore the issue much more fully. It was perhaps the *Anschluss* and subsequent Czech crisis which marked the first real consideration within Government circles of economic appeasement as a tool to keep Germany at bay, rather than to win its friendship.

In a detailed Foreign Office memo considering the implications of recent events and possible measures Britain could take in response, Orme Sargent, Assistant Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, suggested giving economic aid to several countries. The measures he favoured are illustrative of how Germany had now firmly become enemy number one, especially when one considers the other states mentioned as targets:

The countries who might be considered for loans and credits would be Japan, Italy, Russia, Poland, and whatever Spanish Government may emerge... This list is a repellent one but necessity makes strange and unpleasant bedfellows. The candidates for direct subsidies or gifts of war materials would be the Danubian and other States, who are anxious to resist German encroachment and brow-beating.¹¹⁴

Turkey also emerged as a key power in Britain's strategic thinking around this time. As the gateway to the Middle East it was one of the main obstacles to a German *Drang nach Osten*, and the decision was taken in May 1938 to grant it £16 million worth of export credits, £6 million of which would be spent on building warships.¹¹⁵ By June the Government had established an Inter-Departmental Committee on South-East Europe to consider and, if necessary, coordinate economic aid in the region. It was to be chaired by Leith-Ross.¹¹⁶

In the winter of 1938-39, the Inter-Departmental Committee produced an interim report recommending increased imports from countries in South-East Europe, particularly Greece and Hungary, as well as modifying exchange tariffs and quotas in their favour.¹¹⁷ Britain purchased 200,000 tons of wheat from Romania in the wake of Munich, for example.¹¹⁸ The rationale for measures such as these was detailed in a Secret Intelligence Service memo to the Foreign Office which recommended going directly head to head with Germany for economic (and therefore political) influence in the region:

Into those states... we should inject resisting power by helping them financially and economically and making them less dependent on Germany for trade; making them realise that we and the French are strong and united; encouraging them as far as possible to look to us, short of committing ourselves to supporting them actively.¹¹⁹

A convoluted scheme emerged for consideration at this time to encourage British cigarette manufacturers to purchase tobacco from Greece and nations in the Balkans as a means of winning friends and influencing people in such areas. Eventually it was decided that the Government would effectively buy the tobacco from these regimes itself, by paying British companies the equivalent value and then allowing them to do as they pleased with the stock.¹²⁰

By the early months of 1939, then, it was clear that the *Mitteleuropa* strategy of conceding spheres of financial influence to Germany was being eclipsed by a much tougher policy of economic appeasement in East and South-East Europe designed to resist Germany and gain allies at its expense. Events like the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in November 1938, and the war scare in January 1939, when a series of Foreign Office and intelligence reports pointed to an imminent German invasion of the Low Countries, seemed to suggest that any influence of the so called ‘moderates’ in Germany was on the wane. Schacht’s dismissal on 20 January served only to confirm this impression. The Government responded by granting export credits, of £2 million and £1 million respectively, to Greece and Romania in February 1939 and sanctioned an economic mission to Bulgaria with a view to a similar arrangement.¹²¹ Such moves were considered perpetually hereafter until the outbreak of war, with the granting of loans and territory to Italy even being touted by one Southern department Foreign Office official, Francis Brown, in a memo produced in July.¹²² Such a late approach to Germany’s closest ally, in a last attempt to separate Italy from the Axis, is surely indicative of desperation to avoid war now gripping the Government.

Much has been made of some of the less aggressive economic initiatives through the summer of 1939, which have often been seen as a return to the policy of trying to buy Hitler off. Statements made in Parliament by Chamberlain and Halifax, coming not long after the Anglo-German Coal Agreement of 28 January 1939, fuelled suspicions within the Opposition ranks that the Government’s new-found toughness was evaporating.¹²³ On 19 May, for example, Chamberlain indicated to the House that colonial appeasement was not quite dead just yet and that it would have to form part of any settlement with Germany in the near future.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, less than a month later, Halifax

expressed his view that Britain was 'not only willing but anxious' to discuss German demands for economic *Lebensraum* as soon as possible.¹²⁵

It is the secret loan talks between Robert Hudson, Secretary for the Department of Overseas Trade, and Dr Helmuth Wohlthat, a senior German official from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, in June and July 1939, however, that have most aroused suspicion - both contemporary and retrospective - that Chamberlain was once more opening the door to appeasement. Though the precise details are sketchy and accounts of the meetings differ, it is generally accepted that Chamberlain sanctioned several discreet meetings between the two men at which a massive British loan to Germany was discussed, in return for the latter's assurances of peace.¹²⁶ These meetings were leaked to the press and the embarrassed Government was forced to deny any knowledge of such an offer. While the exact control Chamberlain had over the agenda of these conversations is debated, such moves should be seen as the tentative, last minute explorations of a Government desperate to avoid war, rather than as evidence of any complete about-turn in policy. The anti-Fascist bloc being built by Chamberlain in Eastern Europe at this time, both financial and military, is testament to the overriding objectives of the Government in the wake of events in Prague.

The Extent to which the Government Considered the Alternative as Viable

To what extent did the National Government consider colonial and economic appeasement as viable policies for extensive pursuit in the manner suggested by its critics? Why were Chamberlain's approaches in these fields ultimately limited and usually without fruition? Why did Germany never receive its colonies or its loan and why were real, concrete actions only taken by the Government in the wake of the Prague Coup, as an aggressive response to a seemingly unappeasable Hitler? For every colonial or economic initiative explored, there were more problems created which eventually killed them. For every advocate of economic appeasement within the Cabinet or Foreign Office, there was another critic or cautionary figure urging restraint.

While recognising that economic initiatives had to be a substantial part of his general political appeasement programme, it was clear in Chamberlain's

mind which would be the junior partner of the two. He explained the subservience of economics in the House of Commons on 21 December 1937:

While, undoubtedly, the economic problem must always be an important factor in any endeavour to bring about a better state of things in Europe, it is much more likely to receive favourable consideration if it has been preceded by some easing of political tension beforehand.¹²⁷

This view of politics taking precedence over economics dominated the Cabinet and Foreign Office long before Chamberlain had become Prime Minister. As the Chancellor of a country suffering the extreme economic hardships born from the Depression, Chamberlain was frosty at first to suggestions of any measures which would sacrifice British economic interests for the sake of improving the financial position of other powers. When Eden penned a Foreign Office memo in August 1936, for example, suggesting that Britain take the lead in attempting to improve the 'commercial, monetary and financial situation' in Germany, Chamberlain replied that he regarded the proposal as 'full of danger'.¹²⁸ He went on, 'there is no reason to think that the German Government would be willing to cooperate in the programme... the main part of the remedy is in their own hands'. Less than a month later, Vansittart in the Foreign Office expressed similar views of how political appeasement should not be overshadowed by economic initiatives, the latter of which could actually damage progress in the other, more important field:

I want to get on with the political arrangements... before we embark on this other sea... A political settlement would have to precede the necessary and eventual economic one. Do not let us spoil that effect by going off at half cock... else we shall fail politically.¹²⁹

Vansittart was always very cautious of general economic measures, despite his comments, addressed earlier, which spoke favourably of colonial talks.¹³⁰

Colonial appeasement was discussed extensively during the Chamberlain period but never actually sanctioned by the Government, neither in a revision of the mandates, nor in direct cession of British territory to Germany. There were plenty of figures within the Government machine that wanted the issue to be smothered altogether. John Perowne of the Central department of the Foreign

Office claimed that it would be 'desirable to limit discussion of this question as far as possible' as early as February 1936.¹³¹ The Plymouth Report of June that year poured scorn on the idea of colonial concessions and spelt out some of the principal problems raised by such an initiative. It asserted that Germany could not be satisfied by this move, Nazi claims about restricted access to raw materials being vastly over-blown, and pointed out that the vast majority of the League powers, including France and the Dominions (not to mention the USA) were against any revision of the current system.¹³²

In April 1937, Sir Eric Phipps, then still the Ambassador in Berlin, also expressed his alarm at such proposals and questioned the central rationale of economic appeasement in general:

Is there any reason to assume that the restoration of the colonies would permanently satisfy Germany or even assuage German ambition for a decade? Germany possessed her colonies and her Colonial Empire was prosperous before the war, but this fact did not prevent the outbreak of war. Nor were the German people by any means satisfied with their place in the sun when their colonies were flourishing. Indeed, when one recalls the prosperity and abundance of good things in the Germany of those days, where every beer-hall was filled to overflowing... one can only feel sceptical concerning the remedy of restoring German prosperity, whether by the cession of colonies, financial help, or any of the other remedies put forward.¹³³

It has already been seen how Eden, Foreign Secretary until February 1938, was hostile to any colonial deal, despite initially favouring economic appeasement in general. His views were clarified in September 1937, when he penned a reply to a memo from Neville Henderson regarding German military strength: 'This, like many another paper, is a very strong reinforcement for the course of keeping Germany lean'. He continued, 'I should far sooner take the risk... of a hesitant because unready Germany taking a plunge in a weak condition than face the certainty of her bellicose hegemony a little later if fattened for the part - and fattened by us'!¹³⁴ The central issue of colonial and economic appeasement making Germany so strong as to pose an immediate danger to Britain and its Empire was a recurring dilemma. British military and strategic planners like Admiral Drax, for example, constantly warned that any colonial territory ceded to Germany would be likely to be equipped with naval

or air bases within a short space of time and provide the perfect launch-pad for the invasion of other Imperial territories.¹³⁵ One of the reasons Chamberlain's Central Africa repartition scheme was allowed to fade away without protest as events took hold was because most of the Foreign Policy Committee felt that Tanganyika and Kenya, both within the proposed zone for revision, might fall directly into German hands.¹³⁶ Imperial Preference was not abandoned and an Open Door policy was never sanctioned - at least any wider than a crack - because of fears that Japan would only seize the opportunity to expand its own influence in the void left by British trade.¹³⁷ The strategic realities of the day often meant that proposed measures of colonial and economic appeasement had to be reined in dramatically.

It has already been shown that many people within the Government machine, not least Chamberlain himself, felt that Germany's economic problems were of its own making. Furthermore, most believed Hitler's claims of starvation in raw materials were vastly overplayed and amounted to little more than Nazi propaganda. An Inter-Departmental Committee on the Question of Raw Materials reported to the Foreign Office in January 1936, before the Plymouth Committee was even established.¹³⁸ This asserted that Germany was not actually lacking in such mineral resources, or access to them, and also that the cession of colonies to that power would be unlikely to solve such problems anyway. Subsequent historical studies have confirmed these suspicions. David Meredith, for example, has claimed that Germany actually increased the amount of cocoa it bought from West Africa by more than one fifth, trebled its purchases of sisal from Tanganyika and raised imports of rubber from Malay and Ceylon by 40%, between 1932 and 1938. Three quarters of all the copper bought from Cyprus during this time went to Germany.¹³⁹ As early as February 1936, Phipps complained to Eden that German economic claims were largely false and that most of its real problems were easily remedied. Hitler, he wrote angrily, was 'providing marriage bonuses for servant girls to induce them to marry and propagate the species [and] giving large tax reductions to large families. At the same time he is bitterly complaining that Germany is overcrowded and is in dire need of territorial expansion'.¹⁴⁰

The issue of native rights and welfare was another regularly occurring factor that undermined the viability of colonial appeasement. Germany's

chequered history with regards to minorities and issues like the treatment of black athletes at the Berlin Olympics constantly resurfaced in the minds of Government figures. William Ormsby-Gore, for example, Colonial Secretary until May 1938, regularly voiced his opinion in the Foreign Policy Committee that Britain's 'first duty' was to the inhabitants of these territories.¹⁴¹ The Plymouth Report had also expressed strong reservations on this issue. The views of the inhabitants themselves also played a role, with Ormsby-Gore, again, and John Simon both pointing out that the vast majority of Africans would be opposed to Chamberlain's repartition scheme when it was discussed in the Foreign Policy Committee on 24 January 1938.¹⁴² Home Secretary Samuel Hoare and Minister for the Coordination of Defence Thomas Inskip were other Cabinet members opposed to the plan. It was long known that the majority of Tanganyikans, specifically, would be against a return to German rule, regardless of any grand schemes for the Continent as a whole.

Opposition to economic appeasement within the Government was not just reserved for the colonial sphere. The practicability of the more aggressive schemes, where most concrete action was actually taken, were also routinely questioned and served to undermine extensive moves here. As has already been seen, the decision was taken in June 1937 not to adopt an Open Door policy in the Far East for fear of provoking further Japanese aggression in the region, which Britain could do little to check given its other commitments and concerns nearer home waters.¹⁴³ One year later, on 1 June 1938, the Foreign Policy Committee decided not to offer a loan to China in order to resist Japanese belligerence, with Chamberlain again outlining his fear of provoking the latter power.¹⁴⁴ Simon, who had of course succeeded Chamberlain as Chancellor, was also unsure of the practical effects of such a loan: 'We would run the very substantial risks of doing China little, if any, good while creating the maximum amount of trouble and danger with Japan'.¹⁴⁵

The economic appeasement of states in East and South-East Europe, as a means to resist German influence there, was also discussed at this Committee meeting. The results were similar. Chamberlain indicated he was not convinced the whole rationale of such aggressive moves was correct when he suggested that a *Mitteleuropa* strategy might still be the best means to proceed, allowing Germany to grow fat and, hopefully, weary. Simon, meanwhile, held on tightly

to the purse-strings once again. Surely Britain could not afford the colossal expenditure required to cause Germany even to think about changing its policy with regards to this region, he asked?¹⁴⁶

The interim report of the Leith-Ross Inter-Departmental Committee on South-East Europe, produced in October 1938, also warned against over-egging the mixture with regards to this region. Large amounts of capital investment into powers like Hungary, for example, was deemed unviable due to the risk of overloading the small economies of such agriculturally-based states whilst antagonising Germany into possible counter-measures - a lose-lose situation.¹⁴⁷ The scheme which emerged to buy tobacco from Greece and the Balkans at the turn of the year also never took off because of the practical difficulties involved. The British cigarette companies were hesitant to buy large amounts of what they considered inferior quality produce - which they would have great difficulty in storing anyway.¹⁴⁸ The Committee also recognised that business of this kind, as with all aggressive economic appeasement moves in East and South-East Europe, left Britain open to a degree of blackmail at the hands of the 'appeased' powers. These states all knew that Germany would be just as anxious to increase trade with them as Britain was, as Halifax pointed out.¹⁴⁹ The tobacco deal, as a result of such problems, was postponed repeatedly until May 1939, when it was abandoned under the weight of such practicalities and Simon's effective veto.

The influence of domestic finances on the National Government's policy is too vast a topic to cover in any great detail here and will be examined again in succeeding chapters, but a few points on how the power of the purse restricted economic appeasement measures are worth mentioning here. Behind much of Chamberlain's foreign policy strategy lay a belief that a strong economy would emerge as a 'fourth arm of defence' (a thesis which will be examined in Chapter Five) and that Britain would be stronger in the long-run, if a war came, by maintaining balanced budgets at the expense of immediate vast rearmament.¹⁵⁰ The whole *raison d'être* of the National Government, moreover, was to achieve financial stability in the wake of the Depression. Economic appeasement, unsurprisingly, fell victim to such a protectionist outlook. It has been shown over the last few pages that John Simon, the man in charge of the nation's finances during Chamberlain's premiership, routinely opposed the majority of economic appeasement measures. Chamberlain himself, as Simon's predecessor

at the Exchequer, often urged similar caution at any move which might weaken Britain's financial hand or strengthen Germany's. Leading businessmen tended to oppose colonial and economic appeasement too and frequently lobbied the Government on such questions.¹⁵¹ As Antony Best points out, for example, economic appeasement of Japan during Chamberlain's premiership was so limited as a result of these domestic pressures. The textile industrialists from Lancashire (the county with the greatest number of MPs in Parliament during the late 1930s) who were in direct competition with Japanese textile giants for markets in India, would not look kindly upon Government measures to adopt an Open Door policy on the Orient, for example.¹⁵²

Internal political factors also undermined colonial and economic appeasement. Gustav Schmidt makes a convincing argument that, as well as lack of support from the Opposition parties, along with much of industry and the trade unions, infighting within the Government itself - between the Foreign Office and the Treasury (and amongst cliques within the Foreign Office and Cabinet) - meant such initiatives were often hamstrung from the outset:

A coalition of officials, advisers and Cabinet Ministers prevailed time and time again, which maintained that economic and financial measures were admissible as supplementary measures but could never properly prepare the ground for a lasting arrangement between political powers.¹⁵³

Pro- and anti-economic appeasement factions within Government grew to resent one another and competed for the attention and financial resources which only the senior Cabinet figures could give. Even just setting up the bodies to consider these initiatives, such as the Inter-Departmental Committee on South-East Europe in June 1938, for example, could provoke fierce arguments. The Board of Trade resented the costs involved to get the Committee up and running and tensions emerged within the Cabinet between certain individuals, each with particular interests and departments to represent.¹⁵⁴

Wider international factors also contributed to the impression that economic appeasement would be unworkable to pursue in any more than a piecemeal manner. The vast majority of schemes contemplated by the Government relied on international approval, if not contribution, and this was rarely forthcoming in

a period of such global economic instability. A revision of the mandates required the backing of the rest of the League and consent of the colonies themselves. Scrapping Ottawa or Imperial Preference needed Dominion support as well as extensive consultation with the United States. Plans to repartition Central Africa had to have the go-ahead of the current administrative powers as well as the natives. Save for Britain giving one of its own colonies directly to Germany, all of these initiatives were large, complex and would involve many nations taking part if they were to be successful. The Government knew this only too well. The Plymouth Report, for example, pointed out that the colonies and Dominions, as well as USA, France, Belgium and the other European colonial powers, had serious objections to any territorial readjustments.¹⁵⁵

Malcolm MacDonald, meanwhile, was constantly at pains to stress that the majority of the Dominions were against colonial appeasement or the adoption of an Open Door, despite some of the positive indications from South Africa which have been covered.¹⁵⁶ At the Imperial Conference in May 1937, for example, when Chamberlain asked the New Zealand Prime Minister Michael Savage what he thought of a paper detailing the British general line on economic appeasement, he was greeted with the sharp reply: 'bunkum from end to end'!¹⁵⁷

Despite the economics being where the United States was most keen to work with Britain and the wider world, that power was still gripped by strong isolationist sentiment and was wedded to neutrality.¹⁵⁸ This permeated monetary matters, fostered mutual suspicion, and served to paralyse joint efforts to get real work done, especially in the Far Eastern sphere. When Halifax asked Lindsay what role America could play in helping ease China's economic woes in the summer of 1938, for example, the Ambassador replied that, 'he doubted whether American opinion would favour any action so direct [as a loan]... Opinion would very much prefer to continue on some such lines as that one which they were already acting'.¹⁵⁹ The British Government therefore turned away from many of the schemes envisaged by figures like Hull. Moreover, Schmidt claims that the Government, not least Chamberlain himself, often distrusted American intentions in the economic arena.¹⁶⁰ It was often felt that despite the fine words of men like Hull, the USA was dragging its feet in the financial realm as much as in the political, and only made any real moves of significance when the end result would benefit America itself. The Anglo-American Trade Agreement was

a case in point, and even this, it was believed in some British circles, was a move designed more to placate Congress than make any real contribution to the wider world.¹⁶¹

Wider Judgements on the Viability of the Alternative

Was the Government right to regard colonial and economic appeasement as policies which simply could not be pursued in the manner called for by critics? Were the limited and usually fruitless measures it took good enough given the conditions of the late 1930s? A brief survey of wider, non-Government opinion seems to indicate as much opposition to these moves as there was support for them. For every economic appeasement advocate in the House of Commons, for example, there was a critic who spoke out in resistance. The vast majority of Tory MPs regarded the cession of colonies as tantamount to treason. Leo Amery, in particular, was a fierce opponent of colonial concessions to Germany during Chamberlain's premiership, suggesting, as early as 5 February 1936, that such a move would have little effect on the balance of power. Nor would it solve any *Lebensraum* issues:

Is Germany going to be less afraid of Russia if she has Togoland given to her? What colony could we offer to Japan to make her less afraid of Russia?... What Germany wants today, and what she claims, is space for settlers, room for enlarging effectively her economic entity. She is not going to get that if you give her Togoland or even Tanganyika. Does anyone suggest that we should give her half of Australia, or half of Canada?¹⁶²

Over forty MPs from both sides of the House signed a motion brought by Liberal Viscount Elibank against colonial appeasement in this month. Even a few Labour MPs were opposed to colonial appeasement at this early stage. In the wake of the Rhineland crisis, for example, Morgan Price voiced his concerns about the suitability of Germany as an administrator of such territories:

I should certainly not agree to handing any territory, in which we are now responsible for the state of the natives, to those who treat Jews in the way they are doing, and who are developing a crazy, unscientific racial theory.¹⁶³

By the spring of 1937, when the Schacht talks were first being considered in Government, Lord Plymouth spoke out against colonial appeasement in the House of Lords. This is not surprising given his earlier role on this question. On 17 February he pointed to the extreme administrative and logistical difficulties arising from any cession, for both the natives and rulers.¹⁶⁴

Notable Parliamentarians sometimes felt more comfortable expressing their views in private. On 6 June 1938, for example, National Labour MP Harold Nicolson, who had long been sceptical of colonial appeasement, used his diary to bring the central dilemma of the economic question into focus: 'If we assuage the German alligator with fish from other ponds, she will wax so fat that she will demand fish from our *own* ponds. And we shall not by then be powerful enough to resist'.¹⁶⁵ By the time of the Munich debate in October, Labour's Frederick Bellenger seemed to concur: 'No loans for Germany or Italy will buy peace... No colonial settlement will bring disarmament and no regulation of the Mediterranean position will bring peace to our people'.¹⁶⁶

The lengthy colonial debate in the House of Commons on 7 December 1938 allowed critics of such moves a platform to elaborate their views. Even those advocating measures of colonial appeasement, such as Labour's Philip Noel-Baker, for example, who called for all of the world's colonies to be handed over to a League mandate, could see that direct cession to Germany was unfavourable. He first questioned Hitler's demand of a German 'moral right' to own a colony, given his regime's treatment of minorities, before pointing out that the vast majority of raw materials the *Führer* demanded - such as oil, iron and coal - could not be found in great magnitude in these lands. Similarly, he demonstrated that none of the states like Togoland and Tanganyika would be big enough to provide adequate *Lebensraum* for Germany, if Hitler's claims on his population expansion rate were true.¹⁶⁷ There was also the question of very hot climates in the African colonies and the conditions which Germans were used to, notwithstanding enduring uncertainties about the general returns from Empire. Tory MP Ian Orr-Ewing, meanwhile, took a more selfish angle to his

argument, pointing out that the Government had a responsibility to its taxpayers in keeping the Empire for British exploitation. Hardworking Britons who paid for the upkeep of the colonies should get 'some reasonable return', he asserted, as well as attacking the administrative costs of any territorial concessions.¹⁶⁸ He was joined in taking this line by his colleague Sir Walter Smiles, who boomed, 'No surrender, not an inch to anyone', before reminding the House that many British ex-patriots now lived in these lands. Their homes and businesses would be at risk in any re-division of territories.¹⁶⁹

Nor did the Prague Coup in March 1939 usher in any change of position by critics of economic appeasement. Tory MP Ralph Assheton, for example, on 3 April 1939, railed against suggestions that a colonial deal might yet save peace. Native opinion would be aghast, for a start: 'There is in every one of our colonies an unshakable loyalty to the home country and throne'.¹⁷⁰ Late calls for colonial deals as a means to avert war were also rebuked in the House of Lords. On 12 June 1939, for example, both Viscount Stonehaven and Viscount Cecil, Tory peers, advocated no concession of Imperial territory.¹⁷¹

As we have seen, if there were numerous political pressure groups which advocated such moves, there were also a fair few who opposed them. The Anti-Slavery Committee, for example, led by the Tory Earl of Lytton, campaigned on the protection of natives in the colonies and vehemently resisted any transfer to German rule. They were not, however, strictly speaking, against a possible cession of British colonies to the League, provided the inhabitants all consented and the finer details could be worked out to keep native welfare at the fore.¹⁷²

The Colonial Defence League has already been mentioned and this contained figures like Leo Amery, Harold Nicolson and Lord Stonehaven, among others, whose views have already been discussed. While some members like its Chairman Lord Lugard, for example, were in favour of economic appeasement in general, all were determined to resist a return of Germany's former colonies to it. In a pamphlet produced in 1938, the CDL Committee questioned the extent of Germany's avowed lack of raw materials and was keen to spell out the strategic implications for British Imperial responsibilities:

Tanganyika is crucial for air, rail and road communications in Africa. Kenya and Uganda would be surrounded by Germany and Italy if Tanganyika fell. South Africa would be in range of German bombers. Ports in these areas would be open for German ships and submarines. West African domination leads to British weakness in the Mediterranean.¹⁷³

It is not surprising that the main anti-appeasement press could also be very sceptical of economic measures. To give just one example, after the Prague Coup even the *News Chronicle* asserted bluntly its belief that 'this country should do nothing which will enable Germany to overcome its economic difficulties or increase its war resources'. It went on: 'It should rather be our aim to increase those difficulties and diminish Germany's power to wage war'.¹⁷⁴ For this paper the question of economic appeasement died when the first of Hitler's troops crossed the Czech border.

Insofar as we are able to gauge public opinion as a whole, the majority seemed sceptical of colonial and economic appeasement, especially the issue of breaking up the Empire to assuage Germany. The Plymouth Report had indicated a likely public outcry if there was any cession of colonies, something which is confirmed by Gallup Poll data from this period.¹⁷⁵ Of those polled, 85% thought that Germany should not have its former colonies returned to it in October 1938, with 78% willing to fight rather than hand them back.¹⁷⁶ There remained a firm majority against colonial appeasement throughout this period, though one would speculate that less people would have opposed colonies being handed over to the League than were against the Nazis taking direct control.

Unfortunately, the limited Gallup Poll data from this period did not ask any questions on more general measures like loans or the adoption of an Open Door policy. Nevertheless, one piece of Gallup Poll data suggests that there was broad opposition to economic appeasement. While more people thought that Britain should help China financially in July 1939 than do nothing about Japanese aggression in the Far East - 17% compared to 15% - the vast majority of opinion (37% of those polled) backed straight economic sanctions against Japan as their favoured strategy. Meanwhile, 22% of those surveyed called for military action against Japan, which meant that a narrow margin of people favoured actually going to war at this time than resisting Japanese aggression by economic aid to

China.¹⁷⁷ The press and public outcry when the Hudson-Wohlthat loan talks were revealed in this month also suggests that popular opinion was against economic appeasement - at least certainly after the Prague Coup and as war loomed near.¹⁷⁸

(5) CONCLUSION

Colonial and economic appeasement, carried out to a radical extent such as giving away colonies or adopting an Open Door policy throughout the Empire, were clearly stated alternatives to the strategy Chamberlain pursued. While the Prime Minister indeed explored these policies himself, it was only ever in a tentative manner and to a much more limited extent than called for by Government critics. Support for such moves in political circles, in their many forms and in various ways, was considerable. The vast majority of members of both Opposition parties, for example, claimed that the economic realm was one where the Government was failing and could do much more, despite its wider appeasement strategy in general. Economic appeasement could work on differing levels and with differing aims. It encompassed both macro- and micro-scopic initiatives - aiding one country or tackling the problems of an entire continent - and could also have an aggressive bent to it if it was pursued with the aim of restraining the actions of one power by helping another. It was conceived of both as an idealistic, altruistic grand strategy, usually by non-Government advocates on the Left, and as a limited, *Realpolitik* policy, more often than not from the Government's own perspective. It had both domestic and international impulses behind it.

With the arguable exceptions of alliances and rearmament, it was the peace-time 'alternative' to appeasement that the Government considered most of all - certainly in the earlier period. Indeed, it actually formed a sizeable part of Chamberlain's wider policy, though not in the drastic way demanded by his critics. When discussion of colonial appeasement was going to be dropped by the Government in 1936, it was Chamberlain and Halifax who kept the option open for further consideration in the future. It is fair to say that the Prime Minister favoured the colonial element of the policy more than the wider economic substance. At the same time, it was also Chamberlain and Simon who often had the final say in urging caution with grand economic appeasement measures later on. There was as much Foreign Office and Cabinet opposition to the policy as there was support for it, and domestic and international factors also undermined its viability as well as giving the policy impetus.

Was Chamberlain correct to restrain colonial and economic appeasement in the way that he did, never allowing them to become more than a limited part of his wider strategy - and subservient at all times to it? It is understandable why such initiatives were eventually deemed unviable by the Government, despite extensive consideration. Had the Prime Minister pursued these policies in a more radical manner, he would have been supported by many of his former critics but lost that of most of his own party and large sections of the general public, especially if he had given away a colony. Considering economic appeasement after the Prague Coup, which had confirmed in many British minds the true nature of Hitler, would also have been deeply unpopular, as is illustrated by the reception the secret German loan initiative received in July 1939.

For every colonial or economic appeasement measure explored, both aggressive and in the more traditional form, practical difficulties and strategic realities over-ruled them time and time again. The power of the purse played an important role in this. The National Government simply did not have enough money spare to make economic solutions to the world's problems a central priority. Colonial and economic appeasement needed to be internationally supported moves if they were to have any hope of success. The task of building Attlee's 'new world' was so big and the time scale would have been so vast that it would have taken a whole generation of concerted multilateral efforts to even begin to bring it about. Simply put, economic appeasement was much too slow and cumbersome to solve the very immediate problems of the late 1930s. The fact that very few other countries were willing to act decisively in this respect meant that any British initiatives were usually hamstrung from the outset. In this era of paranoia, caution and extreme protectionism, Britain could ill afford to be the only country acting in the world to solve this problem. Could Britain give its colonies over to the League if France would not do the same? Could Chamberlain do anything of value in the way of an Open Door without real help from an America so distrusted and ultra-isolationist? The views of the indigenous people in the regions contemplated for cession, or of the Dominions in the wider Imperial sphere, also served to limit the viability of these initiatives.

Many of Germany's specific claims - notwithstanding the wider problems of restricted world trade and so on - were very questionable to say the least. Could the Government have sanctioned drastic colonial and economic moves to

placate Germany when that power's woes were so radically overplayed and built largely on myths and propaganda designed to give Hitler's belligerence legitimacy? This flags up another major dilemma with regards to economic appeasement: The Nazi regime. Three major concerns existed in the Government mind about economic appeasement, and indeed with much of appeasement in general. Would giving money or territory to Germany sate the Imperial Eagle or merely whet its appetite for more (and for more substantial political concessions to boot)? And if Germany was not given a colony or region to exploit, would it then go to war in order to have its place in the sun? Finally, was it morally 'right' and would the British people stomach it? Even pro-appeasers recognised that there was an element of 'Danegeld' about it all.¹⁷⁹ These were issues the Government wrestled with and the answers it eventually came up with, especially to the first two questions, drove much of its policy. As Neville Henderson, perhaps the Briton who knew Hitler best, stated in September 1937:

If Germany disposes of unlimited raw materials she will become overwhelmingly powerful. If she is shut off from raw materials and so finds her plans thwarted, she will certainly go to war at a favourable moment... rather than remain in a position which she would regard as one of inferiority.¹⁸⁰

As has been demonstrated, much of economic appeasement was based on the belief that 'moderates' within the Nazi regime could influence Hitler to accept these initiatives. Events have proved that this was an error of judgment on behalf of the Government. Faced with this fact, could Hitler ever have been appeased with a colony? Would Tanganyika have had any affect on the *Anschluss*, for example, or on the Czech crisis? Would Hitler have modified his views on Jews, Slavs or Gypsies if Britain had loaned his country a billion pounds? The central problems of Nazism for the wider world were not economic ones and it is doubtful whether economic solutions could have solved them.

The extent to which Hitler was even interested in the economic sphere is highly questionable, and indeed a number of historians such as Ekoko have done so, as has been shown. Even at the time it was open to some doubt. As Henderson asserted in early 1939: 'I should keep away from the colonial

question. I think that Hitler... fully realises that the question must wait a long time yet and that economics and disarmament must come first'.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, it was rare that Hitler did not hold the diplomatic initiative. Britain and the world responded to his sudden and drastic moves and if the *Führer* was not interested in colonial or economic appeasement it was rarely discussed in Anglo-German diplomacy - certainly nowhere near as much as it was considered within the Foreign Policy Committee. As Scott Newton points out with regard to colonies, for example:

The fundamental difficulty was Hitler... there is no reason to believe he ever believed their restoration, in whatever form, would be acceptable as part of a general settlement. This was because he had no particular interest in extra-European expansion... Hitler's purpose in raising the issue had been merely tactical.¹⁸²

With Hitler timing was another related issue. It can be observed in this chapter that Chamberlain was often most keen on economic appeasement initiatives when the German Chancellor was not, and *vice-versa*. When Hitler showed most interest in colonies, after the Rhineland affair in 1936, the Government prevaricated. When Chamberlain was ready with his firm offer in early 1938, for example, Hitler claimed that the question 'could wait four, six, eight or ten years'.¹⁸³ All of this was exacerbated further in the earlier part of Chamberlain's tenure in that he was often most keen on colonial initiatives when Eden, his first Foreign Secretary, was not. Eden, on the other hand, usually favoured general economic moves at a time when his leader was urging restraint on this issue. This problem was solved in February 1938 when Eden resigned and Halifax, often of one mind with Chamberlain on the broad issues, replaced him. However, by now, it could be argued, it was too late.

Historical literature on economic appeasement has been limited in its contribution to the question of viability, but several of the key revisionist and post-revisionist works suggest that Chamberlain was right to keep such measures as background considerations. It is sometimes recalled that allied soldiers were shot at with shells containing copper bought from British Empire sources, which suggests that hindsight adjudges economic appeasement as a tragic mistake from the British point of view.¹⁸⁴ Robert Boothby's retrospective

claim that extensive measures might have averted war is undermined when one considers Attlee's later admissions that his party's enthusiasm for these policies was grossly misplaced.

The alternative path of extreme colonial and economic appeasement might only have made the situation worse. Would colonies or a loan have stopped Hitler pursuing an expansionist policy in Europe and averted the Second World War? And would Germany's chances of winning that war have been hindered in any way, or in fact improved, by extra material resources of this kind? If it is generally accepted that appeasement was a failed policy because it did not count upon Hitler's insatiable appetite for war, it is highly doubtful that the economic dimension, pursued far more vigorously than it was, would have had greater success with the *Führer*. The racial and eugenic elements to Nazi ideology would not be destroyed by bursting German banks. Instead, economic regions to exploit or territories to utilise as their own would have probably only whet the Fascist appetite for more in the way that Manchuria, Abyssinia, the Rhineland, Austria and the Sudetenland had done. When the German tiger had conquered most of Europe by 1942 and had acquired the economic and *Lebensraum* resources of whole swathes of territory - North, South, East and West - it did not stop and settle down to sleep. Rather, a snowballing process occurred where the attainment of resources only fuelled the capacity to gather yet more and perhaps even necessitated still further expansion. Moreover, there was an Imperial element concerned with the colonies (or an Open Door policy for that matter) which would have only increased the danger to the British Empire had they been ceded to one Dictator state or another. It is difficult to believe that an opportunist as skilled as Hitler would not have utilised, say, Tanganyika as a springboard for naval or air assaults in surrounding areas during the war itself, or perhaps even earlier.

Many of the long-term underlying causes of the Second World War were heavily weighed upon by economic factors and this made it tempting, especially to the minds of the political Left in this period, to postulate grand economic solutions for a permanent peace. However, many of the other causes were not financial in character, and so partial economic gestures like these could not ultimately deter that war, nor would they have hindered the Nazi military effort in any significant way.

1. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Commons*, vol.310, cols 1459-60, 16 March 1936.
2. See, for example, T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters, 1931-50* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), Feb. 1936, p.177.
3. Gustav Schmidt, *The Politics and Economics of Appeasement: British Foreign Policy in the 1930s*, trans. by J. Bennett-Ruete (Oxford: Berg Publishers Ltd, 1986), pp.33-7.
4. This sort of aggressive economic diplomacy has continued to come under the banner of 'economic appeasement' as it was still easing the financial situation of one or more countries, albeit with the by-product of keeping another country down. It can be seen as being distinct from, say, League of Nations approved economic sanctions, which, while restricting the trade of one country, were not designed to directly aid or appease the troubles of another state.
5. Quoted, Foreign Policy Committee Memoranda, 15 March 1937, CAB 27/626/FP(36)/18, Annex G, The National Archives (TNA). Cabinet (CAB) papers are located at the National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
6. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, col.244, 5 Feb. 1936.
7. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, cols 87-8, 24 Feb. 1936.
8. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, col.2000, 10 March 1936. Lansbury always viewed economic questions as vital to any general settlement and as a necessary prerequisite to political talks. See, for example, his comments on this issue in the House of Commons in December 1937. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1828, 21 Dec. 1937.
9. *The Times*, 11 Feb. 1936.
10. More ideologically predetermined to be hostile to the notion of Empire, and to look for economic causes and solutions to global issues, such strategies held wide appeal for those who viewed Capitalism and Imperialism as being at the heart of world problems. This point shall be addressed again later when an examination of the far Left is made.
11. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, col.1690, 18 June 1936.
12. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, col.1696, 18 June 1936.
13. See, for example, Conservative MP Hamilton Kerr's speech in Commons on 18 December. HC Deb 5s, vol.318, cols 2841-7, 18 Dec. 1936. The signature of the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936, which drew Germany, Italy and Japan into closer alignment, no doubt influenced this.
14. See Labour Party, *Labour's Immediate Programme* (1937).
15. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.205, 2 March 1937.
16. Liberal Party, *Freedom and Peace* (1937), p.3.
17. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, col.2306, 25 Feb. 1937. Spears was a former National Liberal MP.
18. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1802, 21 Dec. 1937.
19. Nazi treatment of German minorities like the Jews played a part in thinking here, with native rights and welfare often being flagged up by concerned parties.
20. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, cols 1834-5, 21 Dec. 1937.
21. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1821, 21 Dec. 1937.
22. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, cols 1818-22, 21 Dec. 1937. The Anglo-US Trade Agreement was eventually signed in November 1938.

23. As shall be discussed later, it was the economic sphere where Anglo-American cooperation, particularly in the Far East, was felt to be most likely to succeed.
24. Leo Amery to Neville Chamberlain, 11 Nov. 1937, AMEL 2/1/27, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Leo Amery (AMEL) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. Amery's published diaries at this time confirm that he was not against 'some small token concession' as part of a general settlement. See John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, vol.5, 1929-45* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 22 Oct. 1937, p.449.
25. Amery to Jan Smuts, South African politician and later Prime Minister, 22 Nov. 1937, AMEL 2/1/27.
26. P. van Zeeland, 'Report to the Governments of the United Kingdom and France on the Possibility of Obtaining a General Reduction of the Obstacles to International Trade', 26 Jan. 1938. Quoted, *International Affairs*, vol.18 (3), 1939.
27. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1420, 24 March 1938.
28. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1432, 24 March 1938.
29. Japanese troops had secured vast areas of the Yangtze valley and large tracts of Chinese coastline by the summer of 1938.
30. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, cols 3025-8, 4 July 1938. Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander concurred, stressing that 'from a psychological point of view, and, even, in the long run, from the financial point of view,' such a loan would benefit Britain, as well as improving China's position *vis-à-vis* Japan. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, col.3037, 4 July 1938. Even the occasional Tory MP, traditionally more sceptical of the value of the League of Nations, joined such calls on this day. Sir John Wardlaw-Milne, for example, supported such a loan and advocated a tougher line in general from Britain against Japan. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, col.2986, 4 July 1938.
31. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.66, 3 Oct. 1938 (my emphasis). Sinclair, on the same day, concurred with the basic sentiment and repeated similar demands. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.77, 3 Oct. 1938.
32. House of Lords Debates, 5th Series, vol.110, col.1324, 3 Oct. 1938.
33. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1381, 4 Oct. 1938. Again, the Liberals, in this case former leader Viscount Samuel, joined the chorus. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1389, 4 Oct. 1938.
34. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1460, 5 Oct. 1938.
35. HC Deb 5s, vol.342, cols 1199-211, 7 Dec. 1938.
36. This would result, he believed, in no single power having an advantage over another in the raw materials field, something a mandate system would not account for. It would also mean a quicker settlement of any trade and migration disputes. HC Deb 5s, vol.342, cols 1236-7, 7 Dec. 1938.
37. A Non-League 'international authority,' subject to world opinion, was his suggestion and illustrates the diversity of views that existed within the ranks of advocates of this alternative. HC Deb 5s, vol.342, cols 1256-8, 7 Dec. 1938.

38. See Communist Party, *Colonies, Mandates and Peace* (1936). The British Socialist Party believed that Capitalism was at the heart of the world's problems and many of its various organs regularly talked of the injustice of 'economic oppression in the British Empire'. Socialist Party, *Peace Alliance or Worker's Front?* (1938), p.1. Smaller Socialist groupings, meanwhile, like the Militant Labour League, frequently railed against the betrayal of colonial workers by Imperial warmongers and longed for a drastic revision of the mandates as a step towards the natives' liberation. See, for example, Militant Labour League, *'Peace Alliance' and the Road to War* (1938).
39. Independent Labour Party, *The Socialist Challenge to Poverty, Fascism, Imperialism, War: The Basic Policy of the I.L.P.* (1939).
40. Quoted, FO371/21780/C9990, 17 Sept. 1938, The National Archives (TNA). Foreign Office (FO) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
41. Quoted, FO371/20704/C1588, 18 Feb. 1937.
42. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, *Opening the Empire Door: A Positive Policy for Peace* (1937), p.6.
43. League of Nations Union, *Economic Steps Towards World Peace* (1937), pp.2-6.
44. Gilbert Murray, League of Nations Union Chairman, to Amery, 8 Oct. 1937, Gilbert Murray papers, MS Gilbert Murray 83, fol. 9, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Gilbert Murray papers (MS Gilbert Murray) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
45. Quoted, FO371/24029/W323, 2 Jan. 1939 (resolutions adopted on 10 Dec. 1938).
46. *The Times*, 14 Jan. 1936.
47. Geoffrey Dawson, editor of *The Times*, to H. G. Daniels, friend, 11 May 1937, MS Dawson 79, fols. 129-30, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Geoffrey Dawson papers (MS Dawson) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
48. *Daily Herald*, 14 March 1938.
49. *Daily Herald*, 3 and 6 Oct. 1938.
50. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Oct. 1938. The *News Chronicle* had similar demands in the colonial sphere. *News Chronicle*, 3 Oct. 1938.
51. George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain, 1937-75*, vol.1 (New York: Random House, 1976), p.10.
52. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.9.
53. *Daily Herald*, 16 March 1938. In a similar vein, one day earlier, R. H. Howland of East Croydon wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* and asked: 'What is wrong with the uniting of two German-speaking peoples? And again, why this indecision over the return to Germany of her rightful colonies? A great country like Germany cannot do without them'. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 15 March 1938.
54. *Manchester Guardian*, 19 March 1938.
55. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 21 March 1939.
56. Quoted, FO371/19933/C4759, 2 July 1936.
57. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.448, 15 March 1939.
58. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.2517, 3 April 1939,
59. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, cols 2530-2, 3 April 1939.
60. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.343, 20 March 1939.

61. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.684, 19 April 1939.
62. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, cols 1827-8, 19 May 1939.
63. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, col.2004, 31 July 1939.
64. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, cols 2014-7, 31 July 1939. He also advocated closer Anglo-American economic cooperation as well as a loan to China to help resist Japanese aggression in the Far East.
65. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, cols 2042-4, 31 July 1939.
66. This is probably for the simple reason that almost all of the historical works on Chamberlain and appeasement are not concerned with alternative policies, counterfactuals or differing conceptions of the Prime Minister's strategy.
67. C. R. Attlee, *As it Happened* (London: Heinemann, 1954).
68. Robert Boothby, *I Fight to Live* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947), pp.229-30.
69. Boothby's claims should not be overstated, however, as they were merely two out of the ten crucial factors he identified.
70. Francis Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers* (London: Heinemann, 1961), p.13.
71. Andrew J. Crozier, *Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p.269.
72. Bernd Jürgen Wendt, *Economic Appeasement: Handel und Finanz in der Britischen Deutschland Politik, 1933-39* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann University Publishing, 1971), p.616. Quoted, C. A. MacDonald, 'Economic Appeasement and the German 'Moderates', 1937-39: An Introductory Essay', *Past and Present*, vol.56 (3), 1972, pp.105-35 (p.135).
73. Schmidt, *The Politics and Economics of Appeasement*, p.386.
74. Schmidt, *The Politics and Economics of Appeasement*, p.147.
75. MacDonald, 'Economic Appeasement', pp.130-1.
76. A. Edho Ekoko, 'The British Attitude Towards Germany's Colonial Irredentism in Africa in the Inter-War years', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.14 (2), 1979, pp.287-308 (pp.304-5).
77. Neil Forbes, *Doing Business with the Nazis: Britain's Economic and Financial Relations with Germany, 1931-39* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp.225-8. Such tensions between economic bodies like the Treasury and the Foreign Office were ever-present and will be returned to in Chapter Five.
78. Scott Newton, *Profits of Peace: The Political Economy of Anglo-German Appeasement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.76-7.
79. Richard Grayson, 'Leo Amery's Imperialist Alternative to Appeasement in the 1930s', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.17 (4), 2006, pp.489-515 (pp.499-500).
80. Many standard textbooks give the main details of Government economic appeasement policy. See, for example, the largely narrative approach adopted in the relevant sections of R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the coming of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1993).
81. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, cols 2557-8, 6 April 1936. Lord Stanhope, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs at this time, stated in the House of Lords two days later that the Government had not even begun to consider this question. See HL Deb 5s, vol.100, col.584, 8 April 1936.

82. See, for example, the very similar pronouncement in the House of Commons by Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden on 2 March 1937. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.211, 2 March 1937. The statement by Dominions Secretary Malcolm MacDonald on 7 December 1938 is another example specifically during the Chamberlain premiership. HC Deb 5s, vol.342, col.112, 7 Dec. 1938.
83. See, for example, Chamberlain to Amery, 2 Dec. 1938, AMEL 2/1/28(1).
84. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 13 April 1936, Neville Chamberlain Papers (NC), NC18/1/956, Special Collections Department, University of Birmingham (BU).
85. Foreign Policy Committee Proceedings, 27 July 1936, CAB 27/622/FP(36)/2, The National Archives, (TNA).
86. CAB 27/626/FP(36)/8, 20 Aug. 1936.
87. FO371/20472/W3851, 15 April 1936.
88. FO371/19884/C807, 31 Jan. 1936. By the end of the year, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Robert Vansittart, summarised the opinion of many of his colleagues on this matter: 'A conditioned glimpse of an unpromised land would, if properly timed, attenuate what is still a plausible grievance, and remove a bone of contention that is barely worth a dog-fight'. FO371/20278/F7781, 31 Dec. 1936. One or two figures from outside the Government also advocated conceding economic spheres of influence to Germany in Europe. Leo Amery, for example, came to favour a German-dominated Danubian bloc as a precursor to increased economic integration on the Continent as a means to buttress peace. For more on this under-appreciated facet of Amery's foreign policy, see Grayson, 'Leo Amery's Imperialist Alternative to Appeasement'.
89. The deal, which was established in 1934, set a percentage value on the amount of money Germany made from its imports to Britain it was obliged to reciprocate on buying British goods.
90. CAB 27/626/FP(36)/23, 2 April 1937. At a Foreign Policy Committee meeting a few days later, Chamberlain defended Germany against charges of mistreating natives in its former colonies. CAB 27/622/FP(36)/8, 6 April 1937. What are not recorded very often from these meetings were suggestions by Halifax in March for a wide-scale repartitioning of central Africa. In the same meeting, Dominions Secretary Malcolm MacDonald suggested that Australia could take on some of Germany's surplus population. See CAB 27/622/FP(36)/7, 18 March 1937.
91. CAB 27/626/FP(36)/34, 7 June 1937.
92. FO371/21247/W11812, 11 June 1937.
93. He was supported in this by Oliver Stanley, President of the Board of Trade, a consistent backer of economic appeasement. Eden's own pro-economic appeasement views declined as time went on.
94. CAB 27/622/FP(36)/12, 11 June 1937.
95. CAB 27/622/FP(36)/13, 16 June 1937.
96. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 26 Nov. 1937, NC18/1/1030.

97. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1806, 21 Dec. 1937. Eden, on the same day, concurred, stressing that 'the two things are closely interdependent'. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1880, 21 Dec. 1937. Simon also expressed this view in private correspondence in November. See John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to John Tweedsmuir, Canadian Governor General, 24 Nov. 1937, John Simon papers, MS Simon 84, fols. 152-3, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. John Simon papers (MS Simon) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
98. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/21, 24 Jan. 1938.
99. In a follow-up meeting on 3 February, attended by Neville Henderson, the Ambassador in Berlin, the committee discussed what *quid pro quo* concessions should be demanded of Germany in exchange. While a possible return to the League was touted, measures of disarmament in the air (Chamberlain was particularly keen to have all bomber aircraft abolished) and guarantees of Austria and Czechoslovakia emerged as the most concrete desiderata. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/22, 3 Feb. 1938.
100. Quoted, Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p.131.
101. Quoted, Forbes, *Doing Business with the Nazis*, p.203. Again, this is indicative of how those in power had to face up to harsh facts when making decisions, in contrast to the Opposition parties, which very rarely made any statements along these particular lines, if at all.
102. This topic is covered extensively by David Kaiser in his book *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War: Germany, Britain, France and Eastern Europe, 1930-39* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
103. Quoted, Newton, *Profits of Peace*, p.98.
104. FO371/21247/W11812, 11 June 1937. Gladwyn Jebb produced another memo in July in which he identified the so-called moderates within the Nazi leadership to whom economic approaches would most appeal. Figures like Schacht, Neurath, Blomberg and Goering were identified as the more rational individuals, and it was hoped that they might be able to restrain the wilder impulses of extremists like Goebbels and Himmler, who vied for Hitler's attention. FO371/20733/C5138, 14 July 1937.
105. Quoted, MacDonald, 'Economic Appeasement', p.115.
106. Quoted, MacDonald, 'Economic Appeasement', pp.111-3. Indeed, as shall be shown in later chapters, appeasement as a whole was very much driven by the power of the purse - or lack thereof. Domestic issues often put the breaks on more radical economic initiatives of this kind, as will be demonstrated.
107. Correspondence between John Tweedsmuir, the Canadian Governor General, and John Simon is illuminating on this point. Tweedsmuir was a close friend of both Hull and Roosevelt, describing the former as having 'a great crusading earnestness on this question', and the latter, 'though he is a much looser thinker', having 'very much the same feeling'. Tweedsmuir to Simon, 25 Oct. 1937, MS Simon 84.
108. Quoted, Schmidt, *The Politics and Economics of Appeasement*, p.105.
109. FO371/19806/A1159, 7 Feb. 1936.
110. FO371/20660/A4165, 11 June 1937.
111. FO371/22517/R3279, 1 March 1938.
112. Smuts to Amery, 9 Dec. 1937, AMEL 2/1/27(2).

113. CAB 27/627/FP(36)/71, 4 Dec. 1938. The state of South-West Africa was a former German territory mandated to South Africa at the end of World War One. A few months later, in April 1939, the South African Cabinet sent a note of its proceedings to the Foreign Policy Committee, expressing vehement support for a President Roosevelt's recent statement on the importance of continued economic negotiations as a means to avert war. CAB 27/626/FP(36)/44, 25 April 1939. The Vatican was also pro-colonial appeasement. See, for example, D. Osborne's memo on the subject in May 1939. FO371/23790/R4244, 16 May 1939.
114. FO371/21674/C1866, 17 March 1938.
115. Quoted, Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy*, p.249.
116. Chamberlain also addressed the question of Chinese loans at this time, in response to increasing pressure in the House of Commons, but a decision was taken in the Foreign Policy Committee to postpone the initiative indefinitely. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/30, 1 June 1938.
117. See CAB 27/627/FP(36)/54, 26 Oct. 1938.
118. Quoted, Newton, *Profits of Peace*, p.88. Consideration was also given at this time to possible aggressive economic measures against Japan in the Far East, such as reducing imports, though no significant action to this effect was taken. See, for example, FO371/22098/F12895, 4 Nov. 1938.
119. FO371/21659/C14471, 9 Nov. 1938.
120. See CAB 27/624/FP(36)/37, 8 Feb. 1939.
121. After the Prague Coup in March, Britain shored up its new guarantees to these countries (given in April) through increased financial aid in the late spring and summer.
122. FO371/23818/R6506, 21 July 1939.
123. This agreement was designed to lessen competition between the two powers and establish set shares for each state of the total exports of all European coal-exporting countries.
124. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, col.1829, 19 May 1939.
125. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, col.361, 8 June 1939. He echoed these sentiments again at the end of the month in a widely-recorded speech at Chatham House. Quoted, *The Times*, 30 June 1939.
126. For a recent, authoritative account of these events see Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp.264-70.
127. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1806, 21 Dec. 1937.
128. FO371/20475/W10243, 25 Aug. 1936.
129. FO371/19934/C6145, 3 Sept. 1936.
130. He was joined in this view by many senior Foreign Office figures such as Ralph Wigram and Laurence Collier, both department heads. Peter Neville makes a close analysis of the views of Wigram, as well as a survey of the Foreign Office in general, in his article 'A Prophet Scorned? Ralph Wigram, the Foreign Office and the German Threat, 1933-36', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.40 (1), 2005, pp.41-54.
131. FO371/20483/W1331, 13 Feb. 1936.

132. Moreover, the report claimed that there were 'grave objections' to colonial appeasement based not only on the 'formidable difficulties of procedure', but also on 'moral principles and on considerations of material advantage'. CAB 27/626/FP(36)/4, pp.35-6. When the issue was discussed in Government during the spring of 1937, similar objections were raised even by those without a direct stake in affairs. In a private conversation with Eden, for example, Paul van Zeeland 'maintained that the return even of all Germany's colonies could not possibly bring about the improvement in Germany's economic position which Dr Schacht appeared to look for'. FO371/20720/C3243, 29 April 1937.
133. Sir Eric Phipps, then British Ambassador in Berlin, to Eden, 13 April 1937, PHPP 1/18/3, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Sir Eric Phipps (PHPP) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
134. FO371/20731/C6216, 1 Sept. 1937.
135. See, for example, 'Relations with Germany', 24 Oct. 1937, DRAX 2/18, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Admiral Drax (DRAX) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre. Cabinet figures also regularly asserted that any return of Tanganyika to Germany, for example, which was often earmarked as a suitable concession, would only endanger South Africa.
136. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/21, 24 Jan. 1938.
137. CAB 27/622/FP(36)/12, 11 June 1937.
138. FO371/20483/W195, 8 Jan. 1936.
139. David Meredith, 'British Trade Diversion Policy and the Colonial Issue in the 1930s', *Journal of European Economic History*, vol.25 (1), 1996, pp.33-68 (pp.54-6).
140. FO371/19886/C1180, 19 Feb. 1936. As late as 19 April 1939, meanwhile, and despite the fact that the Prague Coup suggested war was looming near, Halifax reiterated that wide-scale economic appeasement could not be sanctioned when the validity of German complaints was in doubt. He stated: 'I think the facts simply will not support the fantastic notion that the British Empire is a great treasure-house whose bounty is selfishly exploited and jealously locked... The vast export of raw materials is there for all to see'. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.696, 19 April 1939.
141. See, for example, CAB 26/622/FP(36)/19, 16 March 1937.
142. CAB 26/623/FP(36)/21, 24 Jan. 1938.
143. See CAB 27/622/FP(36)/12, 11 June 1937. Antony Best points out that the economic appeasement of Japan, both aggressive and in more traditional forms, was only ever very limited and provoked disinterest from within the Cabinet. Antony Best, 'Economic Appeasement or Economic Nationalism? A Political Perspective on the British Empire, Japan, and the Rise of Intra-Asian Trade, 1933-37', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol.30 (2), 2002, pp.77-101 (p.94).
144. He also questioned whether China might not just give the money to the Soviets in return for war supplies.
145. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/30, 1 June 1938.
146. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/30, 1 June 1938.
147. Quoted, CAB 27/627/FP(36)/54, 26 Oct. 1938.

148. More detail on this can be found in CAB 27/624/FP(36)/37, 8 Feb. 1939.
Furthermore, as the President of the Board of Trade Oliver Stanley pointed out in November 1938, the USA would be greatly upset by such a deal which ran contrary to the character of the recent Anglo-American Trade Agreement. The Agreement stipulated that Britain had to buy its tobacco from the USA.
CAB 27/624/FP(36)/33, 21 Nov. 1938.
149. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/33, 21 Nov. 1938.
150. For the origins of the 'fourth arm of defence' thesis see K. Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1946), pp.316-9.
151. John Ruggiero, *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament: Pride, Prejudice, and Politics* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), p.90.
152. Best, 'Economic Appeasement or Economic Nationalism', pp.81-3.
153. Schmidt, *The Politics and Economics of Appeasement*, p.147.
154. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/30, 1 June 1938.
155. CAB 27/626/FP(36)/4, pp.16-17. Various Foreign Office officials recognised that France, in particular, was reluctant to pursue serious economic appeasement initiatives at this time because of the financial difficulties it was suffering after wide social reforms. The franc was also habitually weak. See, for example, FO371/22517/R3279, 1 March 1938.
156. See, for example, CAB 27/622/FP(36)/7, 18 March 1937.
157. Quoted, CAB 27/626/FP(36)37.
158. The amount of books on US foreign policy in this period is legion. For particular reference to Anglo-American relations and Chamberlain's Government see, among others, A. A. Offner, *American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard university Press, 1969); C. A. MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement, 1936-39* (London: Macmillan, 1981); or W. R. Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt: British Foreign Policy and the United States, 1937-40* (Ohio: Ohio State Press, 1988).
159. Quoted, FO371/21501/A5662, 6 July 1938.
160. Schmidt, *The Politics and Economics of Appeasement*, p.127.
161. This Anglo-American distrust shall be discussed more generally in Chapter Four.
162. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, cols 246-8, 5 Feb. 1936. Amery continued to be a strong defender of Empire and spoke on the subject of colonies over the coming years. He wrote a book called *The German Colonial Claim* in 1939, which set about rubbishing just that, and he played a leading role in establishing the Colonial Defence League, which frequently lobbied the Government on this subject.
163. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1507, 26 March 1936.
164. Quoted, FO371/21239/W3422, 17 Feb. 1937. In the House of Commons, meanwhile, Conservative MP Paul Emrys-Evans claimed that it would be 'an act of strategic madness' to surrender any colony. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.264, 2 March 1937.
165. N. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters, 1930-39* (London: Collins, 1966), pp.345-6 (my emphasis).
166. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.126, 3 Oct. 1938.
167. HC Deb 5s, vol.342, cols 1203-6, 7 Dec. 1938.
168. HC Deb 5s, vol.342, cols 1218-20, 7 Dec. 1938.
169. HC Deb 5s, vol.342, cols 1252-3, 7 Dec. 1938.

170. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.2828, 3 April 1939.
171. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, col.401, 12 June 1939. The former also suggested that public opinion was with him in concern about Chamberlain's future colonial plans: 'I can assure him that my post-bag makes it clear that I am by no means alone in feeling anxious about it'. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, cols 398-400, 12 June 1939.
172. See, for example, Anti-Slavery Committee, *Letter to the Prime Minister on the Transfer of Colonial Territories* (1938).
173. Colonial Defence League, *German Colonial Demands* (1938), p.3.
174. *News Chronicle*, 21 March 1939.
175. CAB 27/626/FP(36)/4, 9 June 1936, p.15.
176. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.10. Asked the same question in March 1939, meanwhile, 78% still thought there should be no return of colonies, with 69% now willing to go to war over the issue. This softening of opinion is surely indicative of the public being anxious to avoid war after the Prague Coup, something which looked a more distant prospect after Munich. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.16.
177. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.21.
178. Such tentative assessments of public opinion like these should be regarded with some caution, however.
179. See, for example, FO371/19933/C5021, 23 June 1936.
180. Neville Henderson, British Ambassador in Berlin, to Chamberlain, 1 Sept. 1937, FO371/20731/C6216.
181. Henderson to Chamberlain, 23 Feb. 1939, FO800/315/8.
182. Newton, *Profits of Peace*, pp.76-7.
183. Quoted, Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p.131.
184. Forbes, *Doing Business with the Nazis*, p.xii.

THREE: LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY

We must not surrender faith in the League and in collective peace efforts... The worst enemies of peace today are those who discredit the League. Faith is the first essential in peaceful communities. The only alternative is fear and force.¹ (Fred Simpson, 1937).

(1) INTRODUCTION

A large number of Chamberlain's contemporary critics, such as Labour MP Fred Simpson, above, and those amongst subsequent historians, have contested that the National Government should have pursued a policy of vigorous support for the League of Nations as an alternative to appeasement in the late 1930s. Standing by the League and its central pillar of collective security would, many asserted, have deterred the Fascist powers from their foreign adventures and offered the surest way to lasting peace.

This chapter will examine the origins and viability of the policy of permanent and committed support for the League as an alternative to appeasement. Whereas the other rival strategies considered in this thesis envisaged Chamberlain steering Britain towards a new path, at least one not trod during his own period in office, the League of Nations already existed as an alternative to appeasement that the Prime Minister turned away *from*. Broadly speaking, the League was the *status quo* and Chamberlain's decision to jettison it in his attempts to revise the post-war settlement in favour of the Dictator powers provoked anger amongst many contemporaries across all parties and shades of political opinion. With its grand ideals of a new and better world following the horrors of the Great War, the League had been the way of things since 1920, after Versailles and Woodrow Wilson's radical vision. Its effective abandonment by the Government in the last few years before the Second World War - although it was by no means alone in doing so - was not easily forgiven and led to bitter recriminations from many opponents when war eventually broke out and in the emotional aftermath. The Government had, after all, won the 1935 election on a platform of firm support for the League.

A few clarifications are needed before we can begin. It will become clear throughout this chapter that support for the League was actually more complex and ambiguous in nature than many have considered thus far. It will be demonstrated that backing for the Covenant, from both Government and non-Government figures alike, varied widely in character and extent. For example, some people merely used the terminology and language of the League to cloak other, more cynical policies which were far removed from, and sometimes even antithetical to, the original altruistic ideals of the League's founding fathers. Support was advocated by many people who actually backed the far more *Realpolitik* option of alliances, for example, and indeed these two alternatives - the so called 'old' and 'new' diplomacies - actually merged and interacted on many occasions throughout the late 1930s, as shall be shown. Defining a term like 'collective security', therefore, becomes a problematical issue here. This phrase was used by many at the time in its original sense to describe the idealists' favoured strategy of all fifty-plus member-nations acting together against an identified aggressor in pursuit of economic or military sanctions. And yet the term was also used in this period to describe naked balance-of-power politics, limited agreements and pacts, often by those seeking legitimacy or vindication for the strategies they supported.²

It should be noted that the phrase 'the Covenant' is used throughout this chapter as a substitute for 'the League'. Of course, the reader will be aware that the Covenant was not the League itself, but rather the rule-book, constitution or set of guiding principles for its members. One could support the League in general but oppose elements of the Covenant, for example. While contemporaries often interchanged these terms, as shall be shown, a clarification of this kind is necessary here. Despite the League being an inter-Governmental body consisting of many member states, it shall often be referred to here as 'it', for reasons of simplicity. Again, this was common at the time.

The preceding chapters in this thesis have been justified in large part due to the lack of existing works that assess the viability of those alternatives. This is not the case with regard to the League of Nations, a topic considered in a great many historical books and articles produced in the years since the end of the war. Indeed, of all the alternatives considered in this study, the League is probably the one about which most is already known. This is testament to its

centrality to world affairs during the 1930s and its popularity with a great many of those discussing foreign policy, both at the time and thereafter. While this chapter may, therefore, be less original than others in this thesis, it is of central importance to a work examining suggested alternatives to appeasement. It is also hoped that, by looking at opinion on the League in context, this chapter will offer new insights into the way it was utilised by those active at the time.

The chapter will begin by charting the origins and development of the League option as an alternative to Chamberlain's policy. It will then consider the historiography of the subject before closing with an assessment of how viable this option was, given the conditions of the late 1930s.

(2) ORIGINS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

This section will chart the development of the policy of committed support for the League of Nations as an alternative to appeasement by focusing on some of the main proponents of the cause active in politics at the time. Having functioned since 1920, when it was created by the victors of the First World War, the League still had a great many advocates in Britain by the middle of the 1930s. Events like the Manchurian, Abyssinian and Rhineland crises had, some observers asserted, dramatically shaken faith in the League as an effective instrument in solving world disputes. One critic described it as ‘a lamentable failure’ in the wake of the Rhineland affair, for example.³ However, supporters of the Covenant maintained that adherence to its values and the policy of collective security remained the best guarantee of future peace. While League support existed long before Chamberlain’s premiership, it was during his period, as war loomed near, that calls for the League to be revived found voice.

The Labour and Liberal parties placed great emphasis on the Covenant’s embodiment of international law and order. The League therefore emerged as the Opposition’s most consistently and vehemently backed option to deal with the Fascist threat in this era. It became official foreign policy and the Government’s rearmament effort in this period was largely only ever given approval if the Opposition believed it was for collective security purposes - as discussed in Chapter Five. Indeed, of all the alternatives to appeasement discussed in this thesis, the League had perhaps the widest support, both in politics and throughout the country in general, certainly in the earlier period. As time passed and events in the last year of peace began to turn even the most ardent enthusiasts away from the belief that the League could stop Hitler in his tracks, support for what it represented - its language and ideals - often remained unbowed. The League also had a good number of vocal supporters amongst the Conservative Party, certainly still in 1936 and early 1937, although scepticism about its value in foreign affairs was also highest in Tory circles and probably always had been. This only increased over time, as shall be shown.⁴

The issue of sanctions had been discussed in early 1936 with regard to the limited trade restrictions imposed on Italy by the Council in wake of the Abyssinian invasion in October 1935. Figures from all parties, including the leaders of Labour and the Liberals, called for their intensification in a Commons debate in February, with oil and coal embargos advocated as a means to slow the Italian war effort.⁵ While Sinclair claimed that League economic sanctions were ‘the only means’ of ending the conflict, Attlee broadened his assault on the Government’s policy more generally:⁶

We on this side believe that the war need never have arisen if the Government had stood firmly by the League from the start... If the Government had taken a firm line the other countries of the League would have fallen in. I believe there would have been support from the United States of America and I believe it might immeasurably have strengthened the whole collective security system.⁷

The March 1936 Rhineland affair crystallised foreign policy debate in Parliament. Possible action against Germany, a non-League member from 1933, was rarely advocated in this regard as Hitler was widely perceived to have only revised an injustice left over from 1919. However, discussion of sanctions in view of Italy’s African adventure continued and the importance of the League in general was brought into new focus by developments in Central Europe. Senior Labour spokesman Hugh Dalton, for example, ruled out supporting sanctions against Germany but reiterated his party’s backing for a League of Nations international police force ‘and particularly an international air force’ to replace their national equivalents in a new contribution to collective security.⁸ In the same debate, Conservative MPs Robert Boothby and Winston Churchill both stressed that any concrete Anglo-French military pact - currently being discussed in light of the Rhineland crisis - should not supersede collective security and the League, but only be one part of it.⁹ Churchill, in particular, across two debates in March and April, stressed that ‘pacts of mutual aid and assistance’ should be agreed under the auspices of the League as a starting point in establishing real collective security throughout the world.¹⁰ He concluded: ‘There is safety in numbers and I believe also that there may be peace in numbers’.¹¹ Many Liberals agreed. Geoffrey Mander, for example, on 21 April 1936 again called for the stiffening of sanctions against Italy:

Members will probably say “sanctions means war”... I venture to say that the precise opposite really represents the position. It is the belief that sanctions will *not* be applied or that they will be applied ineffectually or half-heartedly that means war.¹²

In the House of Lords the Liberal peer Viscount Elibank agreed that calls for economic or military sanctions against Germany would be rash, and stressed that any forthcoming conference to deal with the Rhineland crisis should also discuss a revision and strengthening of the Covenant.¹³ Tory peer Viscount Cecil, who will be addressed again later when looking at the League of Nations Union, of which he was President, called for intensified sanctions on Italy and maintained that the ‘big, broad, general systems’ which the League represented provided the most security for Britain.¹⁴ Labour’s Lord Strabolgi, meanwhile, concluded the debate from the Opposition benches, claiming that he saw ‘no alternative at all’ to the League and calling for efforts to reinvigorate the drive for collective security.¹⁵

The abandonment of existing sanctions against Italy in the summer of 1936, because they were not working and greatly unpopular, provoked fury among the ranks of League supporters. The British Government bore much of the brunt, exacerbated only by Chamberlain’s famous reference to the maintenance of sanctions being the ‘very midsummer of madness’ (see below).¹⁶ Labour’s deputy leader Arthur Greenwood, for example, on 18 June claimed that ‘Abyssinia stands as a ghastly monument to the treachery of nations who were sworn to stand by her’.¹⁷ Attlee, meanwhile, agreed in the same debate that Baldwin, by his part in the decision, had ‘killed the League and collective security’. Moreover, ‘He had never even... tried to make an effort’.¹⁸

By the end of the year, Churchill’s support for the League had coalesced with his demands for rearmament into a policy which became known as ‘Arms and the Covenant’. Along with fellow Tory enthusiasts like Harold Macmillan and leading figures from other parties and trade unions (Sinclair, for example) he organised a huge rally at the Albert Hall on 3 December in support of this policy. This ‘tremendous gathering’, as it was later described, would be presented as a missed opportunity to have rallied the country around the League and to have saved peace. At the time, however, the abdication crisis stole much of its thunder and its impact was less than they hoped for.¹⁹ Following

Churchill's vigorous lead, though, many of the other most prominent League supporters attempted to rally to the cause by signing a cross-party pledge in *Headway*, the League of Nations Union magazine, in January 1937. Under the banner 'Save the League: Save Peace', the signatories declared their firm belief 'that war can be averted and a stable peace permanently maintained if the nations which are Members of the League will now make plain their determination to fulfil their obligations under the Covenant'. It went on: 'Only so will the peaceful settlement of international disputes become possible.'²⁰ The statement was signed by, among others, Attlee, Dalton and Philip Noel-Baker from Labour, Sinclair and Lloyd George from the Liberals, Churchill and Lord Lytton from the Conservatives, Cecil and Gilbert Murray (representatives from the LNU), as well as Cosmo Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The position upon Chamberlain's assumption of power in May 1937, therefore, was clear. Although rocked by the Abyssinian and Rhineland debacles, the many supporters of the League from across all parties maintained that it should be strengthened and revived.²¹ Collective security, Geoffrey Mander asserted, if pursued with 'more vigour and determination' by the Government, still represented the best hope for peace, as an alternative to acquiescing in the foreign adventures of the Fascists.²² Another House of Commons statement by Attlee in June 1937 with regards to the Spanish Civil War, is indicative of this view. Here the Labour leader called for an end to Non-Intervention and for the League to be utilised in Spain in the search for peace. Standing by the League was the surest way to solve this dispute, he believed. Furthermore, he asserted, it was 'the only way in which you will maintain the British Commonwealth of Nations'.²³ By the close of 1937, other Labour MPs such as Albert Alexander were calling for League sanctions to be utilised against Japan as well as in Europe. The early war effort of that country (a non-member) against fellow member-state China had been developing well:

We say that if they [the Government] could at this time show themselves to be really pursuing a true League policy, moving towards world peace... seeing that the Chinese people get a fair crack of the whip to defend themselves and working to re-establish the League on the basis of peace, then we would not ask for debates.²⁴

It was around this time that Churchill launched a new drive for his policy of 'Arms and the Covenant', claiming in the House of Commons in December that 'armaments alone will never protect us'.²⁵ Given his later advocated policies, there is solid evidence here that Churchill's enthusiasm for the League was not all that it might first appear, but rather a cloak for the less idealistic policy of alliances. By adherence to the League, he asserted in the same speech, 'we consecrate every alliance and regional pact which may be formed for mutual protection, and... win for us a very great measure of sympathy in the United States'.²⁶ This statement, taken with his earlier calls for 'pacts of mutual aid and assistance', is illustrative of how Churchill saw the League as the means to rubber stamp existing agreements far more limited in nature than collective security originally envisaged. This strategy was meant to be a multilateral, all-inclusive arrangement designed to replace those narrow blocs and alliances of the old diplomacy which were widely held to have contributed to the causes of the First World War. For Churchill, the Covenant would also be a moral device to win support and cooperation from the USA, the strongest non-League power.

Whereas the League was the end in itself for many individuals within Labour and the Liberals, it was perhaps more of a means to an end for men like Churchill, at least by the end of 1937. This is not to suggest that such figures always held these views or that they did not once support collective security in its original, more idealistic sense a few years earlier. Macmillan, for example, who used his memoirs to present himself as being of virtually one mind with Churchill on foreign affairs issues by this time, shows how some figures from the 'Arms and the Covenant' camp were originally disturbed at the links between the League, collective security and alliances.²⁷ In a private letter to Geoffrey Dawson in the wake of the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in March 1936, for example, he spelt out his worries regarding a possible imminent Anglo-French pact:

The danger is not in an alliance - the League itself is an alliance - but in allowing an alliance, designed to be the nucleus of a true European society upholding a principle of security which can be applied to all alike, becoming an alliance which is... a challenge to that principle.²⁸

Churchill's attitude at the time of the *Anschluss* in March 1938 seems to confirm this impression of his real view of the League. As shall be shown in the next chapter, Churchill used this event to call for a Grand Alliance against the Fascist powers in the House of Commons, with the League mentioned only briefly as the conduit through which any discussions with Germany might take place and as the 'moral basis' for rearmament.²⁹ The Covenant part of 'Arms and the Covenant' was retreating here in face of a naked *Realpolitik* pact, though admittedly one 'agreeable with all the purposes and ideals of the League'.³⁰ Other speakers, however, the vast majority to Churchill's political Left, in the same sitting maintained that the *Anschluss* merely demonstrated that the League in itself needed reviving. Liberal Geoffrey Mander, again, was clear:

It is said that the League is dead, but the League at present is like a motor car without petrol and without a driver. It is there and you need only fill the tank and put your chauffeur there and he can at once drive straight ahead.³¹

The inference here is that if Chamberlain's Government would only take a lead in giving the League direction and purpose, then peace could be secured.

Attlee used the *Anschluss* to reaffirm that the world needed 'a return to League principles and League policy... as the only way to maintain peace' and called for a meeting of the Assembly to discuss what should be done in response to the crisis.³² Sinclair, meanwhile, claimed that, 'above all', Britain should now base its foreign policy on the principles of the Covenant and work with its neighbours to 'combine our resources in a system of collective security against aggression'.³³ A few days later, however, on 24 March, Sinclair demonstrated that his thinking was moving away from the ultra-ideological position of many League zealots, towards Churchill's more limited, pragmatic view. His call for the Government to 'rally the peace-loving powers in a system of mutual assistance against aggression' suggested that he was thinking more along the lines of limited regional pacts now as a basis to build a true, all-inclusive collective security later.³⁴ Labour's Philip Noel-Baker, meanwhile, a Geneva enthusiast and member of the LNU, rejected even contemplating this sort of line when he concluded the debate from the Opposition benches: 'We stand for no alliance but the great alliance of the League against armaments and war. What

we want to do, and what we believe can be done, is to revitalise the Covenant of the League of Nations'.³⁵

The view in the House of Lords at this time mirrored, and sometimes perhaps even magnified, that within Commons - the political experience of most of those within the upper House making many more likely to have been active in the idealistic era of the League's inception. Lords Snell and Strabolgi of the Labour Party, for example, echoed their colleague's comments in the lower chamber, both demanding that the League be rebuilt as the surest way to peace.³⁶ The latter, in particular, on 16 March 1938, stressed that the League could be an instrument for removing grievances in Europe, if only they could 'reverse the Chamberlain policy' with regards to it.³⁷

The Munich Agreement, as the epoch of Chamberlain's appeasement policy, drew further debate on the League and collective security. However, neither dominated the discussion in the way they might once have done, evidence that other solutions to the Nazi problem were being considered more and more by this time. Attacks on the Government were also more recriminatory in nature with Chamberlain being scolded as much for not standing by the League in the past as he was for not backing it now. Attlee, for example, opened the debate on 3 October by explaining that Britain was currently in such a humiliating position because of the Government's failure to support the League in Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain and Austria.³⁸ Indeed his almost every reference to the League in this speech was retrospective and full of regret, rather than hope for its successful use again in the future. Senior Labour MP Herbert Morrison's opening attack on 4 October was in the same vein.³⁹ Churchill's salvo on 5 October barely mentioned the League at all - indeed half of 'Arms and the Covenant' had now seemingly been jettisoned altogether.⁴⁰ However, if Munich had perhaps caused a wide-scale sobering of political thought about Geneva, the Opposition had not yet abandoned it. Dalton and Greenwood both submitted that there was no other way to secure peace than collective security.⁴¹ The latter's speech in particular perhaps indicated that the League itself was less important than the ideas it embodied.⁴² More junior Labour MPs like Josiah Wedgwood and James Griffiths, meanwhile, called for the League itself to be revived.⁴³ The latter, in particular, asserted that 'we have, first of all, to get back to 1918, to the one decent thing that came out of it'.⁴⁴ Many Liberals also called for the League

to be remade as an alternative to the sort of agreement embodied in Munich. Liberal peer Lord Davies, for example, scolded Chamberlain on 4 October for abandoning the League during the Czech crisis, before concluding: 'You can make it workable if you create the proper machinery'.⁴⁵

There were even one or two Tories who still advocated strengthening ties with Geneva, though these were now the rare exception in a party which generally stood firm behind appeasement. Sirs Edward Grigg and Derrick Gunston, for example, both spoke in succession on 6 October about the need to create a truly universal League, the inference here being that they wanted America to be included.⁴⁶ In the House of Lords, meanwhile, Lords Londonderry and Lytton reaffirmed their support, the former placing blame square at the door of his own Government on 3 October: 'It is not the League of Nations that has failed, it is the members of the League of Nations who have failed'.⁴⁷ Lytton, meanwhile, concluded that 'peace can only endure and only flourish in the soil of justice. There is no other soil in which it can grow'.⁴⁸

Wider Advocates: Other Groups, Press and Public Opinion

A brief look at wider advocates of the League option is appropriate now in order to more fully understand its development as an alternative to appeasement. The League of Nations Union was as old as the League itself and essentially reflected the views of its founder and Honorary President Viscount Cecil, who had played a leading role in the creation of the League in the 1919 peace settlement. The Liberal academic Gilbert Murray, LNU Chairman by the late 1930s, also drove much of its policy. A 'Pacifist' body, to return to Ceadel's terminology, with strong links to many Pacifist groups, the Union's highpoint was perhaps the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁴⁹ However, it still had just under 200,000 members by 1939 and this was virtually uniform in terms of political bent.⁵⁰ In Cecil's own words, by the summer of 1937, 'practically all the active members of the Union have belonged to the Left, though not usually the extreme Left', with Tory membership almost non-existent by this time.⁵¹

Unsurprisingly, the group was a consistent advocate of closer ties with the League as an alternative to any sort of peace-through-concessions policy. In

June 1936, for example, Cecil wrote to the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden suggesting that collective security was the ‘only solid hope’ of deterring aggression and advised the maintenance of League sanctions against Italy.⁵² Only a few months earlier, Murray had outlined his views that alliances or any other limited agreements were no substitute for the original ideals of the Covenant, in a letter to Lord Ponsonby:

I think the difference between collective action unanimously undertaken by a complete all-inclusive League and an attempt at collective action by certain nations in a very incomplete League is the difference between peace and war.⁵³

The Union intensified its efforts once Chamberlain assumed the premiership, as international tensions increased and the Government moved further away from Geneva. Murray, again, for example, launched a scathing attack on Chamberlain in a letter to a LNU colleague in April 1938:

He first destroyed collective security by announcing that we would not defend anybody, and then justified his isolationism by saying that collective security was dead... If Britain and France give a lead and genuinely support the League, the small states will be overjoyed.⁵⁴

The September 1938 Munich Agreement was, for Cecil, a missed opportunity to stand behind the League and call Hitler’s bluff. On 3 October in the House of Lords he asserted that the Anglo-French partial mobilisation just prior to the conference (and the threat of France and Russia fulfilling their obligations to Czechoslovakia) demonstrated that the principles of collective security were sound: ‘No one can doubt that if we had chosen to use it... it was utterly unthinkable that Germany would have resisted’.⁵⁵ Even as late as 1939, the Union reiterated its belief that there were ‘no other effective measures... than insistence upon the principles which underline the Covenant of the League,’ in a statement of policy adopted on 2 January.⁵⁶ It is important to note the precise wording of this example. A phrase like ‘principles of collective security’ allows a degree of flexibility in interpretation which plain ‘collective security’ does not. This is indicative of a weakening on behalf of the Union by 1939 from the lofty, idealistic heights Murray scaled in the spring of 1936, as

shown above. The fact that the LNU supported Chamberlain's efforts to construct his 'Peace Front' of alliances in the spring and summer of 1939 is also evidence that even the most ardent League supporters now accepted that alliances would be the best substitute for the Covenant's original ideals. This point will be revisited again later.

Other, much smaller groups also promoted the League cause in the mid to late 1930s, often formed by leading LNU members or linked to the various Pacifist bodies in existence at the time. The New Commonwealth Society, for example, of which Churchill and Macmillan were sometime activists, frequently lobbied the Government on the benefits of a League policy and began to make 'real progress' in its calls for an international police force, according to the latter, by the beginning of 1938.⁵⁷ The Council of Action and the Next Five Years Group were both established in the mid-1930s, by Lloyd George and Macmillan respectively, and endorsed collective security as well as measures of colonial and economic appeasement.

Pacifist groups such as the Peace Pledge Union and the National Peace Council also regularly called for the League to be revived, as has been mentioned. The latter, for example, sent a letter to the Foreign Office on 18 February 1937 strongly condemning the Government's rearmament programme and asserting its belief that 'the best safeguard of national security and peace and the best defence of democracy lie in the pursuit of a courageous and practical policy of international cooperation'.⁵⁸

Viscount Cecil has already testified that the far Left rarely joined the LNU, and many from within their ranks were hostile to an organisation often perceived to be no more than a clique of Capitalist powers supporting the slavery of colonials through the mandatory system. However, the Liberal-Leftist ideals of societies of equal nations and a world run by multilateral consensus, as opposed to major states and Empires, still appealed to some within these groups. Calls for a radically reformed League, operating on the grand principles of the Covenant, were therefore sometimes heard. James Maxton of the Independent Labour Party called for a much stronger League, prepared to use 'armed force methods', in the wake of the Rhineland affair.⁵⁹ A Communist Party pamphlet from January 1937, meanwhile, bemoaned 'the National Government's

deliberate abandonment of collective security that plunged the world into a new armaments race', before advocating a return to a League-based strategy.⁶⁰

The national press, as usual, reflected the concerns of many League advocates. Unsurprisingly, the pro-Labour *Daily Herald* often backed the cause wholeheartedly. In the wake of the *Anschluss*, for example, it asked of the Government: 'Will they see now that the only chance for the future is to rebuild the system they have shattered?' It continued; 'There is no escape from danger save by working with redoubled power, taking every difficulty as a spur, for the reconstruction of the collective system'.⁶¹ In response to the Munich Agreement, the *Herald* took a line not unlike Lord Cecil's on the same day in Parliament:

We have refused to take collective security seriously. We were saved from war because at the last moment it was called into being through the collective preparedness of Britain, France and Russia... Two things are necessary to secure peace. One is that there shall be a firm collective resistance to aggression... The second is a removal of the causes of war.⁶²

It is noticeable that the *Herald* closed here, in common with many other advocates, with the claim that the League could be used as *well* as appeasement, and not just as an alternative to it. However, it was only the original, loftier characteristics of Chamberlain's policy to which these Government critics referred - peace through international negotiation - and not the aspects of sacrifice so roundly abused at the time of the Munich crisis.

Other papers backed the League option too, though rarely with the gusto and passion of the *Herald*. The *News Chronicle*, for example, produced a detailed article entitled 'The Only Real Way to Peace' following the *Anschluss*. In this, among other things, it called for Chamberlain 'to maintain without qualification the principle of international right and thereby enlist the moral forces of the nations and the world'. It went on, 'we must recognise that the badly shaken system of collective security needs to be rebuilt... It is only when the principles of collective security have been thus transformed into a living reality that we can begin to "bargain" with Germany'.⁶³ The links between collective security and alliances were not so much an issue for the *Chronicle*, indeed it attempted to persuade its predominantly middle class readership of the benefits of a League policy by linking it *with* these older strategies: 'Collective

security is simply an up-to-date way of giving sense to an old saying: “United we stand, divided we fall.” Or, if you prefer: “Hang together or Hang separately”’.⁶⁴ The *Manchester Guardian* also, on occasion, called for the League to be revived, especially in the earlier part of Chamberlain’s premiership. After the *Anschluss*, for example, the *Guardian* asserted that the road to peace could ‘only be through some form or other of collective understanding... The only solution to the problem [can] be found in the League of Nations’.⁶⁵ Of the smaller newspapers, the *Economist* and *Spectator* were among the most committed League supporters during this period.

The general public backed the League, certainly before the Munich Agreement anyway, with more commitment than they did any other policy. The Government was returned by a landslide in 1935 largely because of its avowed support for the League in foreign affairs. There are numerous examples of how politicians called for the Government to stand by the League by claiming that this strategy had the majority support of the British people. Viscount Samuel’s quote in March 1938, for example, has already been seen, whereas Wedgwood’s bold assertion in the House of Commons that ‘the public opinion of this country, Conservative and Labour alike, is overwhelmingly strong in favour of the League of Nations and collective security as the best way of safety’ is just one other illustration.⁶⁶ Similarly, letters from the public to the national press supporting the League ahead of appeasement abound. To give just a couple of many possible examples, G. M. Bearne of Kingsley Way, North London, felt compelled to write to the *News Chronicle* shortly after the Munich settlement demanding ‘something better’ than appeasement and concessions: ‘We want to find the way out which will change the circle into an ascending spiral. In a word we want Federation - a strong and enduring League of Nations’.⁶⁷ In the *Daily Herald*, meanwhile, shortly after the *Anschluss*, Mr T. H. Linskill of Sussex echoed calls for a League international police force to prove to Chamberlain ‘that authority is the secret of peace’.⁶⁸ The *Herald* also assessed public opinion in the wake of the Munich Agreement by summarising the letters it had received in the aftermath of events. While a new disarmament conference and an international police force were both strongly advocated, ‘by far the largest section’ of the public believed that ‘a return to the League system’ was the

surest way to peace.⁶⁹ Issues of editorial selection should be taken into account here when attempting to judge the significance of such evidence.

It is perhaps Gallup Poll data that gives the clearest indication of public opinion on the League during Chamberlain's era. A huge 71% backed Britain's continued support for the Covenant on 29 June 1937, just a month after he had become Prime Minister.⁷⁰ Asked in December if Britain should remain a member of the League, 72% answered in the affirmative, this despite the effects of Abyssinia and the Rhineland affair.⁷¹ The highest levels of peace-time approval for Chamberlain, meanwhile, and by inference his policy of appeasement, was in the 59% region during the months of the Munich winter - by far inferior to levels of support for the League.⁷² Was this then the people's alternative? Unfortunately, there were no more questions asked about the League in Britain for the duration of Chamberlain's peace-time rule, though no other suggested policy gained as much support in Gallup Polls before the events of September 1938. The period afterwards, however, is a different story - one which will be returned to again in subsequent chapters.

Late Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

This section will examine how support for the League developed and progressed in the last few months before war in order to gain a more complete picture of this alternative. The Labour Party had reaffirmed its faith in the League shortly after the Munich Agreement. In the colonial appeasement debate in the House of Commons on 7 December 1938, for example, referred to in the previous chapter, Philip Noel-Baker asserted that there lay in Geneva 'the only machinery by which stable peace can be preserved'.⁷³ The Prague Coup, however, shook even the most ardent supporters' hopes that a solution to the Nazi menace could be found within the Covenant. While support for the League and collective security continued to be vocalised by the Opposition over the following months until the outbreak of war, few among the ranks genuinely believed that the grand ideals of the League's founding fathers could stop Hitler in his tracks. Indeed, from now on, support for the League was often in lip-service alone, rather than true conviction, or else in retrospective attacks on the Government for placing

Britain in the position it was in now by abandoning Geneva in the past. Collective security and its high moral standing was now used increasingly as a cloak by which League enthusiasts could disguise what, in truth, was rapidly growing support for Chamberlain's post-Prague policy of alliances. Thus, on 3 April 1939, Churchill was quick to praise how the 'letter and spirit of the Covenant' was being maintained when he welcomed the Polish Guarantee of 31 March.⁷⁴ As we shall see later, the Government itself also sought to use the language and moral authority of the League, rather than the League itself, to give legitimacy to other, more cynical policies.

One or two senior Opposition figures even tried to pass off the Government's alliance policy as their own long-held programme and derided Chamberlain for only now adopting the collective security strategy they had been calling for all along. For example, on the same day as Churchill spoke, the Liberal leader Archibald Sinclair welcomed the Polish Guarantee as a being a sign that it was 'now, once again... common ground [for] the rule of law, buttressed by collective security, to represent the foundation of European peace'.⁷⁵ Labour peer Lord Snell, meanwhile, felt able to taunt the Government later that month for its 'conversion to a policy that we have long preached'.⁷⁶ In the months after Prague, many leading pro-League figures advocated closer ties with Russia in particular and expressed their strong desire that the Soviets should not be excluded from the collective security system.⁷⁷

Many League advocates hence became almost self-delusional, as if trying to convince themselves that the naked pacts they were now advocating were somehow acceptable because they were, in fact, collective security in action. The *Daily Herald*, for example, on 21 March claimed: 'The new Grand Alliance which must be formed will derive in spirit not from predatory or self-seeking alliances of the old world, but from the principles of the League'.⁷⁸ A day later, meanwhile, it asserted that 'there must be no turning back from collective security now'.⁷⁹ The *Herald* of course knew only too well that any Grand Alliance currently being considered would consist merely of a handful of powers, rather than an all-inclusive collective, and might indeed contain Russia, a partial (1934-1939) and haphazard devotee of League principals at best.

The more honest Government critics admitted that the policy they were now backing, albeit out of necessity, was in fact little more than alliances, but called

for the League to be carried along in parallel. Lord Strabolgi, for example, complained on 19 April 1939 that the policy of guaranteeing Poland (and the current talks with regard to pursuing alliances with Turkey, Greece and Romania) gave 'the disadvantages of a system of collective security and none of the advantages of the Covenant'.⁸⁰ Others hoped that limited alliances now might prove to be the foundation around which a true collective security might be built later. Thus, before the Polish Guarantee was even given, Lord Cecil expressed his desire that the 'nucleus of a new Confederation of Nations, or League of Nations' would be found in the essential security arrangements currently being discussed with France and Poland. He also hoped that Russia and the USA might one day be added to this revived system.⁸¹ Tory peer Lord Mottistone, meanwhile, on 12 June 1939, called for a newly built 'League of Fair Play [or] League of Humanity' to be built around the current Peace Front in order to secure the future of Europe once the current troubles had died down.⁸²

This consideration of the League as the basis for newer forms of governance leads on to the final part of this section. Some League enthusiasts backed Geneva through the late 1930s in the hope that its example would one day lead to new ways of ordering the world which might guarantee future peace. Many fledgling advocates of European Union, for example, saw in a revived League their best hopes to achieve such goals. Hugh Dalton wrote in his diary on 11 and 12 March 1936, during the Rhineland crisis, *not* of his hopes for collective security but his wish for an 'all European Pact of Mutual Assistance against aggression'.⁸³ This suggests that even the most ardent advocates often had a Europe-first regional mentality. Lord Cecil, among others, was a committed advocate of closer European Union as a means to peace and viewed the League specifically as the instrument to achieve this. Talking of reform and rebuilding the League in the House of Lords shortly after the March 1938 *Anschluss*, for example, he stated: 'Let us have in our minds by all means, as I think we ought to have, the ultimate possibility of a United States of Europe'.⁸⁴

Other academics and individuals of note also saw the League as a catalyst for change of this type, but some went even further than Europe. Writer Arthur Moore, for example, penned a pamphlet entitled *The Necessity for a British League of Nations* shortly after Munich Agreement:

We have before us for purposes of study a remarkable example of a united effort to secure permanent peace and common protection against aggressors: The League of Nations... We might do all we can to popularise here and in other Empire countries the idea of a still larger federation, a Federal British Commonwealth which will have an authority of its own... based upon our collective security and a pooling of defence forces.⁸⁵

Henry Gillett, the Mayor of Oxford, wrote several times to Lord Halifax in the final year of peace with his thoughts. Lamenting how both Geneva and alliances 'did not really function satisfactorily', he spoke of how the League should incorporate America within it and evolve into 'the beginning of a World State':

If it was possible now for England and America to move together towards the formation of this union of democratic nations, the advantages would be very great - first, in a united foreign policy; second, they would be strong enough now without further rearmament to withstand aggression; and third, in guaranteeing the defence of the nations in the union there would be no idea of encirclement of Germany.⁸⁶

(3) HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historical debate on the viability of the League alternative to appeasement has been substantial. This section will examine the most important contributions in the field in order to identify how the debate now stands, a necessary prerequisite before any new assessment can be made. Unsurprisingly, given the popularity of the League at the time and how Geneva dominated much foreign policy discussion, the orthodox school on appeasement had much to say on this topic. Indeed, just about every memoir written by Chamberlain's contemporaries contains at least one passing reference to the League or a brief assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of collective security. The fact that many of these figures wrote in the 1950s, when the United Nations was taking its first tentative steps and the Cold War was escalating, no doubt influenced this.

Many of the Government's contemporary critics with regards to the League later wrote to condemn the records of Baldwin and Chamberlain *vis-à-vis* Geneva. Churchill, for example, viewed the League as a shamefully deserted mechanism which might have changed the course of history had it been used with more conviction in the mid-1930s. In his introductory section to *The Gathering Storm* he asserts that 'it was a simple policy to keep Germany disarmed... to build ever more strongly a true League of Nations capable of making sure treaties were kept, or changed only by discussion and agreement'.⁸⁷ Of the Government's response to the Abyssinian crisis, Churchill lamented how they 'had led the League of Nations into an utter fiasco, most damaging, if not fatally injurious to its effective life as an institution'.⁸⁸ The Rhineland affair, meanwhile, was another turning point:

There was, perhaps, still time for an assertion of collective security, based upon the avowed readiness of all members concerned to enforce the decisions of the League of Nations by the sword... There is no doubt that had His Majesty's Government chosen to act with firmness and resolve through the League of Nations they could have led a united Britain forward on a final quest to avert war.⁸⁹

The accuracy of this statement is a debating point for another place. It is worth noting, however, that the author says much less about his own vocal support for the League in the later 1930s.

Anthony Eden spent much of his memoirs distancing himself from the League, which he was so strongly associated with during his term as Foreign Secretary. He did, however, claim that the Government's tepid attitude with regard to Geneva - 'an intimation to the Dictators that we would stand by and watch, while they swallowed the smaller countries of Europe' - was one of the contributing factors behind his resignation.⁹⁰ Harold Macmillan, on the other hand, was much firmer in his abuse of the National Government in this respect. Echoing Churchill's attack regarding the spurned chance to use much harsher sanctions against Italy during the Abyssinian affair, Macmillan's views on what British policy should have been thereafter were clear: 'It was to the League, fortified, strengthened, and encouraged by British and, it was to be hoped, French leadership, that we must look in order to rally resistance to the growing German menace'.⁹¹ Like Churchill, Macmillan saw the League as a viable alternative to the appeasement route taken by Chamberlain. In 'Arms and the Covenant', he asserted, they had vocalised a workable rival strategy which should have been pursued and may have averted war:

Such a lead by Britain might have brought fresh energy and unity into France; it would have steadied Central and Eastern Europe and probably, in due course, brought Russia into a genuine partnership with the West. It would certainly have thrilled public opinion in the Dominions and perhaps galvanised their Governments into activity. It might, who knows, have succeeded in leading the American people at least some steps along the road of international responsibility which they were destined within a few years to tread.⁹²

Gilbert Murray unsurprisingly concurred with this general view. In his 1948 *From the League of Nations to United Nations*, for example, he confidently asserted that 'the whole course of history would have been different' if only Chamberlain had stood by the League.⁹³ The passing of time had not diminished his conviction that appeasement should have been abandoned in deference to Geneva. Clement Attlee, meanwhile, as another of the main League advocates of the day, used Francis Williams' published interview to resolutely defend at

least the ideal of collective security, if not quite the League itself: 'One must have collective defence. It was sneered at at the time by people like Neville Chamberlain, who called it midsummer madness, but now, of course, it is orthodox doctrine'.⁹⁴

If Chamberlain's critics were quick to attack the Government for spurning the League option in trying to save peace, many of the Prime Minister's contemporary allies were just as eager to defend their leader's tenure. Both Halifax and Simon - perhaps Chamberlain's two most trusted lieutenants in office - stood square behind the Government's strategy. The former asserted that 'it was obviously idle to pretend that there was such a thing as collective security on which nations could confidently rely for their own protection', for example.⁹⁵ The latter, meanwhile, criticised a body which, he claimed, essentially sought to defend an unjust *status quo* in Europe and left only 'a legacy of unappeasable quarrels, which would make the state of the world more dangerous than ever'.⁹⁶

Other colleagues of the Prime Minister concurred with this view of the League's value. Two major figures at the Foreign Office during Chamberlain's premiership, Lord Vansittart and Lord Strang, both gave damning appraisals of Geneva's likeliness to have averted war. The former, by no means a defender of Chamberlain's reputation in general, stressed that while the ideals of the Covenant were right, the conditions of the day were wrong for their use. With America, Germany and Japan not members of the League, and Italy to withdraw in 1937, Geneva's machinery was incomplete and unworkable, he asserted.⁹⁷ Strang blamed a crisis of will. How could the leading members of the League hope to save the world with only 'paper commitments that passed for a system of collective security?'⁹⁸ Samuel Hoare, meanwhile, who was Foreign Secretary during the Abyssinia affair, which dealt such a blow to the League's prestige, defended his own period in office by condemning other nations' attitudes to Geneva. Britain, he asserted, both at the time of Abyssinia and forever thereafter, could not afford to be the only power propping up the whole system on its back.⁹⁹

Even the fiercest critics of appeasement, as we have seen with Vansittart, could admit in retrospect that the League was an unworkable solution to the Fascist problem. Leo Amery, who will be addressed later as an opponent of

collective security, looked back on the 1930s and deemed economic sanctions futile in a world where the non-member states were free to trade with whoever they liked.¹⁰⁰ Alfred Duff Cooper, Chamberlain's First Lord of the Admiralty who resigned in protest at the Munich settlement, claimed in his memoirs that the League amounted to no more than 'dead, empty words' after the Rhineland affair and wrote an allegorical pamphlet in 1940 entitled *The Funeral of the League of Nations*.¹⁰¹ In this he put the death of collective security down to a lack of universality in membership and a coordination of intent.¹⁰² As has been intimated above, both Eden and Attlee, two of the most committed League advocates in the Chamberlain period, also revised their opinions somewhat with the passage of time. The former admitted that the League, after the Abyssinian affair 'was a very different proposition from the League which had voted so solidly in favour of sanctions'. He went on, 'I could not believe that Geneva would be, at least for some time to come, an adequate guarantee of peace'.¹⁰³ Attlee, meanwhile, despite standing by collective security, made a bold admission that his Party's official policy at the time had been naive:

(Williams) How far do you think it was still possible to depend on the League of Nations as an effective organ after the march into the Rhineland and after Abyssinia?

(Attlee) Well, Germany was out. And Russia had more or less gone when Litvinov dropped out of favour. After that I don't think there was much chance.¹⁰⁴

While taking a critical view of Chamberlain and appeasement in general, therefore, the orthodox camp produced as many damning verdicts on the League as it did positive. Moreover, even contemporary Government critics, or supporters of the League alternative to appeasement, could later admit to the numerous frailties of the Geneva system.

Many historians from what might be broadly termed the revisionist period on appeasement only concurred with this assessment. E. H. Carr made one of the most famous scholarly judgments on the League. He viewed it as being doomed to failure because the lofty ideals of its creators were ill-suited to the harsh world of the late 1930s:

The metaphysicians of Geneva found it difficult to believe that an accumulation of ingenious texts prohibiting war was not a barrier against war itself... Once it came to be believed in League circles that salvation could be found in a perfect card-index, and that the unruly flow of international politics could be canalised into a set of logically impregnable abstract formulae inspired by the doctrines of nineteenth century liberal democracy, the end of the League as an effective political instrument was in sight.¹⁰⁵

A plethora of historians succeeding Carr seemed only to reinforce this interpretation. F. S. Northedge, for example, followed up his damning assessment of the League as merely a guardian of the *status quo* (in his 1966 book *The Troubled Giant*) with a comprehensive analysis of the weakness of collective security in his 1986 *The League of Nations*.¹⁰⁶ In brief, his argument was that collective security was too radical a notion for those used to the old diplomacy of the pre-Great War era. They tried to practise both at the same time and succeeded with neither.¹⁰⁷ While the absence of several of the big powers dealt an early blow to the League's chances, it was the essential 'newness' of the system envisaged that was to be its main undoing:

Nothing like the League or the Covenant had ever been seen or tried before... When member-states realised that it was they themselves who had to act, that the League was in effect nothing more than the sum of its members, the old allurements of safety, the old methods and the old game tended to return to the forefront.¹⁰⁸

Other historians have taken elements of the Northedge thesis in more recent times and developed it into what has become the standard view of the League as a tragic failure, save for some minor successes in the humanitarian field. Paul Kennedy, for example, asserts that 'it is difficult to conclude in retrospect that the existence of the League proved an advantage to Britain'.¹⁰⁹ Donald Birn, meanwhile, in his book on the League of Nations Union admits that members failed in educating Government opinion sufficiently enough at the time about what collective security would really entail, preferring to retreat behind their own rhetoric in a flawed attempt to win mass support.¹¹⁰ Peter Beck, in a series of more recent studies on the League, re-emphasises many of these points, whilst also challenging Murray's assertion that Geneva could have averted war. He reminds us, for example, that even the Russo-Finnish conflict went

unchecked by the League at this time.¹¹¹ Though Russia was expelled because of this campaign, no military action was taken by the rest of the League in defence of this fellow member state.

A truly post-revisionist or counter-revisionist exploration of the League option has yet to be undertaken, testament to the extensive, rigorous treatment this topic has received to date and the seeming finality of the judgement now reached. While the continued existence of the United Nations and ongoing debates about multi-faceted solutions to international crises will doubtless mean that this topic is not quite dead just yet, it seems the damning verdict of history with regards to the League alternative to appeasement was reached and settled some time ago.

(4) VIABILITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Links between the Alternative and Government Policy

Is the verdict of history reached so far correct and was Chamberlain right to effectively abandon the League in favour of appeasement? Before these questions can be answered, the following brief section is needed outlining the extent to which the National Government actually worked within the Geneva system, as well as identifying what the most important aspects of the League were to the policy making elites. It has become the stuff almost of historical legend to assume that Chamberlain washed his hands of the Covenant from day one of his premiership. However, it was not until early 1938 that the break effectively became final.

Space does not permit a comprehensive analysis of Government support for the League, but a few comments about its early actions and motives are necessary here as a corrective to the oversimplified picture which exists. The handsome victory in the 1935 General Election, largely engineered by Chamberlain, was in part due to the Government standing on a platform of committed League support. In the wake of the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in March 1936, Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons that the Covenant represented ‘the keystone’ of British foreign policy.¹¹² In a letter to his sister in April, Chamberlain talked about how the League would be discredited if Britain withdrew the Italian sanctions: ‘If that happens our whole European policy is threatened,’ he asserted.¹¹³ Just a few days later in the Western Department of the Foreign Office, Roger Makins claimed that the League was valuable to Britain not only for the measure of security it gave, but also because of the aid it afforded London in maintaining smooth relations with the Empire.¹¹⁴ The Government stood firm behind the League, by and large, in the earliest part of the period covered in this study.

The spring and summer of 1936, however, saw a widespread shaking of this faith, as the repercussions of the Abyssinian and the Rhineland debacles became clear. These few months saw the early stages of a creeping disillusionment set in with the Covenant for Chamberlain and others, as evidenced by his ‘midsummer of madness’ reference to League sanctions in June, which shall be

covered shortly. These were eventually withdrawn in July. Chamberlain's support for the League at this time, and that of many of his colleagues like the Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, now came increasingly to rest upon wide-scale reforms of the Covenant. On first impression, these appeared to aim at strengthening the collective system through the consideration of such things as an international police force to supersede national armies. Germany would also be welcomed onboard. However, Chamberlain in particular was also keen on what would actually amount to the gradual dismantling of 'true' collective security in the form of regional pacts - a sort of halfway house between the Covenant's new multilateral ideals and the old diplomacy of blocs and alliances. A diary entry from 27 April 1936, for example, is illustrative of his thoughts:

Our ultimate aim must be some kind of international police force... The League of Nations should be kept in being as a moral force and focus, but for peace we should depend on a system of regional pacts, to be registered and approved by the League... This proposal would make it easier for Germany to come in.¹¹⁵

A Foreign Office paper from July of that year, circulated in the Cabinet and Foreign Policy Committee, gave more details of the recommendations in this respect. It talked not only of a possible 'Mediterranean Pact' which Britain would adhere to, but also of a more general 'all-European pact of Mutual Assistance', evidence that figures like Dalton were not the only ones to be thinking in a Europe-first mindset.¹¹⁶ Indeed, throughout the Foreign Office, men like Cranborne and fellow Under-Secretary Lord Stanhope were particularly keen on this proposed new system during the summer of 1936.¹¹⁷ The latter, for example, produced a detailed memo on the subject in August.¹¹⁸ Along with Chamberlain of course, figures like Malcolm MacDonald, the Dominions Secretary, gave this greatest consideration within the Cabinet. He was particularly keen to carry Empire opinion in any revision of the collective security arrangement.¹¹⁹

By August 1936, while Chamberlain talked in the Foreign Policy Committee of 'every effort' now being needed 'to strengthen and re-establish' the League system, he not only continued to undermine the ideal of a true, all-inclusive collective security by way of regional pacts, but even suggested that

they might operate *outside* the League's jurisdiction: 'He did not think that the failure of the Council or the Assembly to approve a pact should render that pact invalid... the validity of a pact should not depend upon the prior approval of the League'.¹²⁰ In public pronouncements, however, Chamberlain paid the customary lip-service to Geneva. In a House of Commons speech in November 1936, he asserted that 'all regional pacts must be subject to our general obligations under the Covenant. They are not intended to be a substitute for them but an addition to them'.¹²¹

It is clear, then, that while maintaining the official line of support for the League, many senior figures within the Government, not least Chamberlain himself, were secretly thinking of rebuilding the system in the latter part of 1936 in a way far removed from, and even antithetical to, the original ideals of the founding fathers. Though these planned extensive reforms never came to pass, the following year continued much in the same vein with increased expression of concerns about the viability of the League accompanied by public pronouncements of good faith. By the time Chamberlain had assumed the premiership a strange duality had emerged as the Government sought to reconcile its growing doubts with the official, popular line of continued support. In November 1937, for example, Eden stated in the House of Commons that, in the mission for an enduring peace, 'while the League of Nations is at present seriously handicapped... we believe it still proves the best means for obtaining that result'.¹²² German re-entry was even considered in the Foreign Policy Committee during February 1938, when the *quid pro quo* of a possible colonial agreement with Germany was discussed.¹²³

The final Government break with the League as a peace-keeping instrument came later in this month, when Chamberlain gave a speech in the House of Commons effectively announcing that collective security was dead. However, despite his committed pursuit of appeasement in the final years before war, the Prime Minister still used the language of Geneva for his own purposes. Of course, the Government never officially abandoned the League - rather, to borrow a term, it was put into a state of 'suspended animation' - and remained a member, while continuing to support its wider humanitarian work through to the outbreak of war.¹²⁴ However, as an instrument to check Dictators, its use became more valuable as a cloak to cover other, more cynical policies. Thus, the

comments Chamberlain made in his diary in April 1936 about the moral weight of the League were perhaps only more relevant during the later pre-war period when his Government considered the pursuit of alliances. When a possible Anglo-Franco-Czech pact was discussed in the Foreign Policy Committee in the wake of the *Anschluss* in March 1938, for example, Halifax was moved to state that ‘this could be best pursued if it were sustained by the moral sense of the world, and for this the League of Nations offers a convenient framework’.¹²⁵

A year later, when the Government actually pursued alliances after the Prague Coup, Alec Randall of the League section of the Foreign Office advised calling upon the League in the event of hostilities. This was not because he expected any practical aid for Britain from the other members but because of the moral weight and authority Geneva would give ‘in our position affecting the neutrals’.¹²⁶ It was clear that the Government considered the value of the League as a potential lever on countries like the USA, Netherlands and Belgium to be higher than it was on those like Germany. A League approach would certainly win favour with such powers, and this might one day turn into material support, or at least make it difficult for these countries to side with the aggressor.¹²⁷

Even when Britain was engaged in early discussions with the Soviets with regards to an alliance during the summer of 1939, Alexander Cadogan noted in his diary on 23 May that he and Chamberlain had discussed trying to get ‘a League umbrella for our Russian arrangement’.¹²⁸ It can be seen, then, that the rhetoric of the League continued to have its uses for the Government, as well as for the Geneva supporters, long after the League itself had ceased to be of any perceived importance.

The Extent to which the Government Considered the Alternative as Viable

To what extent did Chamberlain’s Government actually consider the League of Nations and collective security as viable alternatives to appeasement? In some respects, this is a relatively straight-forward question to answer as, has already been shown, the League was dismissed so openly by the Prime Minister in early 1938. The scorn he received from League supporters for doing so was widespread and vociferous. The merits of collective security had been doubted

within the Government long before the late 1930s. As early as 1916, for example, long serving Cabinet Secretary Maurice Hankey had warned his colleagues that any post-war system which relied upon such a notion would only hinder and over-burden Britain, possibly causing complacency with regards to military preparations.¹²⁹ One has to concede that this demonstrated a remarkable degree of foresight. Much closer to the Chamberlain period, meanwhile, in November 1934, Baldwin had famously damned the League's lack of universality in a speech in Glasgow which was to overshadow future policy:

A collective peace system in my view is perfectly impracticable in view of the facts today that the United States is not yet, to our infinite regret, a member of the League, and in the last two or three years two great powers, Germany and Japan, have both retired from it... It cannot be undertaken without these countries - of that I am certain.¹³⁰

The issue of incomplete membership was to haunt the League all through the Chamberlain period and limit its effectiveness as an alternative to appeasement. In the wake of the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, for example, Halifax, who was then Lord President, rebuffed calls for sanctions on Germany by claiming that 'a League that is 50% or 60% representative cannot be expected to be 100% effective'.¹³¹ In the House of Commons, meanwhile, Viscount Cranborne, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, asserted that Britain could not be expected to carry the League on its back by imposing sanctions when nobody else would do the same. 'That policy is heroic, but not collective', he asserted.¹³²

The Rhineland affair shook Government opinion on the League. While Chamberlain was to claim publicly that it still represented 'the keystone' of British policy, as has been shown, in private his doubts and concerns were growing. Had not the League's failure over Abyssinia bequeathed the current crisis? Austen Chamberlain, who had once been Foreign Secretary and had negotiated the Locarno treaty which brought Germany into the League, announced on 26 March 1936 that the time was now ripe for some 'hard thinking' about it, 'and whether collective security is any more than a pretty phrase to adorn a meaningless speech'.¹³³ His half-brother echoed these rising concerns about the vagueness of the system. The League, he asserted, 'must

have far clearer ideas, far more definite arrangements among its members as to what part each is going to take in the arbitrament of force'.¹³⁴ The Chancellor of the Exchequer was clearly concerned that failure to get this would result in a League which would only provoke more trouble from Hitler in the future, who of course hated the system. Indeed, little more than a week later, he complained to his sister that the Covenant had 'once more conspicuously failed to do more than exacerbate feelings all round'.¹³⁵ It is possible that the Rhineland debacle convinced Chamberlain that, far from provoking war, using the League might only bring it nearer.¹³⁶

It was on 10 June 1936 that Chamberlain made his famous reference to the maintenance of sanctions on Italy being 'the very midsummer of madness', in a speech to the 1900 Club. He also talked more here about the merits of exploring the idea of regional pacts, as already discussed.¹³⁷ Though sanctions were not withdrawn until July, Eden announced that the Government no longer supported them just one week later in a Commons debate on 18 June.¹³⁸ On 23 June Baldwin stated that Britain could not carry the League on its own and put the recent crisis down to a lack of will from other members - a 'reluctance of nearly all nations in Europe to proceed'.¹³⁹ In the Foreign Office, meanwhile, lessons were being also learnt. Roger Makins felt that the Rhineland affair demonstrated that the differences in priorities between the League's two foremost powers, Britain and France, were crippling its efficiency. 'My conclusion', he asserted, 'is that we ought to withdraw from the League and refuse to cooperate with France in working out a security system for Europe'.¹⁴⁰ This problem was widely foreseen at the start of the year, when it was recorded in the Cabinet minutes that 'no one thought that France was likely to move in the matter of collective security, except where her own frontier was in danger'.¹⁴¹

Eden, in his memoir, echoes this point that Anglo-French discord all but killed the League, while Northedge asserts that it was a difference in fundamental outlook, rather than geo-strategic priorities, that so hampered Geneva throughout the decade.¹⁴² He asserts that the successive French Governments of the 1930s wanted the League used as a tool to keep Germany at bay and maintain the Versailles *status quo*, while Britain, especially in the Chamberlain era, wanted it to be the engine for change in Europe and the catalyst for Franco-German *rapprochement*.¹⁴³

Makins was not the only senior Foreign Office figure to question Britain's membership of the League during that summer. A host of influential counsellors advocated effective withdrawal in June 1936 by informing the Assembly that Britain would no longer adhere to the coercive clauses of the Covenant. Gladwyn Jebb announced in a memo on 5 June that, 'personally, I have held for a long time that collective security was dead... I cannot help feeling that it would be better to have no obligations at all'.¹⁴⁴ He was joined in this position a few days later on 8 June by Laurence Collier and Maurice Peterson, heads of the Northern and Abyssinian sections of the Office respectively. Assistant Under Secretary Orme Sargent joined their ranks on 22 June.¹⁴⁵ William Strang and Ralph Wigram, meanwhile, head of the League of Nations and Central sections, respectively, also sympathised with this position by late July. The former, however, perhaps unsurprisingly, maintained that Britain should not sever its links altogether, but keep the League's role on a purely consultative basis.¹⁴⁶

These views were supported by many military figures. Admiral Drax, for example, slammed the League's 'pathetic weakness' in an Admiralty paper written in July.¹⁴⁷ While a decision along these lines was never taken, the fact that so many influential Government figures even contemplated such a step is indicative of how low the League had sunk in their eyes after the Abyssinian and Rhineland debacles. In August 1936 Chamberlain penned a memo to the Foreign Office in which he described collective security as a 'palpable sham' and once again underlined how a collective lack of will was crippling the system: 'No one would have any confidence that if he ventured into the lions den he would be followed by anyone else'.¹⁴⁸

This view dominated the Government for much of the rest of that year and well on into 1937. The abdication crisis, and the relative low regard in which Churchill was held by many within the Conservative Party at this time, meant that 'Arms and the Covenant' made little headway in high circles.¹⁴⁹ The kindest public pronouncement that Eden, generally regarded as a Geneva enthusiast, could bring himself to make in early March 1937 was that the League was currently 'in state of convalescence'.¹⁵⁰

While the Government's dire view of collective security had been formed, therefore, before Chamberlain had assumed the premiership, events thereafter served only to reinforce this and convince the new Prime Minister that an

alternative was needed in the search for peace. His early efforts to court Italy and reinvigorate the Stresa Front in the summer of 1937 demonstrate that Chamberlain viewed a flagrant abuser of the League like Mussolini as a more realistic partner for peace than the League itself. The much vaunted international conference in September to deal with Mediterranean piracy was held in Nyon rather than Geneva and invitations to this were extended to non-League members. In October, Chamberlain's frustration with the fervour with which Labour and the Liberals continued to advocate the League option boiled over into an angry outburst in the House of Commons:

Honourable members forget that the League is not an end in itself, it is a means towards an end, and if the League is temporarily unable to fulfil its function to achieve that end, what is the use of repeating parrot-like that we believe in the League?... We have to find practical means of restoring peace to the world.¹⁵¹

It is clear that Chamberlain was planning something drastic with regards to the League by the turn of the year. In a reply to a letter from long-term Geneva critic Leo Amery in November, for example, Chamberlain penned, 'I do not dissent from your views about the League' and intimated that only diplomatic protocol and French sentimentality were currently mitigating against any radical step.¹⁵² Even Eden seemed to suggest that the methods of appeasement, which he soon claimed to despise so much, would be preferable to a League policy in a Foreign Office memo dated 1 January 1938. In this he questioned what was meant when people talked of a general settlement: 'Do we mean to try for some multilateral settlement on a grand scale in which all Governments would participate on an equal footing?', he asked. This, he felt, would 'stand very little chance of success'. He concluded: 'One alternative would be to envisage in the first place... a purely Anglo-German settlement'.¹⁵³

The effective break with the League came in early 1938 when Chamberlain announced the death of collective security. Coming just days after Eden's resignation speech - in which, incidentally, the latter made no mention of the League at all in his final statement as Foreign Secretary - Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons on 22 February to spell out his views:

Does anybody here believe that the League, as it is constituted today, can afford collective security?... I do not believe it now... We must not try to delude ourselves, and still, more, we must not try to delude small, weak nations into thinking that they will be protected by the League against aggressors... You cannot expect a motor car to win a race if half of its cylinders are out of action ... I believe that the policy of the party opposite, if persisted in, this policy of holding their hands and turning their backs, of making speeches and doing nothing, is a policy which must presently lead to war.¹⁵⁴

Government strategy hereafter, as has already been shown, was to regard the League as being in a state of suspended animation. Of all possible alternatives, Chamberlain backed appeasement as his policy and the majority of the few positive references to the League which he made from now on were little more than attempts to secure support for other, more realistic strategies like alliances. In the wake of the *Anschluss*, the new Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax asserted that he could not see any 'useful purpose' in now invoking the League, something Chamberlain concurred with in a letter to his sister shortly after.¹⁵⁵ In this he claimed that collective security could not offer any hope of preventing such events, 'until it can show visible force of overwhelming strength, backed by determination to use it'.¹⁵⁶ The Committee of Imperial Defence seemed only to support this assertion, having claimed that 'recent experience' showed collective security to be of 'illusory value' at the start of that month.¹⁵⁷ It is popularly held that the League Secretary General, Joseph Avenol, was tending to the Geneva gardens at the time the *Anschluss* occurred.

At the Munich Conference in September 1938 the League was sidelined completely. Peter Beck points out that the only reference to Czechoslovakia in the League Council session index - it was meeting at the same time as Munich occurred - was in relation to drug trafficking and not to the Sudetenland.¹⁵⁸ Appeasement rather than the Covenant was the order of the day and indeed it seemed successful in averting war. Chamberlain, meanwhile, used the House of Commons debate in October to round on critics who claimed that collective security was the policy needed, while they really envisaged the old alliances:

That is what some Gentlemen call collective security... but that is not the collective security we are thinking of, or did think of, when talking about the system of the League of Nations. That was a sort of universal collective security in which all nations were to take part. This plan may give you security; it certainly is not collective.¹⁵⁹

The Prague Coup in March 1939 spurred next to no consideration of the League from within Government ranks. As has already been demonstrated, the Government now only ever used the language of the League, not the League itself, and only then as a means of legitimising or giving a moral gloss to efforts to build an anti-Fascist bloc. Even here there was concern that association with Geneva might only undermine alliances or suggest a weakness. In the Foreign Office discussions of April 1939 - already covered - which advocated tying alliances to the League by way of influencing neutral powers, there were also fears expressed that such ties would suggest Britain was attempting to leave itself an escape route, on some Geneva technicality, should hostilities eventually occur.¹⁶⁰ It was clear that the League was strongly associated with cowardice and a shirking of responsibilities, or at least that the Government believed this to be the case, by 1939.

Of course the Government also had to consider other member nations - perhaps, more accurately, the *non*-member nations - in any dealings with the League and indeed this has been shown to have been a reoccurring factor in rendering this alternative unviable. The fact that Germany (after 1933), Italy (after 1937), Japan (also after 1933) and the USA (which never joined), four of the seven biggest world powers, were all non-members has been dealt with as a constant thorn in the League's side.¹⁶¹ France has already been mentioned briefly and, while space does not permit an extensive consideration of other member powers, the Soviet Union's regard for the ideals of Geneva was long held to be in severe doubt. Indeed, that country was eventually expelled in late 1939 when it invaded Finland, another member power. Many senior Foreign Office figures at the Embassy in Moscow, for example, were keen to point out Russia's inherent suspicion and lack of faith in the League, despite the lip-service which figures like Litvinov frequently paid to Geneva.¹⁶²

The Dominions also further complicated matters and the Empire had to be carried with it in any development of League policy. While South Africa had

figures like Jan Smuts, a League enthusiast and founding father, as a leading politician (and Prime Minister from 1939), Australia and New Zealand were much less keen. In these countries it was popularly held that collective security had done little to check Japanese belligerence in the Orient and served only to distract the motherland with dangerous European entanglements far removed from their own spheres of interest. Canada, meanwhile, was often downright hostile to the League, and many of its senior political figures echoed Foreign Office calls for effective British withdrawal in the summer of 1936.¹⁶³

Wider Judgements on the Viability of the Alternative

The following brief section will survey wider, non-Government criticism of the League in order to gauge more accurately why this alternative was rejected. Opposition to the League within the House of Commons could be found across the entire duration of the Chamberlain period. This was almost exclusively from Tory ranks, the membership of which was most sceptical about the League in 1936 and 1937, and almost universally hostile to it by 1938 and 1939, once Chamberlain had abandoned Geneva in favour of appeasement. There were one or two exceptions, however, as has been shown. Indeed, by the last eighteen months or so before war, the future of the League had almost become a party issue, with Labour and the Liberals still in support and the Conservatives firmly against.¹⁶⁴ To give but a few brief examples, Tory opposition to strengthening League sanctions on Italy or placing them upon Germany in the spring and summer of 1936 was widespread. Leo Amery, as usual, was particularly strident on the topic.¹⁶⁵ Figures like Henry Raikes and Paul Emrys-Evans also spoke out on this issue in the House of Commons at the time.¹⁶⁶ The latter was particularly keen to emphasise in June that only a collective will to impose military sanctions against rogue states would have any effect, for example.¹⁶⁷

By the close of the year disillusionment was substantial. On 5 November 1936, National Liberal Robert Bernays noted in his diary that the League had been ‘a lamentable failure’ and wondered, ‘whether I ought to go on wasting time making speeches about it’.¹⁶⁸ By June 1937, Tory MP Colonel John Gretton asserted that the League was ‘becoming a danger to peace’.¹⁶⁹ And it

was deemed ‘the worst will o’ the wisp that has ever been followed’ by his colleague Alfred Wise on the day of Eden’s resignation in February 1938.¹⁷⁰

Chamberlain’s announcement that he was abandoning the League in favour of appeasement the next day resulted in many Tory colleagues following suit. Former pro-Leaguer, turned avid pro-appeaser, Lord Lothian, for example, offers an illustration of this trend in a letter he wrote to Gilbert Murray on 24 February: ‘It was the painful experience over Abyssinia which finally convinced me that League collective security could not, indeed ought not, to be made to work unless the League could also do collective justice’. In a variation on the *status quo* argument, he then went on to suggest that the League’s ‘total inability to do justice to Germany in the years after the war’, as well as its ‘moral failure... to recognise that justice comes before peace’, were the main reasons for its downfall.¹⁷¹ Not long after this, Tory MP Maurice Petherick restated old charges about the League’s cumbersome machinery during the House of Commons post-mortem on the *Anschluss*. Here he bemoaned the terrible delays in arbitration which meant a decisive response was impossible.¹⁷²

Tory MP Leo Amery is worthy of closer examination as he was one of the most fierce and long-term critics of the League. He asserted in the House of Commons as early as 1 March 1935, for example, that, ‘we might as well call on the man on the moon for help as make a direct approach to the League’.¹⁷³ He also made some of the most lucid attacks on collective security across the late 1930s as a whole. Amery was particularly keen for the Covenant to abandon its coercive clauses and exist only as an instrument for conciliation by the autumn of 1936. In a speech in Canada on 19 September, for example, he claimed that the collective system was little more than a dangerous dream:

Whenever the question of coercion has been raised, whether in connection with Manchuria, Abyssinia, and so on, the League has failed, on the other hand it has had remarkable success where it has been used as an instrument for conciliation.¹⁷⁴

Amery was also concerned that British support for collective security at this time might just provoke anger from the Fascist powers and drive Italy and Germany closer together in mutual hostility to the League.¹⁷⁵ By November 1937, he felt bitter enough to write to Chamberlain advocating a complete break

with 'the lip service paid to collective security and the League's ideals'. He went on: 'There is nothing so fatal as sticking to the carcasses of dead policies'.¹⁷⁶ With so many critical views expressed by such a large section of his own party, could the Prime Minister afford to resist this groundswell of opinion?

The House of Lords was not averse to this fierce opposition and one or two non-Tories felt able to express their concerns more freely than their colleagues elsewhere. Former Liberal leader Viscount Samuel, for example, admitted the frailties and declining authority of the League in wake of the *Anschluss*, before urging the Government to redouble its efforts in reviving Geneva.¹⁷⁷ Tory peer Viscount Stonehaven damned the League Assembly as 'no more effective than a flock of sheep on the way to slaughter' after the Munich conference, and abused the tepid, cumbersome nature of its machinery.¹⁷⁸ After the Prague Coup, even the Labour stalwart Lord Ponsonby felt moved to call the League a 'museum piece' and refuted suggestions from some of his colleagues that it should be revived in a last push for peace.¹⁷⁹

Other political parties and pressure groups often opposed the League too. It is perhaps not surprising that the British Union of Fascists mirrored the critical views as expressed by Hitler and Mussolini. A BUF pamphlet from 1936, for example, asserted that the League was 'merely an instrument to maintain the Versailles Treaty' and claimed, 'the sooner the League is destroyed the better for mankind'.¹⁸⁰ The far Left, meanwhile, could also be critical of Geneva, as has already been intimated. Sir Stafford Cripps, the outspoken Labour MP, who was expelled from the party in May 1939, derided the League as a club of 'Capitalist Imperialists' during the early Chamberlain period.¹⁸¹ While the Independent Labour Party's James Maxton thought the League should be strengthened after the Rhineland affair, he had fallen into line by the time of Eden's resignation: 'We never believed that the League of Nations was anything more than a utopian dream in a Capitalist Society'.¹⁸²

Not all Pacifists saw the League as the surest way to peace either. David Lukowitz, for example, asserts that many members of the Peace Pledge Union came to view collective security as a euphemism for war (military sanctions, of course, were effectively this) and believed economic sanctions would only hurt innocent people in countries like Italy, while the rich perpetrators of the trouble went unhindered.¹⁸³ Even the League of Nations Union eventually had to admit

to the obvious frailties with the Geneva system. An examination of Gilbert Murray's private papers demonstrates a clear decline in his view of the League's viability as time went by. By May 1938, for example, he too was advocating the pursuit of regional pacts in a letter to a colleague, the League by now, 'having failed as an instrument of coercion'.¹⁸⁴ National Labour's Harold Nicolson, meanwhile, a staunch member of the LNU, recalled in his diary on 10 November 1938 that the group was going nowhere:

LNU meeting: Liddell Hart [Sir Basil, Military expert and adviser] puts forward an admirable memorandum in which he suggests that as the League is practically dead, the Union should turn itself into some sort of Union for the protection of democracy and liberty... These ancient League enthusiasts have ceased merely to have bees in their bonnets and have actually become huge bumblebees themselves.¹⁸⁵

Opposition to the League grew in wider, more public spheres also. Hans Morgenthau, for example, then Professor of Law and Political Science at Kansas University, published a book in Britain during the summer of 1938, critical of the League as a body of ideals but not action. Moreover, he felt it would always be crippled by the priorities and concerns of the nation-state continually overriding multilateral impulses.¹⁸⁶ George Egerton charts the contemporary academic debate about collective security in his article 'Collective Security as a Political Myth'. In this work he tells how Francesco Coppola, Professor of International Law at the University of Rome, publicly challenged Gilbert Murray about the merits of the League system at the International Studies Conference in London during June 1935. Here Coppola abused the strategy as 'absurd' and 'anti-historical', maintaining that arms and allies were the surest way to protect one's country.¹⁸⁷

The hostility of the national press to the League option as a realistic policy increased as time moved on. To give just a few examples, the pro-isolation *Daily Express* was a long-term critic, describing sanctions as no more than a 'flop' in March 1936.¹⁸⁸ By 1 October 1938, however, immediately after the Munich settlement, the *Express* boomed triumphantly that Chamberlain's appeasement had, 'destroyed the ghost of collective security, that apparition growing dimmer each day yet still troubling our peace of mind'.¹⁸⁹ The *Manchester Guardian*, meanwhile, on 5 October, decided that the League and

collective security had now gone, 'even as watchwords'.¹⁹⁰ Even Labour's darling paper, the *Daily Herald*, had to admit that the League was now 'broken' after the events in Prague during March 1939.¹⁹¹

While the infant Gallup Polls of the era failed to ask any questions about the League after December 1937, it seems likely that public backing would have decreased as events continued to hammer home its redundancy. As the next chapter will demonstrate, for example, popular support for other, often antithetical policies such as alliances rose markedly throughout the end of 1938 and early 1939.¹⁹² There was also an increase in letters to newspapers criticising the League after the Munich affair. C. J. Robins of Croydon, for example, wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* on 1 October 1938 to ask, 'might it not have been better for the world if President Wilson's 'ideal' League had been left as a skeleton framework for a later generation to fill in?'¹⁹³ It was clear that this reader, among others, adjudged collective security to be unfit for the task for which it was chiefly designed.

(5) CONCLUSION

The League of Nations and collective security had substantial and widespread support as alternatives to appeasement in the late 1930s - from the Labour and Liberal Opposition, from a committed but tiny band of Tories, from large pressure groups like the League of Nations Union and from significant sections of the press and a majority of the public. Convinced of the moral weight behind their policy, this support was highest before Chamberlain assumed power but continued in response to events thereafter and as a knee-jerk reaction to the Prime Minister's abandonment of Geneva. As time passed, support from all sections of politics and society diminished and had all but evaporated by mid-1939, though its lofty ideals survived and received new life after the war in the form of the United Nations. The nature of support for the League option was transient and shifted its basis as events in the approach to war increasingly tested the foundations. As time passed, the rhetoric and ideals of the League assumed perhaps more significance than the actual machinery itself. Indeed, the language still had a function after the League ceased to matter, as a cover for other, more cynical policies such as alliances, or as the inspiration behind notions of world governance such as European Union. The League option and the alliance option were actually closely interlinked at this time, as has been demonstrated.

The National Government only considered pursuing a wholehearted League strategy in the early 1930s, before the Abyssinian and Rhineland debacles illustrated the frailties of the Geneva system. By the middle of 1936 it even contemplated effective British withdrawal altogether. It could even be said that Chamberlain had made his mind up about the viability of this alternative before he assumed the premiership and then struggled to extricate himself from the shackles once he took power. What support he *did* give to collective security was largely on the basis of regional pacts - a limited, bastardised version of the system, which had much more in common with those old alliances that the League was designed to replace. In the last year or so before war, the moral weight of the League was greater than its deterrent value for Chamberlain and his senior colleagues. Even when the Government used the League, then, it largely did so in a partial and slight-of-hand manner.

Given all this, then, it is clear that opposition to the Government with regards to its League policy was largely muddled. Irrespective of the League's viability in averting war or keeping Hitler at bay, a significant portion of support in fact rested upon ideas alien to the original grand ideals of the founding fathers, especially as time went on. Churchill's 'Arms and the Covenant' is an example of this, the 'Covenant' part being used more to disguise a policy of alliances than to signal a true commitment to the ways and means of Geneva. Many of the arguments of the League die-hards in criticism of the Government often lack consistency or rest upon skewed thinking and self-deception. To claim, for example, as many did, that the Government's policy in wake of the Prague Coup *was* League collective security, was plainly stretching the facts to fit an ideal. Similarly, critics often abused the British Government alone for letting the League down or killing collective security and then extolled the virtues and necessity of multilateralism. Was it possible for one power to be responsible for destroying a system which was supposed to be collective? If only Britain would give a lead in the Assembly, many asserted, then the League could flourish and peace would be secure. But surely the concept of a Collective Security 'leader' was just a contradiction in terms? The League was designed to be a society of equals, to replace the old diplomacy that rested upon balance of power and blocs of nations gathered around the great states. A Covenant based on notions of British 'leadership' would actually be destroying its own foundations and League zealots knew this.

Labour figures in particular often advocated collective security with Russia as the vital cog in the machine, especially after the Prague Coup. Again, a truly collective system should not hinge upon one special nation. By supporting the League in this way, often alien to its very guiding principles, Government critics merely demonstrated the weaknesses of the policy they proposed. Was this symptomatic of a blindness to the realities of the day caused by the shining beauty of the vision they longed for? Support for the League rested so much upon the utopian ideals of the early 1920s, a decade far removed in its aspirations and hopes, if not in time, from the paranoid and dangerous world of the mid-1930s. Indeed, the fact that the League had broadly been the way of things since the end of the last war, and that so many people in the 1920s adopted a 'never again' mentality, goes some way to explaining why supporters

found it difficult to let go and accept Geneva's limitations in face of the march of Fascism. Peace through the League seemed a realistic proposition after the Great War, a vision difficult to abandon in the late 1930s. This also explains why it was so easy for the Government to utilise the language of Geneva later on to win support for its policy of alliances. The League represented a convenient and attractive notice-board onto which it could pin its other strategies.

It is clear, as the verdict of history would suggest, that the League and collective security were no match for the conditions Chamberlain inherited. They would have been unworkable as strategies for extensive pursuit in the hope of peace. Indeed, Chamberlain and many of his colleagues often thought that sticking to Geneva might only have brought war *closer*, and events would suggest that this may have been the case. It certainly did little to avert the many hostilities of the late 1930s and doubtlessly played a substantial role in emboldening the Fascists and driving them closer together. The League's very existence was a bone of contention for Hitler and Mussolini. In his ultimately deluded hopes to pacify these men, it was clear that Chamberlain would have to put great distance between himself and the League.

Lack of universal membership hamstrung the League from day one. As a famous *Punch* cartoon from 1919 testified, Wilson's America had built most of the bridge but then rested its head on the keystone and slept.¹⁹⁴ The fact that Germany, Italy and Japan, the main troublemakers of the age, had all left the League (among others) meant that it was impossible to work with these powers through Geneva in the quest for peace. The two leading member-states, Britain and France, meanwhile, not only had different priorities and concerns, but often had different conceptions of the League's main purpose. The last of the world's major powers, Russia, was expelled in 1939 and was a partial participant at best. Given this, along with the wide hostility to military sanctions and the fact that the much vaunted international police force was never established, the League had a marked lack of teeth. It rested on economic sanctions as the best means to avert war and these, of course, had failed dramatically to do so with Mussolini and Abyssinia. Nor did they restrict non-member powers. Hitler looked on.

Collective security was only as good as a collective will to make it work and each member interpreted it in its own way with its own interests paramount. In a League of such unequal powers, a collective paralysis crept in. The small

nations would not act unless they were confident of support from the big. The big powers, like Britain, were reluctant to take a lead for fear that the small ones would not join them. The repeated debacles over sanctions proved this repeatedly, and a sort of 'after you' mentality took hold, especially with Britain and France. As Porter observes, the League was not in fact a League at all:

The problem was a general one: While every nation could conceive of some act of aggression somewhere which would affect it, very few nations could accept that every act of aggression everywhere would. The effect of this was to make them - and Britain especially - reluctant to be the first to commit themselves to guarantees.¹⁹⁵

Collective security also, of course, forced otherwise indifferent or hostile powers to work together as friends and broke up those traditional partnerships which had previously played a role in keeping peace. The collective security experiment dislocated much in Europe that actually worked in an effort to fix things that did not. As Northedge points out, for example, the League put Britain and France in a particularly awkward position with regards to Italy. Mussolini's Abyssinian venture meant that the League powers were forced to treat Italy as a Pariah, at exactly the same time as Britain sought to reinvigorate the Stresa Front, or at least keep Italy and Germany apart.¹⁹⁶ The experience of the United Nations today, with regards to reaching a consensus on issues like the Iraq war or the North Korean nuclear arms programme, suggests that collective solutions to global crises will always be severely hampered until such time as the concept of the nation state has been abandoned. It is doubtful that this will ever occur.

The Government also held that the League's machinery was far too slow and that the Covenant, in places, was vague. In the rapid-fire world of the late 1930s it was not suited to quick and decisive responses to the latest foreign coup. The fact that Chamberlain abandoned the League in favour of appeasement suggests that there is credence in the widely held view that Geneva was a body to protect the *status quo*, at least on the big issues, rather than to make real efforts to revise the Versailles settlement. Many hold that this was a necessary prerequisite during the inter-war years in pacifying a continent. Moreover, as Peter Raffo points out, the League was 'created in the hope it would be able to prevent war; it was not created to solve the causes'.¹⁹⁷

Prevention rather than cure was the watchword, whereas Chamberlain's appeasement aimed primarily at the latter option. All of these factors above, of course, were driven home to Chamberlain repeatedly by the vast majority of his Cabinet and his party, by large sections of the Foreign Office and by most of his military advisers. The weight of Government opinion against the League as a viable solution to the problems of the day was huge by 1938 and 1939.

The orthodox school on Chamberlain and appeasement, as has been shown, offered some of the harshest judgements on the Government's Geneva record. Were the claims of figures like Churchill, Macmillan and Murray correct, that support for the League would have averted war? The idea that the League could have stopped Hitler at the time of the Rhineland affair, and thereby averted a later war, is fraught with many doubts. While individual nations might have been able to check Germany at this time (though none of them felt moved to do so) a collective response to the crisis through the Covenant would have resulted in little more than economic sanctions being applied, as Eden later admitted in his memoirs.¹⁹⁸ That 'Arms and the Covenant' would have deterred Hitler from war is similarly doubtful, certainly without a drastic, almost impossible increase in British armaments and without a drastic, almost impossible reshaping of the Covenant. All of this would have needed the backing of the other member-nations too. Would the threat of League sanctions have stopped Hitler invading Poland? They did not do so and were no deterrent to the *Anschluss* or his mobilisation against the Czechs. Cecil's claim at the time of the Munich Agreement that collective security had deterred Hitler from war was delusional. His League 'collective' amounted to a possible (and far from certain) alliance of Britain, France, Russia and the Czechs, and this was, in fact, the antithesis to all the League stood for. Even Attlee later admitted that the League could not have averted a war, and he was one of its biggest supporters at the time.

Much of this speculation is irrelevant anyway. The League did, in fact, exist but did not, in fact, avert war. Despite its various humanitarian achievements in this period, its every repeated political failure only encouraged the Fascists to chance their arm in the last years of peace. It may have even accelerated the descent to conflict. For the League to have even had a chance of averting the Second World War, all members would have had to deal with every minor incident that disrupted international stability firmly and assuredly from the date

of its inception. Given the condition of the world in the 1920s and 1930s, and the obvious predominance of national interest over multilateral impulses in these uncertain times, this League could only have been carried on the back of a small clutch of traditional major powers. Peace might have been secured in this way but it would not have been by a League of Nations at all.

1. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Commons*, vol.321, cols 645-6, 4 March 1937.
2. Collective security has evolved as a strategy over time. The United Nations, for example, redefined the more vague League conception, although it is this former version that shall be considered here.
3. Nick Smart (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays, 1932-39: An Insider's Account of the House of Commons* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p.273.
4. Of course, the vast majority of those calling for colonial appeasement, as addressed in the previous chapter, also supported the League and a strengthening of its mandatory system.
5. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, various cols, 24 Feb. 1936. Among the figures calling for intensified League efforts in this respect were Labour MPs Keighley Lees-Smith and Josiah Wedgwood, Liberal Geoffrey Mander and Conservatives Robert Boothby and Richard Pilkington.
6. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, col.97, 24 Feb. 1936.
7. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, col.153, 24 Feb. 1936.
8. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1450, 26 March 1936.
9. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, cols 1499-500, 26 March 1936.
10. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, cols 1527-8, 26 March 1936.
11. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.2487, 6 April 1936.
12. HC Deb 5s, vol.311, col.106, 21 April 1936 (my emphasis).
13. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Lords*, vol.100, col.193, 24 March 1936.
14. HL Deb 5s, vol.100, col.537, 24 March 1936.
15. HL Deb 5s, vol.100, col.577, 24 March 1936.
16. Quoted, *The Times*, 11 June 1936.
17. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, col.1216, 18 June 1936.
18. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, col.1240, 18 June 1936.
19. Harold Macmillan, *The Winds of Change, 1914-39* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p.479.
20. *Headway*, Jan. 1937. Quoted, FO371/21240/W250, 3 Jan. 1937, The National Archives (TNA). Foreign Office (FO) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
21. National Labour's Harold Nicolson, for example, felt Chamberlain's accession could mark a new dawn for the 'Geneva front'. See N. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters, 1930-39* (London: Collins, 1966), p.303.
22. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.218, 2 March 1937.
23. HC Deb 5s, vol.325, col.1556, 25 June 1937.
24. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1877, 21 Dec. 1937.
25. He called on Britain to adhere to the laws of the League as a means to 'secure the good will of all the nations of the world'. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1838, 21 Dec. 1937.
26. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1838, 21 Dec. 1937.
27. See, for example, Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.465.
28. Harold Macmillan, Conservative MP, to Dawson, 28 March 1936, Harold Macmillan papers, MS Macmillan 101, fol. 36, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Harold Macmillan papers (MS Macmillan) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.

29. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 99-100, 14 March 1938.
30. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 99-100, 14 March 1938.
31. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.111, 14 March 1938.
32. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 55-6, 14 March 1938.
33. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 58-62, 14 March 1938.
34. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1432, 24 March 1938.
35. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1504, 24 March 1938.
36. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, col.132, 16 March 1938. See also HL Deb 5s, vol.108, cols 436-7, 29 March 1938.
37. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, col.172, 16 March 1938. Former Liberal leader Viscount Samuel, meanwhile, on 29 March, claimed that it would be Chamberlain's duty to get back to collective security once the current crisis was over: 'That policy, I submit, will alone command in the long run the support of the great mass of this peace loving nation'. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, col.470, 29 March 1938.
38. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 56-64, 3 Oct. 1938. The 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement was not mentioned by Attlee, but was often presented as another Government act antithetical to the ideals of the League. See, for example, Labour Party, *'National' Government's Disarmament Record* (1935), p.15.
39. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 172-3, 4 Oct. 1938.
40. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 356-73, 5 Oct. 1938.
41. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 149-50, 3 Oct. 1938.
42. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.358, 5 Oct. 1938.
43. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.213, 4 Oct. 1938.
44. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.257, 4 Oct. 1938.
45. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, cols 1427-8, 4 Oct. 1938.
46. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 534-8, 6 Oct. 1938.
47. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1341, 3 Oct. 1938.
48. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1451, 3 Oct. 1938.
49. Many of the leading British Pacifist groups of the day, such as the Peace Pledge Union or the National Peace Council, for example, sprang from the seeds of the LNU, with cross-group membership very common at this time.
50. Quoted, M. Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-45: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), Appendix 1.
51. Viscount Cecil, Honorary President of the League of Nations Union, to Geoffrey Dawson, 7 July 1936, MS Dawson 79, fols. 145-6, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Geoffrey Dawson papers (MS Dawson) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
52. FO371/20181/J5088, 4 June 1936.
53. Murray to Lord Ponsonby, Labour peer, 9 March 1936, Gilbert Murray papers, MS Gilbert Murray 224, fol. 143, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Gilbert Murray papers (MS Gilbert Murray) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
54. Murray to Mr E. Lyttelton, League of Nations Union colleague, 14 April 1938, MS Gilbert Murray 232, fols. 113-4.
55. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, cols 1333-4, 3 Oct. 1938.
56. Quoted, FO371/24029/W323, 2 Jan. 1939.
57. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.525.

58. FO371/20704/C1588, 18 Feb. 1937. Even much smaller regional equivalents, such as the Stockton Peace Assembly, for example, felt compelled to lobby their MP as late as May 1939 calling for a new drive in collective security - ideally including America among the members. Stockton Peace Assembly to Macmillan, 3 May 1939, MS Macmillan, dep. 131, fol. 360.
59. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.2495, 6 April 1936.
60. Communist Party, *Labour and Armaments* (1937), pp.2-9.
61. *Daily Herald*, 12 March 1938.
62. *Daily Herald*, 3 Oct. 1938.
63. *News Chronicle*, 11 March 1938.
64. *News Chronicle*, 14 March 1938.
65. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 March 1938.
66. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, col.1442, 18 Feb. 1937.
67. *News Chronicle*, 5 Oct. 1938.
68. *Daily Herald*, 18 March 1938.
69. *Daily Herald*, 6 Oct. 1938.
70. George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain, 1937-75*, vol.1 (New York: Random House, 1976), p.2.
71. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.4.
72. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, pp.12-14.
73. HC Deb 5s, vol.342, col.1200, 7 Dec. 1938.
74. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.2499, 3 April 1939.
75. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.2489, 3 April 1939.
76. See, for example, any of the speeches by Greenwood, Sinclair, Lloyd George or Dalton in Commons on 3 April 1939. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, cols 2475-578, 3 April 1939.
77. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.616, 13 April 1939.
78. *Daily Herald*, 21 March 1939.
79. *Daily Herald*, 22 March 1939.
80. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.668, 19 April 1939.
81. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, cols 336-7, 20 March 1939.
82. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, cols 390-1, 12 June 1939.
83. B. Pimlott (ed.), *The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918-40, 1945-60* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1986), pp.197-8.

84. HL Deb 5s, vol.108. cols 153-5, 16 March 1938. Later on he regularly pressed for the formation of a European sub-committee of the League, designed to foster economic cooperation on the Continent. Early advocates of European Union as a means to peace and prosperity also existed independently of the League and indeed some were very critical of it. To give just a few examples from this period, Leo Amery was increasingly vocal on this issue, especially in the last months of peace, as mentioned briefly in the previous chapter. He wrote to Halifax in June 1939, for example, recommending that the League be scrapped and that 'a European Federation or Commonwealth is... the goal which you should now boldly put forward'. Amery to Halifax, 30 June 1939, AMEL 2/1/29, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Leo Amery (AMEL) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. Labour's Arthur Henderson regularly talked of such matters in the House of Commons at this time, whereas Liberal peer Lord Davies did the same in Lords. The Federalism Union was established in the wake of the Munich crisis by a small band of Pacifist intellectuals, but their cause received little attention until after the Prague Coup, when war loomed nearer.
85. Arthur Moore, *The Necessity for a British League of Nations* (1938), pp.3-11.
86. Henry Gillet, Mayor of Oxford, to Halifax, 6 April 1939, FO800/315/H/XV/146, Public Opinion 10.
87. W. S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1948), p.16.
88. W. S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1948), p.168.
89. W. S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1948), pp.171-82.
90. Earl of Avon, *Facing the Dictators: The Eden Memoirs* (London: Cassell, 1962), pp.601-2.
91. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.438. For his views on the League and the Abyssinian affair, see pp.416-35.
92. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.524.
93. Gilbert Murray, *From the League of Nations to United Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp.71-6.
94. Francis Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers* (London: Heinemann 1961), p.12.
95. Earl of Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, 2nd edn (London: Collins, 1957), p.227.
96. Viscount Simon, *Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Viscount Simon* (London: Hutchinson, 1952), p.244.
97. Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p.506.
98. Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1956), p.65.
99. Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), p.187.
100. L. S. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol.3, *The Unforgiving Years, 1929-40* (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p.175.
101. A. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), p.205.
102. A. Duff Cooper, *The Funeral of the League of Nations* (1940). Quoted, DUFC 8/1/9, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Alfred Duff Cooper (DUFC) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
103. Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, pp.317-8.

104. Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers*, p.12.
105. E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Year Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1946), pp.25-6.
106. F. S. Northedge, *The Troubled Giant: Britain Among the Great Powers, 1916-39* (Suffolk: Chaucer Press, 1966), p.123.
107. F. S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-46* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986), p.252.
108. F. S. Northedge, *The League of Nations*, pp.276-7.
109. Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London: Harper Collins, 1985), p.244.
110. Donald S. Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.229.
111. Peter J. Beck, 'Britain and Appeasement in the Late 1930s: Was there a League of Nations Alternative?', in Dick Richardson and Glyn Stone (eds.), *Decisions and Diplomacy: Essays in Twentieth-Century International History* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.153-73 (p.153).
112. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1540, 26 March 1936. Viscount Cranborne, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs at this time, meanwhile, had pledged the country's continued support for sanctions against Italy just one month earlier. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, cols 54-62, 5 Feb. 1936.
113. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 13 April 1936, Neville Chamberlain Papers (NC), NC18/1/956, Special Collections Department, University of Birmingham (BU).
114. FO371/20472/W3851, 15 April 1936.
115. Quoted, Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1946), p.295.
116. Foreign Policy Committee Memoranda, 13 July 1936, CAB 27/626/FP(36)/5, The National Archives (TNA). Cabinet (CAB) papers are located at the National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
117. See, for example, FO371/20474/W6346, 16 July 1936.
118. See, for example, FO371/20475/W11340, 24 Aug. 1936. Rex Leeper, head of the News section, was another important figure who enthusiastically backed this general line. See, for example, FO371/20473/W5075, 3 June 1936.
119. See, CAB 27/626/FP(36)/12, 21 Aug. 1936.
120. Foreign Policy Committee Proceedings, 25 Aug. 1936, CAB 27/622/FP(36)/5, The National Archives (TNA).
121. Quoted, FO371/19914/C7936, 5 Nov. 1936.
122. Quoted, Marion L. Kenney, 'The Role of the House of Commons in British Foreign Policy during the 1937-38 Session', in Norton Downs (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Conyers Read* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp.138-85 (p.162).
123. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/22, 3 Feb. 1938.
124. Alexander Cadogan coined this phrase with regards to the Government's League policy. Quoted, FO371/21659/C14471, 8 Nov. 1938.
125. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/26, 18 March 1938, Appendix 1.
126. FO371/24038/W5267, 22 March 1939.
127. See, for example, a memo on this subject from Viscount Cranborne Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Lord Strang, then Head of the Foreign Office Central Department, dated April 1939. FO371/23063/C5524, April 1939.

128. D. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45* (London: Cassell, 1971), p.182.
129. Quoted, CAB 27/626/FP(36)/2, 1 May 1936.
130. Quoted, AMEL 1/5/62, 23 Nov. 1934.
131. HL Deb 5s, vol.100, col.515, 8 April 1936.
132. HC Deb 5s, vol.311, col.126, 12 April 1936.
133. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1484, 26 March 1936.
134. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1549, 26 March 1936.
135. Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 4 April 1936, NC18/1/955.
136. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, meanwhile, felt these troubles only demonstrated that the League's machinery was too cumbersome - another Government complaint that was to reoccur over the coming years. Sanctions, he later asserted in his memoir, would have been 'too slow to be effective in this instance'. Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p.346.
137. Quoted, *The Times*, 11 June 1936.
138. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, cols 1201-6, 18 June 1936.
139. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, col.1725, 23 June 1936.
140. FO371/20472/W3851, 15 April 1936.
141. Quoted, FO371/19884/C614, 29 Jan. 1936.
142. Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p.366. Macmillan also refers to this factor in his memoirs. See Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.576.
143. Northedge, *The League of Nations*, pp.288-9.
144. FO371/20473/W5075, 22 June 1936.
145. FO371/20473/W5075, 22 June 1936.
146. FO371/20474/W6374, 16 July 1936.
147. 'British Foreign Policy', 17 July 1936, DRAX 2/18, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Admiral Drax (DRAX) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre.
148. FO371/20475/W 9131, 11 Aug. 1936.
149. Churchill's sympathetic view of the King's plight at this time only added to his unpopularity which had risen due to his recent utterances over India. Churchill was widely viewed as yesterday's man by the party in the mid-1930s.
150. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.215, 2 March 1937.
151. HC Deb 5s, vol.327, col.166, 21 Oct. 1937.
152. Chamberlain to Amery, 15 Dec. 1937, AMEL 2/1/27(1).
153. CAB 27/626/FP(36)/40, 1 Jan. 1938.
154. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, cols 226-9, 22 Feb. 1938.
155. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, col.481, 29 March 1938.
156. Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 13 March 1938, NC18/1/1041.
157. Quoted, FO371/21624/C1704, 1 March 1938.
158. Peter J. Beck, 'Searching for Peace in Munich, not Geneva: The British Government, the League of Nations and the Sudeten Question', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol.10 (2), 1999, pp.236-57 (p.251).
159. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.549, 6 Oct. 1938. Leslie Burgin, Minister of Transport, meanwhile, had delivered a fierce rebuke to those who claimed that use of the League could have averted the Czech crisis just two days earlier. See HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.183, 4 Oct. 1938.
160. See FO371/23063/C5524, April 1939.

161. Gary B. Ostrower, *Collective Security: The United States and the League of Nations in the early 1930s* (London: Associated University Presses, 1976) is good at detailing American views on the League, its inherent isolationism and fears that it would get all the blame if it joined the Collective system and it failed. It will also be noted that the first three of the four powers mentioned above were also the ones causing most trouble.
162. See, for example, a report from Douglas Mackillop, a Foreign Office official based in Moscow, on likely Soviet policy aims. FO371/21243/W18952, 7 Oct. 1937.
163. See, for example, MacDonald's summary of the Dominions' views on the League. FO371/20475/W11340, 11 Aug. 1936. E. J. Tarr's *After Munich: Where do we go from here?* (1938) also details the anti-League views of many eminent Canadian politicians and businessmen.
164. See, for example, Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander's assertions on this point in the House of Commons in February 1938. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, col.116, 21 Feb. 1938.
165. See, for example, HC Deb 5s, vol.309, col.105, 24 Feb. 1936.
166. See, for example, HC Deb 5s, vol.311, cols 113-5, 21 April 1936.
167. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, col.1650, 18 June 1936.
168. Smart (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays*, p.273.
169. HC Deb 5s, vol.325, col.1577, 25 June 1937.
170. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, col.263, 21 Feb. 1938.
171. Lord Lothian, Conservative peer, to Murray, 24 Feb. 1938, MS Gilbert Murray 232, fol. 5.
172. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1462, 24 March 1938.
173. Quoted, Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.96.
174. Amery speech to the Winnipeg National Council of Education, quoted, AMEL 1/5/24.
175. See, for example, Amery to Beaverbrook, 12 Nov. 1936, AMEL 2/1/26(1).
176. Amery to Chamberlain, 11 Nov. 1937, AMEL 2/1/27. This, incidentally, is the letter which Chamberlain did not 'dissent from', as mentioned above.
177. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, col.466, 16 March 1938.
178. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, cols 1356-7, 3 Oct. 1938.
179. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.676, 19 April 1939.
180. British Union of Fascists, *Mind Britain's Business: BUF Notes for Speakers* (1936), p.3.
181. Quoted, F. McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, appeasement and the British road to war* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.105.
182. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, col.267, 21 Feb. 1938. A policy manifesto from 1939 echoed this charge and announced the party's rejection of sanctions and collective security as viable strategies. Independent Labour Party, *The Socialist Challenge to Poverty, Fascism, Imperialism, War: Basic Policy of the I.L.P.* (1939), p.13.
183. David C. Lukowitz, 'British Pacifists and Appeasement: The Peace Pledge Union', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.9 (1), 1974, pp.115-27 (p.119).
184. Murray to Lady Howard of Penrith, League of Nations Union colleague, 16 April 1938, MS Gilbert Murray 232, fol. 177.
185. N. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson*, p.378.
186. Hans Morgenthau, *The Problem of Neutrality* (1938), pp.118-23.

187. George W. Egerton, 'Collective Security as Political Myth: Liberal Internationalism and the League of Nations in Politics and History', *International History Review*, vol.5 (4), 1983, pp.496-524 (p.511).
188. *Daily Express*, 10 March 1936.
189. *Daily Express*, 1 Oct. 1938.
190. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Oct. 1938.
191. *Daily Herald*, 17 March 1939.
192. See, for example, Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, pp.16-17.
193. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 1 Oct. 1938.
194. 'The Gap in the Bridge', *Punch*, 10 Dec. 1919.
195. Bernard Porter, *Britain, Europe and the World, 1850-1982: Delusions of Grandeur* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p.98.
196. Northedge, *The League of Nations*, pp.253-4.
197. Peter Raffo, *The League of Nations* (London: The Historical Association, 1974), p.24.
198. Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p.366.

FOUR: ALLIANCES AND THE 'GRAND ALLIANCE'

If a number of states were assembled around Great Britain and France in a solemn treaty for mutual defence against aggression; if they had their forces marshalled in what you may call a Grand Alliance... and if it were done in the year 1938 - and, believe me, it may be the last chance there will be for doing it - then I say you might even now arrest this coming war.¹ (Winston Churchill, 1938).

(1) INTRODUCTION

A substantial body of Chamberlain's critics, amongst both contemporaries and historians alike, have suggested that the National Government should have pursued a policy of alliances as an alternative to appeasement in the last years before war. Indeed, Churchill's famous conception of the 'Grand Alliance', which he first advocated in the House of Commons immediately following the *Anschluss* in March 1938, has emerged as perhaps the favourite rival strategy of those later appeasement detractors who like to consider scenarios of what might have been.² Whether envisaged as the spurned deterrent that could have driven Hitler away from war, or as the best means to have won the battle once it was joined, the option of an anti-Fascist bloc is probably the most popularly offered rival strategy by scholars looking back on this period. It is therefore central to this study.

This chapter will examine the origins and viability of this alternative to appeasement, sometimes described of late as 'alliance diplomacy'.³ Of course, alliances *were* the alternative Chamberlain eventually adopted, some six months before war began, when the guarantee to Poland was given on 31 March 1939 (which France also joined) and similar agreements were extended to Greece and Romania in April, and an alliance with Turkey made in May. Conversations with the Soviets, exploring the possibility of a Mutual Assistance Pact, were already underway by this point, while powers like Holland and Denmark, among others, declined similar offers. One might think that the time-frame for this chapter would therefore be different to others in this work, but the failure of the Soviet negotiations, and subsequent conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 23 August 1939, has emerged as another major criticism of Chamberlain's regime.

Would not an alliance of Britain, France and Russia have deterred Hitler from war in late 1939, and did not the Prime Minister abandon talks and effectively force Stalin into Hitler's arms? Such are some of the charges brought against the National Government even today. Indeed, as the Soviet dimension to appeasement is currently one of the most keenly debated areas of research, the period right up until the start of war must be considered.

A few preceding comments and clarifications are necessary before beginning. It will become clear as this chapter progresses that there was no 'one' policy of alliances suggested in the late 1930s. Numerous appeasement critics, at different times and in different circumstances, envisaged a whole swathe of variously constituted pacts and blocs which they hoped could deter Hitler from war. Advocates of one alliance could fiercely oppose those of another. Leo Amery, for example, as shall become apparent, enthusiastically backed an Anglo-Franco-Italian stand against Germany at several points during these years but resisted an Anglo-Franco-Soviet one at the same time. The links demonstrated in the previous chapter between alliances, collective security and the League of Nations serve only to muddy the waters further. However, several common trends emerge. While it was common for many people at the time to suggest that Britain should improve relations with one country or draw closer to another - not necessarily advocating a formal alliance as such - the importance of several key powers is shown which were regularly considered as potential allies. France was widely viewed as Britain's closest friend and most important neighbour in the Chamberlain period and was the one country which was almost always considered a constituent member of any alliance system suggested. The United States was committed to isolation during the interwar years. However, it was the world's most powerful nation and shared numerous cultural, historical and political links with Britain. It was, therefore, a regularly advocated partner in solving global disputes. After all, it had fought alongside Britain and France during World War One. The Soviet Union did not have such bonds with Britain, but was nevertheless one of the greatest world powers and influenced strategic considerations in both Europe and Asia. The obvious ideological hostilities between it and Nazi Germany also suggested that Russia could be a potential ally for Britain in restraining Hitler. While Italy was considered more as an enemy than a friend during these years, it will also be covered where appropriate

as a number of influential people suggested a return to the 1935 Stresa Front as a deterrent to Germany. Driving a wedge between Mussolini and Hitler also played a role in Chamberlain's early appeasement policy during 1937.

This chapter will therefore concentrate on three or four key alliances and essentially consider British relations with three or four main powers. Anglo-French links with each one of the countries mentioned above were all suggested at various points in the years before war as a means to resist German expansion. The somewhat vague and transient concept of a Grand Alliance, meanwhile, which would essentially constitute Britain, France and Russia at its core, but could also be supported by the USA, Czechoslovakia (before Munich), Poland and whoever else cared to join the ranks - a whole host of small powers from all regions of Europe were touted at one point or another - will also be considered.

It will become apparent that these various partnerships, unions and groupings could work on different levels, both formally and informally, with a wide range of terms and conditions to them. This chapter will often discuss alliances, regional pacts, guarantees, and so forth, in close proximity to each other, under one rather simplistic umbrella. The author is of course well aware that a regional pact could represent a halfway house between League collective security and a more traditional bloc. Similarly, a guarantee could indicate a partnership between two powers that did not quite constitute a formal alliance, which were usually reciprocal in nature. Calls for 'closer relations' between two powers, meanwhile, need not represent any such binding arrangement. Such nuances and ambiguities should not be discounted as this chapter progresses.

It will begin by charting the origins and development of the numerous alliance alternatives to Chamberlain's policy. It will then consider the main historiography on the subject before closing with an assessment of how viable this strategy was considered to be, and would actually have been, given the conditions of the late 1930s.

(2) ORIGINS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

This section will chart the development of alliances and the Grand Alliance as alternatives to Chamberlain's policy by focusing on some of the main proponents active in politics at the time. Alliances and blocs had been widely discredited in interwar Europe, many believing they had played a major role in causing the Great War. The League of Nations and agreements like that made at Locarno in 1925 were designed to supersede such pacts and maintain peace on the Continent. Only a few alliances existed in Europe by the mid-1930s, such as the Stresa Front, established by Britain, France and Italy in April 1935 and designed to safeguard the borders of Austria, or the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact, concluded in the same year. These, however, were typically limited agreements featuring one or two powers, often between states actually somewhat distrustful of one another.⁴ The events in Abyssinia and the later Rome-Berlin axis of October 1936 were to render the first of these arrangements, Stresa, all-but dead by Chamberlain's premiership anyway.

Indeed, the ominous new developments in German foreign policy during the early part of this year, following on as they did from the Abyssinian debacle, caused new rumblings of discontent within Britain at the League's ineffectiveness and prompted calls for alliances designed to deter or resist a German renaissance. Labour's Hugh Dalton had speculated that Britain should move closer to the Soviet Union during the debates in February 1936.⁵ Robert Boothby echoed these views from the Conservative benches.⁶ Leo Amery, meanwhile, in calling for an end to 'hopeless' sanctions on Italy and a recognition of Germany as the chief danger to Europe, seemed to want to keep the door open for a possible *rapprochement* with Mussolini.⁷

Such calls only increased and solidified in the wake of the Rhineland crisis, as one might expect. National Labour's Harold Nicolson, for example, was among many who suggested that the traditional close relationship with France should be cemented by means of a formal military alliance in a House of Commons debate on 26 March.⁸ Conservative MP Henry Raikes, meanwhile, a few weeks later, thought the crisis merely demonstrated the many frailties of the

League and called for a system of Regional Pacts in Europe to supersede the existing collective security arrangement.⁹ The most concrete and radical proposals in Parliament in response to the Rhineland affair came from Communist MP William Gallagher. He advocated the 'peace encirclement of Germany' through an Anglo-Franco-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and called for the Government to 'associate British foreign policy with the peoples who want peace rather than making any capitulation to Hitler and the Nazis of Germany'.¹⁰

While figures like these from the political Left backed closer relations with the Soviets at all times and for obvious reasons, calls for alliances in general tended to come mostly from Conservatives or those on the Right of the political spectrum. As the previous chapter has shown, Labour and the Liberals were staunch supporters of the League for the vast majority of this era and this was the supposed antidote to the old diplomacy of 1914. Demands for allies were still very much in the minority at this time and decreased further once the dust on the Rhineland crisis had settled. From now on calls largely only resurfaced in the latter part of the period covered by this thesis, in response to big events and in face of an obvious threat to peace. The March 1938 *Anschluss*, for example, was perhaps the next occasion when alliances were advocated widely.

Nevertheless, at the end of 1936 and beginning of 1937, growing disillusionment with the League and increased concern at Fascist militarism caused some to think about security on more traditional, limited and national levels. The Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936 between Germany and Japan followed on from the Rome-Berlin Axis and brought the issue of allies, as well as the Far East, into sharper focus. In a series of Commons debates in February 1937 several Labour MPs seemed to be concerned about their official party line - pro-League and anti-alliances - as they expressed a desire to draw closer to friends in Europe and particularly Soviet Russia. Sir Stafford Cripps, for example, whilst using collective security terminology, castigated the Government for failing to conclude a definite 'pact or arrangement' with France and Russia when he spoke on 18 February.¹¹ James Walker, meanwhile, felt that Russia offered 'the best help we could have as an Empire' in the event of increased Japanese militarism in the Far East.¹² A couple of weeks later Churchill underlined his desire from the Tory benches for a closer union with the French.¹³ Robert Boothby agreed wholeheartedly.¹⁴ Viscount Astor,

meanwhile, felt it was to the United States and Commonwealth, rather than the distrusted Soviets, that Britain should look for help in the quest for peace.¹⁵ It was perhaps Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander's contribution on 18 February, however, that was the most striking at this time. It seemingly amounted to a call for what might later have been termed a Grand Alliance against the Fascists. While he was careful to couch his words in the language and ideals of the League, the meaning was pure *Realpolitik*:

I suggest that if the Government were to make it clear that we are willing to go all out with our forces, not drawing back as in recent examples, we could rely upon a system of alliances. After all, the League of Nations is only an alliance of all loyal nations against a potential aggressor. We could rely upon France, Belgium, Russia, Poland, the Little Entente countries, the Balkans, Turkey, Holland, and the Scandinavian countries. One would hope that all the others would come in, and Germany and Italy too. If they did not, they would rightly be encircled. Any aggressor deserves to be encircled.¹⁶

In a private memo on foreign affairs at this time, Robert Boothby seemed to broadly consent. He wrote, 'a catastrophe can still be averted' if Germany could only be made to fear the 'united opposition of the whole of the rest of Europe'. He went on: 'The three great powers, Great Britain, France and Russia... if they stand together... are more than strong enough to preserve peace'.¹⁷

By the time Chamberlain had assumed the premiership, therefore, concerns about security were so high that a tiny but significant band of MPs from across all parties had advocated a range of alliances and pacts with various constituent members. One or two were even thinking in terms of deterring the Fascists from war through a large coalition of major powers like Britain, France and Russia. Others, however - usually on the Right, who were less disposed to look to the Soviets for assistance - felt that Italy could be used as a partner against Germany. In 1937 many advocated attempting to revive the 1935 Stresa Front as Chamberlain's early conversations with Italy progressed. National Liberal Robert Bernays, for example, was one of many figures who resented how events in the last few years had all but wrecked what was potentially a very beneficial arrangement for Britain. He noted in his diary on 5 November 1936: 'I do not see how we can possibly face the future unless we buy Italian friendship'.¹⁸

Leo Amery felt that if isolation was to be refused by Chamberlain then a return to Stresa would provide the best chance of averting war, far more so than any measure of appeasement, concessions or the League. He asserted in his diary, 'the great thing I urged was to be patient and restore the Stresa Front' during a foreign affairs meeting in Parliament shortly after the Rhineland crisis in March 1936.¹⁹ A letter to the Prime Minister towards the end of the following year broadly confirms this. Here Amery advocated trying to drive a wedge between Britain's enemies by recognising the Italian conquest of Abyssinia:

I would say that our first effort should be to get back to the Stresa position in which case we bring together not only France and Italy but their various client states in the Danubian Basin... Stresa was the high water-mark of the success of our diplomacy in Europe.²⁰

The trend towards advocating those wider alliances of the type considered by Mander or Boothby in early 1937, meanwhile, continued after Chamberlain took office and gathered momentum throughout the rest of the year. Former Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George, for example, was a case in point. He announced on 25 June 1937 that, 'if the great powers, France and Russia... and ourselves, talked quite frankly, brutally if you like, [then] these three great powers have such a force that there is no one in Europe could stand up against them'.²¹ Even the Liberal leader Archibald Sinclair, a firm advocate of the League at this time, appealed to Chamberlain to make an effort in 'fostering and strengthening' closer ties with the USA, as an additional security measure should collective security fail.²² The perceived success of the Nyon Conference in September of this year also emboldened those who favoured the deterrence of Hitler and Mussolini. Churchill, for example, congratulated Eden on his success in Switzerland in a letter on 20 September and felt events only underlined the importance of a strong Anglo-French stand against the Fascists.²³

Calls for increased American cooperation grew after Roosevelt's famous 'Quarantine Speech' on 5 October 1937, which seemed to intimate that America now favoured a tougher line against the Dictators.²⁴ Sinclair, again, felt it was a 'clarion call to action' and represented a chance to draw the USA into the Anglo-French sphere:

Let us not fail to seize with both hands this... glorious opportunity of lining up the United States in the defence of the ideals of peace and justice, which are common to our two countries, to France and to all the great democracies of the world.²⁵

The March 1938 *Anschluss* brought the issue of Czechoslovakia into sharp focus and provided new momentum to the suggestion of alliances as an alternative to appeasement, unsurpassed until the events in Prague one year later. The subsequent well-publicised offer from the Soviets to Britain and France for talks with a view to 'the organisation of collective resistance to the aggressor' on 17 March 1938 also resulted in a flurry of calls for Russia to be an integral part in any anti-Fascist bloc.²⁶ Churchill gave tacit approval to Chamberlain's seeming attempts to revive the Stresa Front on the day of Eden's resignation, but now came all out in favour of the bolder, wider policy.²⁷ While the concept of a Grand Alliance spanned several centuries - inextricably linked to notions of a 'balance of power' and Britain's traditional policy of opposing any nation attempting to dominate the Continent - Churchill gave the term new, wider use in the context of Hitler and the late 1930s.²⁸

Following his dynamic lead, eloquently expressed on the opening page of this chapter, a host of political figures from all parties now joined the campaign. Again, despite being officially opposed to alliances, and taking care to voice their demands in League terminology, leading figures from the Opposition felt that pacts might just keep the peace. Labour's Philip Noel-Baker, for example, on 24 March asserted that while Labour did 'not believe in power politics or in alliances of the old kind', war could be averted, 'if they were to make a definite, concrete, binding alliance with France, Czechoslovakia and Russia'.²⁹ Only a few days earlier Sinclair asked, 'What then should we do? Let us resolve to support France... draw more closely by all means in our power to the Government of the USA, and let us not forget... the folly of leaving Russia out of account'.³⁰ Former Liberal leader Viscount Samuel, meanwhile, admitted to the *Manchester Guardian* in the following month that, given the current state of the League, 'pacts, agreements and understandings, first with France, and then with others, were the right policy'.³¹

Back in Parliament at this time, on 14 March, Tory MP Sir Henry Croft felt that the 'finest line of policy we could adopt' would be to draw closer to the

Empire: 'There are 500 million people in the British Empire and we have great strength behind it'.³² His colleague Viscount Wolmer, meanwhile, hoped for 'a definite and specific alliance by which the Danubian and Scandinavian states, England and France will pledge themselves to go to each other's assistance'.³³ Harold Macmillan even talked at this time, albeit in private, of a 'London-Paris-Madrid axis [as] the best chance of avoiding a general war'. If Franco could be won over to the Western bloc, 'such a compact geographical grouping would provide the maximum security and the minimum of provocations'.³⁴ Labour's Thomas Fletcher, however, talked more of general principles:

If a man has an idea to hit me on the head, I certainly will fight for the idea of not being knocked on the head, and I try to find some friends who agree that I ought not to be knocked on the head. That is not a contest of political theories. That is common sense.³⁵

There were many variations on this general theme over the coming weeks, far too numerous to cover here. Almost all of the suggested alliances, however, envisaged a central core of Britain, France (and hence Czechoslovakia) and the Soviet Union, with whoever else would come in around them. Unsurprisingly, now Austria had been absorbed into the Reich, and despite the initial promise of the Anglo-Italian Agreement in April 1938, calls for Stresa to be revived fell away sharply.³⁶ The Anglo-Franco-Soviet based Grand Alliance became the strategy of choice for most advocates at this time.

As the Czech crisis gathered momentum through the summer of 1938, Chamberlain's policy came under increasing attack from the various pro-alliance camps. In May, Churchill wrote an article for the *News of the World* in which he appealed for greater Anglo-American consultation, though he recognised that an all-out alliance was unrealistic:

If Britain and the United States were agreed to act together, the risk [of war] would be slight. These two great kindred powers, in collaboration, could prevent - or at least localise and limit - almost any quarrel that might break out among men... almost certainly without any resort to force themselves, by moral, economic and financial power... It is a union of spirit not of forms that we seek.³⁷

On 4 July, Sinclair announced that the Liberals ‘strongly dissented’ from the Prime Minister’s appeasement strategy and once again bemoaned Britain’s neglected relations with France and America.³⁸ Independent MP Eleanor Rathbone, meanwhile, talked of how Russia was ‘essential’ to the anti-Fascist front and decried ‘the selfishness of our present policy,’ through which ‘we have practically been left alone’.³⁹ Labour’s Josiah Wedgwood was even more critical of appeasement. His alternative was obvious: ‘Every time you sacrifice one of your potential allies to this pathetic desire to appease the tyrants you merely bring nearer and make more inevitable that war which you pretend you are trying to avoid’.⁴⁰

Wider Advocates: Other Groups, Press and Public Opinion

This section will briefly summarise what wider groups, the major newspapers and the British public had to say in favour of alliances, a necessary endeavour in order more fully to understand how popular this alternative was. Unsurprisingly, groups from the far Left, such as the Independent Labour Party, almost universally backed closer relations with the Soviets at all times and were particularly keen on an Anglo-French military alliance with Russia from March 1938 onwards.⁴¹ In fact, as early as January 1937, the British Communist Party favoured ‘opposing the warmongers by a policy of peaceful cooperation with Socialist Russia, the Government of France supported by the People’s Front, and the small states of Europe’.⁴²

Whilst regularly advocating closer relations with the USA, the League of Nations Union unsurprisingly resisted calls for alliances for the vast majority of the Chamberlain period.⁴³ However, by the summer of 1939 and despite the persistence of the usual collective security rhetoric, it had moved over to seeking ‘a Peace Front too formidable to be challenged’ as its solution to the Fascist march.⁴⁴ This would be made up of Britain, France, Russia, Poland and, broadly speaking, anyone else in Eastern Europe wishing to join. Evidence of the LNU’s crumbling conviction in the League’s power can be found earlier than this, however. Senior figures like Gilbert Murray gave approval for Regional Pacts in the wake of the *Anschluss*, for example, which, as discussed in the previous

chapter, actually amounted to an undermining of the true ideals of collective security, in favour of older *Realpolitik* measures more akin to the pre-Great War era.⁴⁵ Even many Pacifists began to take a similar line as the Czech crisis reached its nadir. The International Peace Campaign, for example, in a leaflet from September 1938, announced, ‘the people’s answer to the Dictators is collective security’, and yet went on: ‘Britain, France and Russia can defend Spain and Czechoslovakia, defend Europe and defend peace’.⁴⁶ Their advocated ‘League’ coalition here amounted to a naked alliance of three great powers, one of which - Russia - was a regular transgressor of the rules of Geneva.

The widespread rejection of alliances and blocs, and hope that the League could offer a better way to maintain peace, was as much, if not more, driven by public and press sentiment in the early to mid-1930s. However, by the time of Chamberlain’s premiership, and particularly in the wake of the major flashpoints on the road to war, substantial sections of both groups came to believe that alliances were the best policy. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, felt that the *Anschluss* could have been countered with a united Anglo-French stand: ‘If Mr Chamberlain said in the House of Commons today that the British and French Governments would not tolerate any further intimidation of small countries there would be no reason for gloom’.⁴⁷ The *News Chronicle* greeted Churchill’s rallying cry for a Grand Alliance immediately following the *Anschluss* with enthusiastic approval and felt that Munich need never have occurred, had a similar ploy been adopted in May or June 1938:⁴⁸

The truth is that common and resolute action by Britain, France and Russia in the summer would... have saved us from ever coming to the brink of war, and would have marked a turning point - perhaps decisive - in the hitherto aggressive career of the Dictators.⁴⁹

The *Yorkshire Post* was another vehemently anti-appeasement paper and its editor, Arthur Mann, a long-term advocate of alliances as the best strategy to pursue. In August 1938, for example, he wrote privately of his burning desire to see Chamberlain not spurn Roosevelt’s ‘moral and implied material support’ against the Dictators.⁵⁰

The Prague Coup was the watershed event in press calls for alliances as an alternative to appeasement; indeed, demands for a Grand Alliance were almost

universal across the main dailies from now on. The *Yorkshire Post* promptly advocated a pact with Russia, its editor in particular believing that the possibility of a two-front war for Germany would deter Hitler from taking the decisive step.⁵¹ The *Daily Express*, which as a pro-isolation paper had urged closer relations with no other powers than the USA and Dominions, now felt that France's borders were effectively Britain's. It backed an effort to turn the Empire into 'a vast, mighty and flexible instrument capable of offering instant and overwhelming resistance to any who may dream of attacking our heritage'.⁵² The *Daily Herald*, unsurprisingly, favoured closer relations with the Soviets after the Munich settlement but now came round to advocating a formal military alliance with France and Russia, as well as the closest cooperation with America.⁵³ The *News Chronicle* felt strategically important smaller powers in Europe should be targeted first, such as Holland, Romania and Yugoslavia.⁵⁴ Even traditionally pro-appeasement papers such as *The Times* felt that Prague had effectively killed this policy and now urged drawing closer to other powers in an anti-Fascist alliance.⁵⁵

There are countless examples of members of the public writing to newspapers and MPs in favour of alliances during the Chamberlain period. The *Anschluss* in March 1938 proved a spur for such letters, many of which wanted Britain to draw closer to the Soviets or USA. Some, like W. Laxton of Edgware, however, were more outraged that appeasement had sacrificed the friendship of traditional allies like France and America in favour of that of enemies like Germany and Italy.⁵⁶ Others were more creative in the measures they suggested. F. W. Balch of Stockton wrote to Harold Macmillan on 22 March 1938 advocating not only guarantees to Poland and Romania, but also that 'Roosevelt should be asked to take temporary charge of all our interests in the Pacific'. Moreover, he thought that a late effort to rebuild the Stresa Front should be made through inducements to Mussolini: 'We should offer Italy... if she comes in on our side... £100 millions in cash... and further French territories on the Moroccan coast'.⁵⁷

Events in Prague in March 1939 produced another huge flurry of letters on foreign policy. Hugh Wilson of South West London, for example, informed the *Daily Telegraph* on 21 March that he favoured cementing ties with Romania and reducing its attractiveness to attack by purchasing all oil stocks for British use.⁵⁸

A day earlier, in the same paper, 'W. E. M.' of East London felt that now 'surely the time has come for a close military alliance between all the Western democratic countries'. His particular solution had a Scandinavian feel: 'A combination of Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, France and Great Britain would be a formidable obstacle to tackle'.⁵⁹

The Prague Coup marked a real catalyst for alliances being popularly favoured over appeasement, as evidenced by Gallup Poll data from this period. Asked, 'Are you in favour of a military alliance between Great Britain, France and Russia?' in April 1939, a colossal 87% responded in the affirmative, with only 7% against.⁶⁰ These figures represent the highest levels of approval for any suggested alternative to appeasement in the final years before war - more so even than support for the League of Nations in 1937 or 1938.⁶¹ The fact that no Gallup Poll questions were asked about alliances before this year suggests that it was essentially a policy most strongly favoured in the last six months before war, despite increasing support from all sections after the *Anschluss*. Indeed, given the figures above, it was surely *the* policy Britain demanded at this time.

Late Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

As the brief examination of the groups above suggests, alliances emerged as the most widely suggested alternative to appeasement after the Prague Coup. In partial response to this demand, the Government itself effectively abandoned appeasement in favour of deterrence when Chamberlain offered a guarantee to Poland on 31 March 1939 and then a few days later talked of the 'new epoch in the course of our foreign policy'.⁶² Many critics of appeasement felt the Munich Agreement was a wake-up call for Britain to marshal its defences in close accord with others. Figures from both Houses bemoaned the cold-shouldering of Russia and America at Munich, while others were even convinced that an Anglo-Franco-Soviet bloc could have caused Hitler to back down without the need for any Czech concessions.⁶³ The Tory Earl of Lytton, for example, echoed Churchill's renewed call for a Grand Alliance on 5 October 1938 and felt such a stand would have caused the crisis to dissipate: 'I do not believe that Herr Hitler

was any more ready to go to war with Great Britain, France and Russia... than we were prepared to go to war with Germany'.⁶⁴

After events in Prague, approval for the Government's tougher line was widespread and wholehearted. Although they still often couched their words in collective security terminology, both Labour and the Liberals came over to the strategy of a Grand Alliance. To give but a few of many possible examples, on 3 April 1939 Deputy Labour leader Arthur Greenwood welcomed efforts 'in establishing a formidable and insurmountable barrier against future aggression... a new chapter which I entitle "Mutual Aid" '. In this front, he felt, 'the military value of the USSR... might well prove to be the final, decisive and smashing factor on the side of keeping the peace in the world'.⁶⁵ Archibald Sinclair, meanwhile, stated that 'we shall, of course, support the policy... of gathering together the friends of peace and order... as the only way of stopping war'. He went on to express the 'extreme importance' of Russia to this bloc and hoped the Government would also try 'to rally Romania, Turkey and other Balkan powers to the common cause'.⁶⁶

The position in the House of Lords at this time was very similar. Lord Snell, on the Left, asserted on 13 April that Labour welcomed the Government's new policy but bemoaned the lack of consideration given to Russia: 'The key to this situation seems to us to be an Anglo-French-Soviet declaration of peace and intention to resist aggression'.⁶⁷ On the Right, meanwhile, Lord Lothian backed Churchill's Grand Alliance as the policy he favoured, to which, he felt, the inclusion of Russia 'may be absolutely vital'.⁶⁸

Loud criticism of the Government hence soon resurfaced at its perceived reluctance to include Russia in the new Peace Front, which evolved further in April 1939 when guarantees to Greece and Romania were given. The Soviets had again approached Britain, this time with the suggestion of a six-power-conference (Britain, France, Russia, Poland, Turkey and Romania) as early as 18 March that year, and tentative talks began, although it was not until 24 May, shortly after the Turkish alliance was announced, that the Cabinet agreed to start negotiations for a full blown Anglo-Soviet alliance. On 19 May, Attlee underlined his party's conversion to alliances, 'the best hope of preventing war' being 'to get a firm union between Britain, France and the USSR as a nucleus of a World Alliance against aggression'. He also derided Chamberlain's progress

so far as ‘dilatory and fumbling’, blaming old Tory distrust of Soviet ideology as the main sticking point.⁶⁹ This attack was echoed in the House of Lords on 12 June 1939, when Liberal peer Lord Davies accused the Government of being ‘obsessed by the notion that there is a “Bolshie” behind every bush’, of being ‘frightened to death of Communism’.⁷⁰ Churchill, meanwhile, in the same debate as Attlee, asserted that the new Peace Front of Britain, France, Poland, Greece, Romania and Turkey could function ‘*only* with the effective support of a friendly Russia lying behind all those countries’.⁷¹

In late July 1939 William Strang from the Foreign Office and Admiral Reginald Drax were dispatched to Moscow by Chamberlain to advance Anglo-Soviet discussions. The Opposition parties were by now furious, believing that, while appeasement had seemingly been abandoned, Chamberlain’s new policy needed to take a rapid and decisive turn. On 31 July, Sinclair questioned the wisdom of sending such relatively obscure figures to Russia while Halifax remained at home.⁷² The latter’s predecessor, meanwhile, who was by now a vocal Government critic, asserted his view that ‘no other policy,’ than a Russian alliance, stood a chance of averting war.⁷³

(3) HISTORIOGRAPHY

Alliances are probably the most suggested alternative to appeasement offered in the subsequent historiography by both Chamberlain's contemporaries and later critics alike. Though there are far too many contributions on this subject to give anything but a brief survey here, the following section will examine the most important and influential works on this question in order to understand how historical assessments of its viability have developed.

Almost all of the memoirs which dominate the orthodox interpretation of appeasement have something to say on the issue of alliances. Churchill's *The Gathering Storm* dictated the terms of the debate for many years to come. For the author, 'there was never a war more easy to stop' than the Second World War and the 1930s represented a series of missed opportunities to have built an anti-Fascist front which would have done just that.⁷⁴ Churchill asserted that Germany could have been ejected from the Rhineland in March 1936 by a firm Anglo-French stand.⁷⁵ The Nyon Conference of September 1937, meanwhile, was proof that the combined influence of these two powers was a powerful check on the Dictator states.⁷⁶ It left him 'breathless with amazement' that Roosevelt's Peace Initiative - 'the proffered hand stretched out across the Atlantic' - was waved away by Chamberlain in January 1938.⁷⁷ An Anglo-French guarantee of Czechoslovakia later that year might have 'deterred or delayed Hitler's next assault'.⁷⁸ It was the spurned Grand Alliance in the summer of 1939 that perhaps most rankled, however:

There can be no doubt, even in the after-light, that Britain and France should have accepted the Russian offer... The alliance of Britain, France and Russia would have struck deep alarm in the heart of Germany in 1939, and no one can prove that war might not even then have been averted... History might have taken a different course. At least it could not have taken a worse.⁷⁹

Churchill's argument about the alliance unmade was taken on by numerous other anti-appeasers from the Chamberlain era. Anthony Eden, later the Earl of Avon, certainly presented himself as such in the years after Munich, although the true extent of his anti-appeasement credentials is questionable. In any case,

he used his memoirs to paint himself as the lone voice within the Chamberlain Cabinet calling over and over for tougher action on behalf of his colleagues. Speaking of the late 1930s in general, he asserted, 'I was convinced that close Anglo-French understanding and coordinated action, endorsed as nearly as we could contrive by the United States, was the only way to keep the peace'.⁸⁰ He attributes his resignation to Chamberlain's rejection of the Roosevelt Peace Initiative in January 1938 and the Prime Minister's persistence in bowing to Dictators.⁸¹ Harold Macmillan used *The Winds of Change* to place himself firmly in Churchill's shadow. It has already been shown in the previous chapter that Macmillan felt an Anglo-Franco-Soviet union could have been made, and a war possibly averted, had 'Arms and the Covenant' been adopted as Government policy in 1937. He also claimed that 'the first and most urgent need of Britain', upon Chamberlain's assumption of power, 'was to draw in as her allies... the United States and Russia'.⁸²

Many others took a similar line. Alfred Duff Cooper felt Britain 'should have retained the friendship of Italy' in the 1930s, 'and the axis... would never have formed'.⁸³ The Roosevelt Peace Initiative, meanwhile, represented 'an immense opportunity which... might have proved one of the turning points in European history and would probably have averted the coming war'.⁸⁴ Leo Amery, unsurprisingly, used *My Political Life* to reiterate his conviction that 'it was at all costs essential to build up a combination of powers prepared to keep Hitler in check'.⁸⁵ To his credit, however, he reminds the reader that Churchill's Grand Alliance would have had to rely upon a Russian army widely perceived to have been crippled by Stalinist purges.⁸⁶ The Stresa Front once more emerges as the deterrent spurned for Amery.⁸⁷ This is also a point echoed by Vansittart in his memoirs, where he describes such a combination as 'the only real bulwark for peace' available at the time.⁸⁸ Yet Vansittart also claims that an alliance of the Balkan powers and the Little Entente, supported by Poland, would have been 'a real obstacle to Italo-German expansion in the mid-1930s'.⁸⁹ Robert Boothby lists the double failure to secure a Grand Alliance - after the *Anschluss* and after the Prague Coup - as key turning points which made war inevitable, a claim echoed by Attlee in the 1961 Francis Williams interview.⁹⁰ It was, for Attlee, 'what we *ought* to have done... what we wanted' and it would have deterred war, especially if the Soviets had been included among the ranks.⁹¹

Not all Chamberlain's contemporaries were critical of the Prime Minister on this issue, however. Lord Strang, for example, gives a detailed defence of his own record with regards to the failed 1939 Moscow negotiations and puts the reason for their collapse squarely at the door of the Soviets. While Poland would never consent to Russian troops crossing their territory anyway, the hard-line Molotov consistently upped his demands in light of every concession offered by the British delegation, making an agreement with them all but impossible. The author was suspicious that the ever-cautious Stalin was only playing for time with Britain, in order to secure the best deal possible with Germany.⁹² Samuel Hoare, later Viscount Templewood, launched a similar defensive rearguard. Chamberlain 'had good reason to be sceptical of grandiose proposals' like the Roosevelt Peace Initiative, coming as it did in a vague form from an ultra-isolationist power, far removed from the affairs of Europe.⁹³ Again, the Russian half of the 1939 alliance negotiations was, for Hoare, the more destructive of the two. Stalin's intransigence and refusal to sign anything other than a deal which would effectively mean partitioning Poland and the extension of Soviet control in the Baltic all but killed the talks in his view.⁹⁴

Other of Chamberlain's loyal colleagues rallied to the Prime Minister's defence. Neville Henderson, in his memoirs *Failure of a Mission*, reiterated that Soviet duplicity was the main reason that no Grand Alliance was ever made: 'Stalin and Molotov kept putting the price up... I still believe that from the outset [of talks] Moscow never meant them to terminate in agreement with us'.⁹⁵ Both Sir John Simon and Lord Halifax emphasised just how unattractive even Britain's best options were for allies in the period. The former, for example, asserted that 'the French Air Force was deplorably weak' during the pre-war years.⁹⁶ The latter, meanwhile - whose views are all the more important given that he succeeded Eden as Chamberlain's Foreign Secretary - claimed that even when the USA showed most willingness to help Britain in its mission for peace, in January 1938, the results of such a plan would have been far from certain:

I am satisfied that on neither count is it possible to maintain the argument... either that the President felt resentment at the reception accorded to his initiative, or that this initiative, if differently handled, might have had the effect of preventing the war.⁹⁷

A plethora of later historians took further the debate on the viability of alliances as an alternative to appeasement and only a select few of the most important can be covered here. Both Sir Lewis Namier and A. L. Rowse wrote very critical accounts of Chamberlain's tenure in high office and indicated that the Prime Minister could have halted Hitler's march 'without excessive effort or sacrifice' if only he had adopted a tougher line.⁹⁸ Rowse, in particular, in his 1961 work *Appeasement: A Study in Political Decline, 1933-39*, took the Churchillian line that a Grand Alliance was 'the only way to contain Hitler'.⁹⁹

Moving into what could be broadly described as the revisionist period on Chamberlain and appeasement, A. J. P. Taylor largely exonerated the Prime Minister from blame for the coming of war in 1939 and saw appeasement as a realistic strategy given the conditions of the day. He poured scorn on the likely outcomes of the spurned Roosevelt Peace Initiative, for example. However, Taylor was critical of Chamberlain's failure to secure an alliance with the Soviets after the Prague Coup in March 1939. Once it became clear that all other alternatives were dead - and for him a turning point like Prague had signalled this - the Government should have pursued alliances with far greater vigour.¹⁰⁰

This line was broadly echoed by F. S. Northedge in several of his works from the 1960s and 1970s. In view of the weakness of existing alternatives to appeasement, such as collective security, Northedge felt the traditional notion of a balance of power would have been the best option to pursue: 'It has its faults, but it may have fewer faults than any alternative upon which the world could agree'.¹⁰¹ A host of successive historians over this period developed the debate with a more charitable view of the appeasers and their policy. To give just a few of the most influential examples, Paul Kennedy's 1981 work *The Realities Behind Diplomacy* was one of many to address the long-term strained relations between Britain and its potential allies. Russian Communism was widely seen as a bigger threat than German Nazism for the 1920s and much of the 1930s, America was viewed as an aloof and unpredictable partner, while relations with France grew increasingly irksome as the decade progressed.¹⁰² John Charmley was quick to point out that these constraints weighed heavily on Chamberlain's mind and mitigated against a Grand Alliance - something that was easy to suggest by those on the sidelines who had no responsibility for events.¹⁰³ 'His was the only policy which offered any hope of avoiding war', he concluded.¹⁰⁴

Peter Neville concurred with this broad line: 'The Grand Alliance was an impressive concept, but its component parts seemed to be defective. It also reminded Chamberlain of a pre-war Entente'.¹⁰⁵

Alistair Parker's 1993 book *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* remains perhaps the best known work from the post-revisionist school. The author revives many of the classic criticisms of Chamberlain and maintains that Churchill's Grand Alliance option was both well-supported and realistic in the years before war.¹⁰⁶ In his follow-up work, *Churchill and Appeasement* (2000), Parker states his case more bluntly:

Churchill could have prevented the Second World War. If Churchill had controlled British foreign policy, he would have made a 'Grand Alliance'... It might have stopped Hitler or caused moderate Germans to stop him. Churchill might even have managed to make Britain and France seem to Stalin to be safer collaborators than Nazi Germany... We shall never know... It is, however, hard to imagine that any conceivable alternative chain of events could have been worse than what happened in 1939-45.¹⁰⁷

Parker's seminal work influenced other historians to readdress the issue of alliances as a viable alternative to appeasement, both in favour of Chamberlain's choices and against. Roy Denman, for example, asserted in 1996 that the *Anschluss* might have been averted and war made very doubtful had Eden's detestation of Mussolini not driven the *Duce* irretrievably into Hitler's camp.¹⁰⁸ David Dutton, however, is keen to point out how Chamberlain felt that alliances would only provoke a war when he in fact sought to avoid one.¹⁰⁹ Would a Russian alliance not just make Hitler lash out against perceived encirclement by a hostile bloc, or make the Japanese think that the Western coalition was trying to strangle their interests in the Far East?

In addition to the works mentioned so far, there are numerous more detailed studies focussing on British relations with particular countries during the Chamberlain period. While lack of space negates any detailed examination, it is worth mentioning one or two key books which add to our knowledge on the question of alliances. On Anglo-French relations, Anthony Adamthwaite's comprehensive *France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936-39* (1977) remains perhaps the best survey of the discord and disharmony between

Britain and its closest ally in the years before war. Characterised by a relationship of ‘bickering and backbiting’, the author details the rationale behind French appeasement and underlines how neither power was willing to take the lead in forming a powerful coalition against Hitler until late so in the day.¹¹⁰ Martin Thomas’ more recent work on the same topic draws similar conclusions and pays particular attention to French military weakness and political instability as decisive factors undermining a united front between the two powers. This is a line which Glyn Stone, in particular, concurs with.¹¹¹

There have been many works on Anglo-American relations in the Chamberlain period, of which William Rock’s *Chamberlain and Roosevelt: British Foreign Policy and the United States* offers one of the most damning indictments on their efforts to cement a Special Relationship in face of the Fascist challenge. While he doubts whether an Anglo-American alliance would have actually deterred Hitler from war in the final instance, Rock criticises how the two nations ‘acted more like selfish, suspicious rivals’ than partners at this time. They ‘materially reduced their effectiveness in confronting the challenge of Hitler in Europe - to say nothing of the Japanese threat in the Pacific’.¹¹² David Reynolds makes a similar case and pays particular attention to how Chamberlain thought American help in the short-term might cost Britain more in the long run, *vis-à-vis* later European influence.¹¹³ Arnold Offner was more critical of American isolationist sentiment, in face of a desperate Britain, as the reason no decisive Atlantic front was established.¹¹⁴ This is a line Gary Ostrower, among others, broadly adopted in his 1976 *Collective Insecurity: The United States and the League of Nations during the Early 1930s*. Here he asserts that the dominant features of Roosevelt’s administration were ‘fear of war... New Deal economic nationalism, and... sensitivity to public opinion’.¹¹⁵ These crippled the chances of America joining in resistance to the Fascists until after the attack at Pearl Harbour.

Anglo-Soviet relations in the late 1930s have been an area of much recent research and this trend will continue as new evidence is uncovered. Much of this work has revived old charges that Chamberlain never really wanted a deal with Russia and therefore passed a powerful ally into the Nazi camp. This, critics say, made war inevitable when he could have worked with Stalin to avoid it. While David Kaiser echoed Strang’s anti-Soviet stance in 1980 by claiming that the

Russians were never interested in making an alliance with Britain and France - 'they were merely stalling until Hitler would submit a bid of his own' - Geoffrey Roberts contested this with the assertion that Stalin stumbled into the Nazi-Soviet Pact at the last possible moment.¹¹⁶ There was no devious, long-term plan for Russia, according to Roberts, and the Soviets only took the Nazi option late in the day in face of perceived Anglo-French reticence.¹¹⁷

Michael Jabara Carley and Louise Grace Shaw have both recently offered similar, more charitable interpretations of Russian intentions with regards to the alliance talks. The former is at pains to explain that Russia only did the obvious, most sensible thing during August 1939 for its own safety, and, moreover, that anti-Communism permeated the hesitant British efforts during negotiations.¹¹⁸ Shaw, however, was even more damning of Chamberlain's Government and in many ways takes us back full circle to the position championed in *The Gathering Storm*: 'An alternative existed to the policy of appeasement - namely an Anglo-French-Soviet Alliance'.¹¹⁹ This, she maintains, would have 'posed serious, and very possibly, successful resistance to Germany in 1938 and 1939'.¹²⁰ Where the blame lies for the failure to secure this deal is clear - with a Prime Minister enveloped in anti-Soviet prejudice:

It was Neville Chamberlain, alone, who... repeatedly rejected Soviet proposals. Consequently, it was ultimately Neville Chamberlain who drove away the one ally who could have made a significant difference to Britain's experience of war.¹²¹

The current consensus seems to be that Chamberlain could have done more in the pursuit of allies than he did, regardless of the unattractiveness of his options. Doubtless the debate will continue as more information, particularly from the Soviet archives, comes to light.

(4) VIABILITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

The Extent to which the Government Considered the Alternative as Viable

As Chamberlain adopted a policy of alliances in 1939 at the expense of appeasement - or at least the 'classic' appeasement of concessions to Hitler - a lengthy section addressing the often overlooked links between the two strategies is not really needed here. It is clear that the Prime Minister eventually came to see blocs and pacts as the next best option he had. The following section will therefore discuss why Chamberlain resisted calls for alliances so vehemently until after the Prague Coup and always held doubts about closer relations with America and Russia for the duration of his premiership, something he has been heavily criticised for from all quarters. It will be more concerned with a thematic analysis of the different alliances suggested, and of British relations with certain powers, than a chronological narrative.

The widespread hostility to alliances in Britain during the mid-1930s, and conviction that they had led to the Great War, was shared by the Government. In the sort of statement that was common at this time, Viscount Cranborne, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, claimed in the House of Commons on 24 February 1936 that it was not true, 'that a policy of alliances or a policy of the balance of power would save us. Already that has brought us to the greatest catastrophe in the history of the world'.¹²²

The previous chapter has demonstrated how important individuals within the Government during the later part of 1936 became convinced of the need for Regional Pacts as a halfway house between collective security and alliances. Chamberlain himself even suggested that they should not necessarily require League approval, indicating that senior figures felt that security could be better maintained over the coming months by traditional methods, rather than the newer multilateral diplomacy of Geneva.¹²³ Similarly, several prominent individuals considered the revival of the 1935 Stresa Front to be an attractive policy for Britain at this time. Eric Phipps, for example, then still Ambassador in Berlin, told Eden that it was 'essential to reform the Stresa Front' in February 1936.¹²⁴ Vansittart, meanwhile, according to popular opinion, was the driving figure from the Foreign Office on this issue during Chamberlain's period.¹²⁵ In

his memoirs, Samuel Hoare claims that the infamous Hoare-Laval plan of December 1935 was just one part of a long-term strategy to maintain and then, later, revive the Stresa Front in the mid to late 1930s.¹²⁶ Indeed, a *rapprochement* with Italy went on to become an important part of Chamberlain's early appeasement strategy in 1937 and the first months of 1938. It is important to note, however, that appeasement contained a more general aim of improving relations with Italy which did *not* constitute an attempt to prise that power away from Germany and win it as a formal ally.

The conclusions of an important memo sent to the Cabinet by the Chiefs of Staff dated 8 December 1937 sheds important light on the issue of allies in general, as well as on the particular subject of revising Stresa. It suggests that, as time went on, despite the consideration of alliances increasing dramatically within the Government, the idea of winning Italy back to the Anglo-French sphere deteriorated as three Fascist powers became increasingly entrenched:

We cannot foresee the time when our defence forces will be strong enough to safeguard our territory, trade and vital interests against Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously. We cannot therefore, exaggerate the importance, from the point of view of Imperial defence, of any political or international action that can be taken to reduce the numbers of our potential enemies and to gain the support of potential allies. Of course, it would be possible to make an effort to detach one of the three Powers from the other two and it might even succeed. This, however, could only be done at the cost of concessions which would involve humiliations and disadvantages to this country by destroying the confidence of other nations. No-one would suppose, therefore, that we should try and bribe one of the three nations to leave the other two.¹²⁷

The March 1938 *Anschluss*, by removing Austria from the picture, provided another blow to hopes of reviving the Front, something which was discussed again in Cabinet this month. However, Chamberlain never ruled it out as a possible, if unlikely, part of his wider strategy.¹²⁸ Indeed, as late as July 1939, figures like Edward Ingram, head of the Southern section of the Foreign Office, considered making a late attempt to win Italy over to a Mutual Assistant pact with France by way of colonial concessions.¹²⁹

A word or two about the Government's views on France is appropriate now, as failure to reach a bold and united front with Britain's closest ally in the years

before war is an oft-cited charge against Chamberlain. An ingrained mistrust of the French, perception of Gallic weakness and instability, and a concern that they might only draw Britain into a war it did not want, all characterise the Government's position during these years. Despite the usual lip-service paid in public to Anglo-French unity in this period (Eden and Halifax regularly made the customary comments about keeping in step with France, for example) relations were normally poor.¹³⁰ Although there was a vague and general understanding that Britain would fight to protect France in any coming war - Director of Military Operations General Sir Henry Pownall stated in January 1938, 'if France crumbles we fall' - no concrete alliance existed between the two powers until early 1939.¹³¹

Mutual suspicion had clouded relations for years. As Thomas has observed, Anglo-French bickering during the Great War carried on into Versailles and was augmented by Imperial tensions in the 1920s.¹³² The effects of the Great Depression and subsequent French political instability in the 1930s had led to growing discord, which resurfaced in 1935 over Abyssinia and the Anglo-German Naval agreement - widely perceived in France to be undermining the Stresa Front. Glyn Stone points out that there was substantial tension over coordinating policy and consensus with regards to the Spanish Civil War too.¹³³

Personal rancour also increased during the Popular Front era, with the Tory-dominated Cabinet having to deal with a host of various Left-wing Gallic counterparts. Figures like Paul-Boncour and Bonnet, for example, were widely disliked by most of Chamberlain's Cabinet, many of whom held anti-French prejudices, according to Eden.¹³⁴ Even as late as 1 November 1938, just after the Munich settlement, Halifax confided to the Ambassador in Paris, Eric Phipps, that he thought the 'defeatist' French might renege on Britain and sign a Non Aggression Pact with Germany.¹³⁵ This feeling was often mutual. Daladier himself, who served as French Prime Minister for the majority of Chamberlain's premiership, described Chamberlain as a 'desiccated stick', Eden as a 'young idiot', the King as 'a moron', and England in general as 'feeble and senile' to the American Ambassador in Paris on 6 February 1939.¹³⁶

Long term political and economic chaos in France caused Chamberlain's Government to have little faith in their closest ally. It is a popular truism that there was no French Government in place at the time of the *Anschluss* and

indeed France in the late 1930s has been described as being on the verge of a Civil War, with industrial turmoil and political and social tensions rife.¹³⁷ When the French Government asked Phipps to do what he could to organise talks between Ministers in the wake of the *Anschluss*, for example, he replied that, 'such meetings seemed to me quite useless until the days of transitory French Governments were over. When a strong and durable Government appeared here they would, on the other hand, be very useful'.¹³⁸

Although the British hoped that France could hold out in any future war, the military picture in that country was perceived to be bleak.¹³⁹ Defeatism was thought to be rife in the upper ranks of the French army, as evidenced by Halifax's above quote, the Generals of which commanded a force greatly suited to a defensive conflict, hidden away behind the outdated and crumbling Maginot Line. The Cabinet pondered what effective aid France could offer in a war to save Czechoslovakia during the summer of 1938, for example, and Halifax subsequently urged the Foreign Office to harass them to put their house in order immediately following Munich.¹⁴⁰ Given all of this, then, perhaps the biggest fear that the Government had, which mitigated against a formal alliance until so late in the day, was that France could draw Britain into a war it was not prepared for, by way of the its Soviet pact or its pledge to assist Czechoslovakia in case of attack. In its *Review of Imperial Defence* on 22 February 1937, for example, the Chiefs of Staff ominously warned: 'If France becomes involved by a decision for which we should have no part, we, owing to our geographical and strategic position, are in danger of being drawn into a general European war'.¹⁴¹

Anglo-American relations should also be addressed to better understand why the Government never formed an Atlantic front against Fascism. Described by a close colleague in January 1938 as 'temperamentally anti-American', Chamberlain made a series of statements about the United States which have been used by historians to characterise the nature of the Special Relationship in the 1930s.¹⁴² Perhaps the most telling of all of these came in October 1934 when he claimed, the 'real trouble with Yanks' was that they 'never can deliver the goods'.¹⁴³ Always a realist in nature, Chamberlain and many others in Britain at the time believed that the USA, struggling to set its affairs in order in wake of the Wall Street Crash, its public wedded to isolation and its Congress committed to the successive Neutrality Acts, would never be able to offer substantial

material aid in the quest for peace. As with the French, Anglo-American relations in the 1930s were bedevilled by long-term tensions and personal rancour. Many people in Britain, who resented how America had remained aloof from the League of Nations, were angry at its grand posturing, accompanied by little action, during the Far East crises of the early 1930s. The 1933 World Economic Conference had been effectively destroyed by Roosevelt when he refused to yield on the issue of fixed currencies. A personal frostiness between the two leaders, who distrusted one another's economic policies - the New Deal sat as easily with the Prime Minister as the notion of Empire did with the President - was matched by a general suspicion between the two administrations.¹⁴⁴ Roosevelt's personal emissary, Harry Hopkins, meanwhile, thought the problem was a wider one of racial and historical tensions. He once told a meeting of British MPs, that 'there always has been and always will be' about a quarter of Americans who disliked Britain.¹⁴⁵

The troubles in the Far East during the summer of 1936 set the tone for Anglo-American relations over the coming years. Despite it being the theatre abroad in which America was most willing to act and had most interests to protect, a Foreign Office memo from Roger Makins of the Western department on 3 June pointed out that America was 'unwilling to enter even into a shadow of a commitment' in this region.¹⁴⁶ In a speech in New York on 12 September that year, Secretary of State Cordell Hull echoed Jefferson's historic claim that American foreign policy rested upon 'peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none'.¹⁴⁷

Despite the obvious signs that an Anglo-Franco-American pact was not on Washington's agenda, Chamberlain appealed to America for help in avoiding war shortly before assuming the premiership. Encouraged by figures within the Foreign Office like Vansittart, who stated in a Cabinet paper produced at the turn of the year, 'we must act and state our case in such a way as to retain American sympathy at all times', Chamberlain deputed Orme Sargent to write to Roosevelt in March 1937.¹⁴⁸ In this lengthy memo, Sargent stated that 'the greatest single contribution' America could make to world peace at that time was to amend its existing neutrality legislation. He also called for them to help in any way that they could to stabilise the Far East situation.¹⁴⁹ The response was lukewarm. Over six weeks passed before Hull and the Under-Secretary of

State, Sumner Welles, drafted an official reply, which asserted that they did not believe the Neutrality Acts encouraged aggression and promised help in the Far East only 'within the limits of our general policy'.¹⁵⁰

Chamberlain assumed the premiership, therefore, with little hope of concrete American help, in the form of an alliance or even in more general measures to influence world affairs. Roosevelt's 'Quarantine Speech' in October 1937 - which later prompted Chamberlain to respond, 'it is always best and safest to count on nothing from the Americans but words' - was followed just weeks later by no response to the attack on the *USS Panay* by Japanese gunboats on the Yangtze.¹⁵¹ Chamberlain complained at this time to John Tweedsmuir, the Canadian Governor General and close friend of Roosevelt, that he had 'gone out of his way to encourage those sections of American opinion that seem to have welcomed the President's Chicago speech', but all to no avail. 'Nevertheless', he continued, 'I am very conscious of the differences that have to be overcome by the President before it can be said that he has his people behind him'.¹⁵² Despite some figures in the Foreign Office like Frank Ashton-Gwatkin advocating another effort to win American aid against Japan in the Far East at the end of the year, a memo *to* the Office from Ronald Lindsay, British Ambassador in Washington, exasperated the Government further.¹⁵³ It warned that Cordell Hull wanted British Ministers to be careful about the language they used when talking about Anglo-American cooperation in the media, lest it have a misleading effect on the US public: 'As Mr Hull put it, "you may talk about parallel or similar action or about constant or even close collaboration" but never use the word "joint" '.¹⁵⁴

The Roosevelt Peace Initiative of 12 January 1938 has been presented by critics of appeasement as the President's grand effort to secure an Anglo-American partnership in the search for peace. Its collapse was one of the causes of Eden's resignation in February and it has been labelled as one of the missed opportunities to avert war. Unsurprisingly, much has been written about, and a great deal of mythology has surrounded, this secret proposal made to Britain of a peace conference to be held in Washington in early 1938. It is necessary now to expose some of these half-truths and exaggerations, albeit briefly, to gain a more accurate picture of events. Firstly, Chamberlain never actually rejected the plan outright as has often been claimed. More accurately, he greeted the

proposal with limited enthusiasm - albeit described by Welles as 'a douche of cold water'¹⁵⁵ - and asked that it be postponed for a time because the majority of the Cabinet felt it was woolly and vague and might cut across their own appeasement initiatives with the Dictators shortly about to commence.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, it might even provoke some Mad Dog act from Germany or Japan. Chamberlain was said to have penned: 'Eden's policy to line up the USA, Great Britain and France; result war' on his notepad during a Foreign Policy Committee meeting at this time.¹⁵⁷ Chamberlain actually gave the proposal his backing on 21 January and then again on 12 February, but Roosevelt was scheduled to be away from the Whitehouse for a large part of this month and thereafter announced the plan's indefinite postponement in the middle of March. There would have been little to stop the President going ahead without Chamberlain's blessing had he been determined to do so.

Secondly, the allegation that this was a rejection of some last chance to line up America in an alliance against Hitler is similarly flawed. The initiative was for the USA to host the conference, rather than actually contribute to discussions, as spelled out by Roosevelt himself.¹⁵⁸ Only the earmarked states that would attend would make any decisions and these included small powers like Sweden and Switzerland - hardly likely to have been able to enforce any agreements on Germany, Italy or Japan. Moreover, the conference would have been one designed for peace, not war. Issues scheduled for discussion were arms limitation, the distribution of raw materials and other economic measures - that is, initiatives akin to Chamberlain's own appeasement and not of some great stand against Dictatorship.¹⁵⁹ Roosevelt's warm reception to the Munich Agreement - indicated by the famous 'Good Man' cable - would suggest that he would have been more of an appeaser himself than a fighter had he been in Chamberlain's position at this time. William Rock even suggests that Roosevelt might have been relieved that his initiative failed in the end, which allowed him 'off the hook' from a hastily prepared and quite vague plan.¹⁶⁰ The results of such an initiative, if it had gone ahead, are also very uncertain. It seems highly unlikely that a proposal of this kind would have met with Hitler's approval, nor that it would have averted the *Anschluss* just a short while later. Even Eden later admitted to F. S. Northedge that nothing concrete would have come from the

plan in the short term, but felt the more general effects on Anglo-American relations made it worthwhile to welcome it.¹⁶¹

Chamberlain wrote a letter to his American cousin just after the Peace Initiative approach which outlined his thoughts on issues at this time. Despite the optimistic flourishes, one can sense the Prime Minister's deep frustrations:

I am just now in closer relations with the American Government than has been the case within my recollection. I have made more than one attempt, while I have been Prime Minister, to draw them even closer still and have had more than one disappointment... The trouble is that public opinion in a good part of the States still believe it possible for America to stand outside Europe and watch it disintegrate... In spite of my disappointment, I intend to keep on doing everything I can to promote Anglo-American understanding and cooperation. Not because I want or expect America to pull our chestnuts out of the fire for us; in any cooperation we shall always do our part, and perhaps more than our share. But I believe we want the same fundamental things in the world.¹⁶²

The next few lines are even more interesting, however. They explain not only why Chamberlain was ultimately prepared to give the plan his blessing, despite believing it woolly and vague, but why he would continue his contacts with America throughout his premiership, despite his disappointments and the continuous setbacks in relations:

The United States and United Kingdom in combination represent a force so overwhelming that the mere hint of the possibility of its use is sufficient to make the most powerful of Dictators pause... The cooperation between our two countries is the greatest instrument in the world for the preservation of peace.¹⁶³

Developments hereafter followed the same broad pattern: The Government's alarm at the deteriorating situation, which necessitated closer American involvement, meant Chamberlain continued to make approaches and kept the USA in the back of his mind. All of this was despite his repeated frustrations and his lack of faith in any forthcoming efforts from that quarter, more often than not later confirmed. For example, just before Munich, the situation was so bleak that Admiral Drax wrote a secret paper designed to be passed to Joseph Kennedy, the American Ambassador in London, in which he

expressed his hope that Roosevelt might approach Congress with a view to sending troops and planes to Europe.¹⁶⁴ The Anglo-German Agreement signed at Munich, meanwhile, was, according to Lord Home, Chamberlain's one time Parliamentary Private Secretary, cunningly designed primarily with America in mind. If Hitler kept to his word then all well and good; if he broke it then world opinion, and particularly the USA, would see how untrustworthy the *Führer* was - and where blame lay for war.¹⁶⁵ Hopes of increased cooperation were dashed again just after Munich, however, when former President Herbert Hoover made a well-publicised speech on 26 October 1938, singing the virtues of isolation. This was attended by Roosevelt and obviously carried weight with him.¹⁶⁶

The war scare in January 1939, when British intelligence warned of an imminent invasion of the Low Countries by Germany, again provoked panic in the Foreign Policy Committee and once more seemingly necessitated immediate contact with America. Despite reservations on the response he would receive, and despite fears that such an action might just provoke a German assault, Chamberlain agreed to share his intelligence with America and sound out Roosevelt about making a public declaration on the subject.¹⁶⁷ One might think that this scare and the Prague Coup in March 1939 would encourage a more positive response from America and efforts to move closer to the Western European powers. Roosevelt was also known to be greatly upset by the events of *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, after all. Again, however, Chamberlain's scepticism was proven to be well founded. A Foreign Office paper written by Halifax on 20 April and circulated in the Foreign Policy Committee indicated that, should war break out, Roosevelt had offered little more to Britain and France than 'the most beneficial possible neutrality'.¹⁶⁸

Government consideration of the Grand Alliance as an alternative to appeasement was, unsurprisingly, only really popular after the *Anschluss* in March 1938 and Churchill's rallying cry. Hitherto, it had only been briefly discussed in any seriousness just prior to the Nyon Conference in September 1937. Orme Sargent, for example, in a Foreign Office paper on the first of this month, suggested 'the formation of a bloc of states in Europe which would be sufficiently powerful to deter Germany from taking the offensive', but felt it would have little effect unless Germany was also isolated from Italy and Japan.¹⁶⁹ Others feared it would only provoke conflict by breaking Europe into

hostile ideological camps, especially if Russia was included on their side. Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, wrote in his diary on 9 September 1937, 'I hate the French-British-Russia party - it does exactly what we don't want - emphasises the split in Europe'.¹⁷⁰

The limited importance of alliances at the turn of the year in general, despite the tentative discussions in some quarters about reviving the Stresa Front (which were shortly to fade away) is demonstrated by a key memo from Thomas Inskip, presented to the Cabinet in December 1937. This report, entitled *Defence Expenditures in Future Years*, listed the protection of allies in a future war as the least important out of four key defensive priorities - behind (1) the home islands; (2) Britain's vital trade routes; and (3) its overseas territories.¹⁷¹

The *Anschluss* and subsequent offer to Britain from Russia on 17 March 1938 for a conference aimed at pooling security arrangements was to rouse the Government once more to the issue of a Grand Alliance. While there is some evidence from Eden's memoirs that Chamberlain had been considering 'the encirclement of Germany and a possible alliance with Russia' on 30 January 1938, 'the mood did not last'.¹⁷² It was not until the German troops marched into Austria that it returned again. Cadogan recalls on 14 March: 'Went to PM's room where I found H[alifax]. We had a short discussion: They rather on the line of Winston's Grand Alliance. I don't know about that'.¹⁷³ This last brief sentence shows Cadogan's uncertainty about such a venture, exacerbated a few days later when the Soviet offer came in. This, he felt, would 'only aggravate the tendency to divide Europe into two opposed camps' - 1914 all over again.¹⁷⁴

A letter from Chamberlain to his sister on 20 March 1938 remains perhaps the most crucial single document for understanding how viable he thought such a policy would be as an alternative to appeasement. He wrote:

As a matter of fact the plan of the 'Grand Alliance' as Winston calls it had occurred to me long before he mentioned it. I was thinking about it all last weekend. I talked about it to Halifax and we submitted it to the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office experts. It is a very attractive idea; indeed there is almost everything to be said for it until you come to examine its practicability. From that moment its attraction vanishes. You only have to look at a map to see that nothing France or we could do could possibly save Czechoslovakia from being overrun by the Germans if they wanted to do it.¹⁷⁵

Halifax's paper for the Foreign Policy Committee on this subject written a couple of days earlier is also illuminating. It explains why appeasement was thought to be preferable to alliances:

It might prove to be an effective deterrent to German action. But it might equally well, on the other hand, increase our chances of being involved in a war earlier rather than later... The Grand Alliance is an attractive proposal and there is a good deal that might be said both for and against it, but there is one decisive objection: In order to achieve it, it would be necessary to draw up a formal instrument in treaty form and this would be a long and complicated matter... [which] would afford both a provocation and an opportunity to Germany to dispose of Czechoslovakia before the Grand Alliance had been organised... This is not a good argument for risking disaster now... It may be argued that in order to prevent such developments the two great democracies must rally their forces and make a stand at an early date before the position deteriorates... I would say that we should not be justified in taking whatever risk there might be in trying to deter Germany from making war.¹⁷⁶

The geo-military factors Chamberlain alluded to in his letter of 20 March also played a part in the rejection of the Grand Alliance in deference to appeasement during the spring of 1938. A day later the Committee of Imperial Defence produced a paper which looked at the feasibility of some of the suggested constituent members of such a pact. It asserted that, 'an alliance with Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, Turkey and Greece would be of limited assistance to Great Britain and France and they might ultimately constitute an additional embarrassing commitment'. It went on: 'Our association with allies, many of whom are of doubtful military value against Germany, might precipitate a definite military alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan'.¹⁷⁷ Chamberlain echoed these points when he addressed Churchill's proposal and the Soviet offer for talks in the House of Commons on 24 March 1938:

The value of such alliances... as a deterrent to possible aggression, must obviously depend upon their military efficiency, upon the numbers and equipment of the forces that can be mobilised, on their distribution in relation to the arena in which they might have to be employed and on the amount of preparation and coordination of plans which it might be possible to achieve beforehand.¹⁷⁸

The perceived success of appeasement in averting war, as embodied in the Munich Agreement of September 1938, led to a temporary abatement in Government consideration of alliances as a policy for pursuit. Appeasement was the order of the day until the war scare in early 1939, which prompted immediate consideration of a Britain-France-Low Countries military alliance, as well as discussions over whether Anglo-French relations should be formalised into a definite Mutual Assistance pact.¹⁷⁹

The March 1939 Prague Coup brought a Russian alliance onto the table as a topic for consideration like never before. Popularly presented by many appeasement critics as one of the best opportunities to have deterred Hitler from war, the failed Anglo-Soviet negotiations of the summer of 1939 must be addressed if we are to gain a fuller understanding of Chamberlain's policy. A great deal has been written on the many reasons for their failure to terminate in agreement which cannot be gone into in any depth here. Nevertheless, a few major themes emerge. As a power which affected Britain's strategic position in both Europe and Asia, and therefore influenced relations with Germany, Italy *and* Japan in a way that France and the USA did not, the Soviet Union had to be addressed by the Government whether it wanted to or not. The Russian offer of a six-power conference in the wake of events in Prague (the second approach in a year) provided an opportunity for doing just that and spawned a legion of demands for an alliance from the many pro-Russian elements in Britain.

Anglo-Soviet relations had been characterised by over two decades of mistrust, ignorance and mutual suspicion. Diplomatic contacts between the two countries were suspended for a long time. For the majority of the inter-war period, Russia was seen as by far the biggest threat to Britain and world peace, Communism as the dark spectre on the horizon - especially loathed by Tories and the Tory-dominated Governments of the time.¹⁸⁰ In 1937, the Labour Party expelled the Socialist League from its Annual Conference as a result of that group advocating an alliance with Russia. Even Churchill, one of the biggest advocates of such a pact during 1938 and 1939, had made fiercely anti-Soviet speeches as late as 1936. All of this led to what Hugh Dalton termed Britain's 'mad fixation about Russia' on 17 September 1938, and he felt that many politicians, especially on the Right, would rather lose a war without Soviet assistance than win one with it.¹⁸¹

In February 1936, Eden warned his colleagues of the dangers of ‘hugging the bear too closely’ and claimed that many Germans were particularly fearful of an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement* giving them a strategic dilemma on two fronts, and fuelling Hitler’s claims of anti-Fascist encirclement.¹⁸² Fear of provoking Germany, and particularly Hitler, by closer union with the great ideological enemy of Nazism was a recurring factor in British calculations for the duration of the Chamberlain period. ‘Rab’ Butler, for example, Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Office from 1938 to 1940, claimed, during the negotiations, that an Anglo-Soviet pact would have ‘a bad psychological effect on Hitler’.¹⁸³ During the House of Commons debates which followed the Munich settlement, Inskip warned those Labour MPs bemoaning the lack of Russian involvement in events that they were pursuing ‘the policy of the encirclement of Germany and that is one which offers no remedy for the disease’.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, Chamberlain and Simon both denied such a strategy in Commons when the Polish Guarantee was announced on 31 March 1939.¹⁸⁵

As we have already seen, the great fear for British Ministers was that alliances - and especially ones with the Popular Front French and Communist Russians ranged against the Nazi Germans and Fascist Italians - would provoke blocs in Europe akin to the pre-Great War era. Might not an alliance with Russia just provoke Spain to move into the Axis camp and thereby lose more for Britain in the West than it would gain in the East? Might it not just cement relations within the Anti-Comintern Pact and thereby provoke the nightmare scenario for Britain of a simultaneous war with Germany, Italy and Japan? A Foreign Office paper from 23 March 1939, and believed to be written by Sir George Mounsey, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, warned of such risks:

The conclusion of any consultative pact with Russia would no doubt merely encourage those powerful circles in Japan which are pressing the Government to agree to German and Italian proposals for an alliance... This is a danger which must be borne in mind.¹⁸⁶

Perceptions of limited Soviet military capabilities played an important role in British considerations of an alliance with Russia. While Churchill, with the benefit of hindsight, would later claim that pre-war calculations of Soviet weakness were excessively pessimistic, it is clear that Russia in the late 1930s

was far from the colossal Superpower it was in the Cold War world at the time Churchill was writing.¹⁸⁷ The effects of Stalin's cull of the officer class of the Red Army during the summer of 1937 (later reckoned by Hoare to be three out of five Marshals, 13 out of 15 Army Commanders, 30 out of 58 Corps Commanders and 110 out of 195 Divisional Commanders either killed or imprisoned) were being recorded in Britain as early as August that year.¹⁸⁸ Lord Chilston, Ambassador in Moscow, informed the Foreign Office that his Military Attaché Colonel Firebrace thought main effect would be to render the surviving officers devoid of initiative, many of whom were joined by new, inefficient colleagues, described by Firebrace as little more than 'party dogs'.¹⁸⁹ The Ambassador in Rome, Lord Perth, meanwhile, recorded in December 1937 that his Polish equivalent in Moscow believed the Red Army to be in such a state of chaos that, 'he doubted if it would be capable of any except purely defensive operations for a period of three to four years'.¹⁹⁰

As Keith Neilson records in some detail, pessimistic estimates such as these dominated British perceptions of the Red Army during the vast majority of the Chamberlain period and mitigated against alliance talks until May 1939, when the Chiefs of Staff finally recommended an approach.¹⁹¹ Hugh Ragsdale is keen to point out how lamentable Soviet infrastructure, its poor road and rail networks, would have been a 'seriously inhibiting factor' on effective assistance being rendered to the Czechs at the time of the Munich crisis, for example. He therefore believes that Stalin would never have authorised Russia's inclusion in any Central European war in the autumn of 1938.¹⁹²

The scepticism of Russian military value, together with old ideological-based suspicions and a constantly recurring fear that alliances, especially with the Soviets, might just provoke a war all played on Chamberlain's mind in the weeks before he sanctioned talks. On 26 March 1939, for example, he wrote of his 'profound mistrust of Russia' and of having 'no belief whatever in her ability to maintain an effective offensive, even if she wanted to'.¹⁹³ He spoke in Cabinet on 5 April of his scorn for the Left's 'pathetic belief that Russia is the key to our salvation'¹⁹⁴ and privately lamented the 'enormous irritative power' conversations with the Soviets had on friend and foe alike just a few days later.¹⁹⁵ Given these personal doubts, then, it was diplomatic protocol and the enthusiasm of some of his senior colleagues and Foreign Office personnel,

combined with growing pressure throughout the country, which led to serious consideration of the Soviet option by the Government throughout April 1939.¹⁹⁶ When the Chiefs of Staff came round to supporting an alliance on 16 May, and hence the majority of the Cabinet followed suit, the Prime Minister bowed to pressure and conversations for a 'full-blown guarantee of mutual assistance', as it was termed, began in earnest.¹⁹⁷

Several Foreign Policy Committee papers from the earlier period of the Anglo-Soviet talks, in March and April 1939, illustrate another important point in understanding why they failed. It was widely believed by senior Government figures that adding Russia to the front currently being established (of Britain, France, Poland, Greece and Romania) would only lead to its collapse and drive away other potential allies who might later join it. Chamberlain's comments in the Committee on 27 March were evidence of these fears:

Even if we could agree to a scheme on these lines it was becoming clearer that our attempts to build up a front against German aggression were likely to be frustrated if Russia was closely associated with the scheme. We had received communications both from Poland and Romania that any public association of Russia with the scheme would greatly diminish and weaken the authority of the common front. Similar intimations had been received from Finland, Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain and Portugal.¹⁹⁸

The Prime Minister also pointed out that Poland offered the opportunity to force Germany into a war on two fronts, if one ever came, whilst avoiding the provocative effect on enemies, and disruptive influence on friends that Russia alone would bring. Chamberlain, hence, felt that one option might be to approach Russia in secret at this time so as not to alienate Poland and the other members of the front.¹⁹⁹ Only one or two of his more junior colleagues objected to this proposal, and Halifax, among others, wholeheartedly supported the strategy of keeping Russia inferior to Poland in British security planning: 'If we had to make a choice between Poland and Soviet Russia, it seemed clear that Poland would give the greater value'.²⁰⁰

Hence Poland, which was seen as the most senior of the smaller Eastern European powers, and to whom a guarantee had already been given, became central to Government planning during the Peace Front negotiations. That

country had endured hundreds of years of Russian occupation throughout its history and deeply despised its larger neighbour. Polish Foreign Minister Colonel Beck's early stated opposition to allowing Soviet troops to cross his territory in the event of war with Germany, for fear that they would remain there at the end of the conflict, hindered alliance talks throughout and would later become one of the main stumbling blocks in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations during June and July. The talks continued, however, in light of the Chiefs of Staff recommendations in May and the view, becoming increasingly common among sections of the Foreign Office, that Russian depots would be the best source of essential Polish supplies.²⁰¹

A delicate balancing act in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations was therefore needed and this was only undermined by the frosty nature of relations between the two delegations throughout that summer. As early as 12 April 1939, Halifax announced in the House of Lords that there were 'great difficulties' to be met in the early talks, 'and those difficulties most certainly are not of *our* making'.²⁰² This sort of sniping was to set the tone for conversations. Notwithstanding much-quoted incidents like the slow ship journey which transported the British military experts to meet their Russian counterparts in August, or the aggressive tough-talking which characterised Soviet diplomacy when Molotov succeeded Litvinov in May (both of which now have something of a myth about them), it was clear that mutual suspicion and mistrust abounded.²⁰³ Each side believed the other to be in no hurry to sign a deal. From the British point of view, repeated Soviet intransigence on certain specific issues and the raising of new demands when others had just been met, were major points of antagonism. They went on to convince Chamberlain that his earlier suspicions were correct and that a Russian alliance was not viable.

Without going into the precise details of negotiations, discussions in May were dogged by Soviet insistence for a No Separate Peace Clause, designed to stop Britain, France or Russia agreeing its own peace with Germany and leaving the other two nations to carry on the struggle alone. Britain eventually conceded this point to Russia and agreed to insert such a caveat into any pact, but was greeted in return with a blank refusal to have a League framework erected in support of the deal.²⁰⁴ In June the issue of Polish consent for Soviet troops to cross its borders once more reared its head and arguments over definitions of

what constituted 'Indirect Aggression' - one trigger for any Anglo-Franco-Soviet pact to become active - muddied waters still further. It was feared in Britain and Poland that Russia might annex certain territories itself under some fabricated incident or disturbance.²⁰⁵ All of this prompted Cadogan to pen in his diary on 20 June 1939: 'The Russians are impossible. We give them all they want with both hands, and they merely slap them'.²⁰⁶

Britain eventually conceded to the Soviet formula for Indirect Aggression in July but the new one was again rejected by the Russian delegation.²⁰⁷ Later that month, Molotov demanded that the names of all the smaller states which would be guaranteed under any front should be published for all to see.²⁰⁸ The National Government was less keen on this, as many of those states feared that being publicly lined up with Russia might just provoke a German attack, but it conceded the point once more in order to advance discussions.²⁰⁹ The Soviets responded by calling for the removal of all other powers from arrangements and a return to a straight Tripartite Mutual Assistance pact with France. On 4 July Chamberlain accepted this more simple formula, to the approval of the vast majority of his Cabinet, and just as it seemed a deal was to be concluded, the Russians countered with new demands for detailed military talks to commence before the general political agreement had even been made.²¹⁰ Again this was conceded by Britain but the staff talks only delayed matters yet further and led Chamberlain to finally call off the discussions.

The inconsistencies, uncertainties and opportunism which characterised Russian diplomacy during the talks seemed, to the Government, only a microcosm of the nature of that state itself. In fairness, this was doubtlessly also felt about Britain on the Soviet side.²¹¹ It is clear that both parties, Britain and Russia, only wanted an alliance with the other power on its own terms, but that the Soviets were in the much stronger bargaining position. Stalin and Molotov knew not only that the British political Left and general public were pushing the Government to make a deal, but that Germany itself had been waiting in the wings since May for its own talks. It is worth mentioning, incidentally, that there was a general assumption in Britain that a Nazi-Soviet Pact was extremely unlikely. Russia, therefore, could afford to play it tough in conversations with Britain and France and increase its demands to get the best possible arrangement for its own security. Chamberlain's Government, meanwhile, felt that it could, at

best, secure a pact which had a multitude of drawbacks and which would only undermine the existing Peace Front, or, at worst, lead to its tacit acquiescence in Soviet troops marching into an ally's territory. Large regions of Eastern Europe and the Baltic might follow. The negotiations duly collapsed in late July and the Nazi-Soviet pact was concluded just one month later.

Wider Judgements on the Viability of the Alternative

As opposition to alliances in Britain before the Prague Coup was widespread - indeed it was almost universal in the mid-1930s - a large section examining all those non-Government figures who thought this option was a poor alternative to appeasement is not possible. Even the most ardent advocate of the Grand Alliance, Winston Churchill, seemed genuinely convinced that the League was a better alternative to alliances in the early 1930s and only later began to use its rhetoric as a cloak for a policy of pacts and blocs. Even as late as 2 March 1936, for example, he publicly expressed his hope that, 'we shall not resign ourselves to that [a return to alliances], without first an earnest effort to preserve the other policy, namely the establishment of a real collective security'.²¹²

Despite their later conversion to the cause - although, again, much of this would be heavily cloaked in the language of the League - the Labour Party was officially opposed to all alliances for the vast majority of the pre-war period.²¹³ Unsurprisingly, given its political distaste for Fascist Italy and that country's attack upon the authority of the League in Abyssinia, during 1936 and 1937 Labour wholeheartedly opposed the notion of revising the Stresa Front, something discussed by Tories like Amery in this period. The Liberals were generally of a similar mind as Labour on foreign policy, backing the League over a return to alliances, but were perhaps slightly less ardent in their opposition to the latter. The regular statements from their leader about the importance of improved American relations at this time, or the speeches from figures such as Geoffrey Mander, for example, are evidence of this.

The Tories, conversely, were less ideologically opposed to alliances (it was from within their ranks that the greatest number of supporters emerged after the *Anschluss*) but tended to be amongst the biggest opponents of the Left's drive to

rehabilitate Russian relations throughout the Chamberlain period. This move was described as ‘producing a red rag to a bull’ by MP John Sandeman Allen in the wake of the Munich Agreement, for example.²¹⁴ Furthermore, it was from the Conservative ranks that most concern was voiced when alliance talks with the Soviets began in the last few months before war, although the vast majority did support Chamberlain’s new direction after the Prague Coup. The Earl of Mansfield, for example, questioned the moral and military character of Russia in a speech in the House of Lords on 13 April 1939 and pointed out that Soviet inclusion in any anti-Fascist bloc would greatly disturb Poland and Romania as well as pushing countries like Hungary and Spain closer to the Nazi camp.²¹⁵

Political prejudice perhaps played a more important role in the *opposition* to some alliances than it did in generating support for others. Leo Amery, for example, backed the rebuilding of the Stresa Front for much of Chamberlain’s period and yet urged that Britain keep Russia ‘out of the picture’ in the wake of the Rhineland affair on 28 July 1936.²¹⁶ In a letter to Chamberlain written in November 1937 he described an Anglo-Franco-Russian combination as ‘for us at any rate the far most dangerous conceivable’.²¹⁷ Much later, a day after the Nazi-Soviet Pact was agreed, he attacked Soviet duplicity in a letter to Lloyd George: ‘Doesn’t it look rather as if Stalin, from the first, was only concerned with cheap territorial expansion, and simply played off one side against the other in order to see which would give him what he wanted with the least effort?’²¹⁸

Many of the smaller parties and pressure groups were also opposed to alliances during Chamberlain’s premiership. Socialist MP Rhys Davies, for example, was scathing of the perceived weakening of Labour on alliances in an article for the *Glasgow Forward* entitled, ‘*Is the Labour Party too Bellicose?*’, written in November 1938. In this he attacked the wave of enthusiasm for the Munich Agreement by many Labour MPs and, more surprisingly, questioned the wisdom of their continued support for the pursuit of closer ties with the Soviets: ‘When she is engaged in a major war, she is likely to break up from within. If Russia is so powerful, why does she not give a helping hand to the poor Chinese, who are being slaughtered... left and right by Japanese militarism?’²¹⁹

As has already been demonstrated, groups like the League of Nations Union wholeheartedly rejected alliances until after the Prague Coup, although some of their individual members like Gilbert Murray did privately weaken a good deal

earlier. Murray was never convinced that the USA, in particular - the power that had created and then abandoned the League - could be relied upon as an ally. In a letter to a LNU colleague on 14 April 1938 he claimed that Roosevelt had warned a mutual friend that pursuing his country to act in conjunction with Britain in the Far East, 'was just the way to make the Americans say no'.²²⁰ It appears that this view was widespread in Britain at the time.²²¹ Hugh Dalton claimed in his diary that Chamberlain himself told him something very similar on 28 June 1939: 'The surest way, said the Prime Minister, to lose the Americans is to run after them too hard'.²²² Could it be that the best way to win American sympathy in the long term was to ignore it in the short? This was certainly the view of many important figures in Britain at the time.

The national press was also overwhelmingly hostile to alliances as an alternative to appeasement for the vast majority of the late 1930s, even those that did not back Chamberlain's policy. The pro-isolation *Daily Express*, to give just one example, was particularly vehement in this respect, stating on 1 October 1938 that the Munich Agreement killed 'once and for all the old plan of putting a ring around Germany, of encircling her with hostile states'. It went on: 'That plan was always dangerous, always wicked. It sought to perpetuate in Europe a fixed antagonism between one state and a group of other states'.²²³ Despite his enduring support for closer Imperial and American relations, on 20 June that year Beaverbrook claimed in a private letter to a friend that Churchill's Grand Alliance was the worst of all the alternatives available to Chamberlain.²²⁴

The press turned almost universally pro-alliance after the Prague Coup in March 1939, however. While Gallup Polls show that the general public also enthusiastically backed a Soviet alliance hereafter, no real questions were asked about alliances prior to this date. However, the highest peace-time approval ratings for Chamberlain in October 1938 indicates general satisfaction with appeasement, at least in the immediate wake of Munich.²²⁵ This would suggest, albeit tentatively, that public support for policies like alliances was pretty limited during Chamberlain's premiership prior to 1939. Moreover, extremely high support for the League of Nations at the end of June 1937 (as shown in the previous chapter) indicates low enthusiasm for the older diplomacy of blocs and pacts.²²⁶ Asked in August 1939 whether or not they felt the Government was doing its best to secure a deal with Russia at this time, 50% of those questioned

responded in the affirmative, with only 30% against. This would suggest that the general public thought failure to secure such an alliance was at least through no lack of effort on Chamberlain's part, but owed much more to the Soviet side.²²⁷

More anecdotal evidence such as letters from the public to newspapers and MPs would support the conclusion that there was widespread opposition to alliances before the Prague Coup. Henry Gillett, the Mayor of Oxford, for example, wrote to Lord Halifax during February 1939 advocating closer European Union as a possible means to secure world peace. He indicated that the lessons of history drove his particular cause: 'It becomes clear as the years go by that... Alliances of Nations do not really function satisfactorily'.²²⁸ Given this wide condemnation of alliances from all sections of politics and society, it is understandable why the National Government sought to avoid them for so long.

(5) CONCLUSION

The pursuit of separate alliances, variously formed and constituted, and apart from the League of Nations, had very limited support in Britain in the mid-1930s. One or two advocates then emerged as events like the March 1936 Rhineland crisis caused widespread concern at the new menace to European peace. By the time Chamberlain had assumed the premiership in May 1937, a small number - who recognised that the League was unsuited to the dangers of the new world - now favoured alliances as an alternative to the Prime Minister's rapidly coalescing policy of appeasement. Calls were heard more and more for Britain to 'move closer' to other powers including France, America and Russia at this time and a rehabilitation of the Stresa Front became the pet project of a diminutive band of enthusiasts. The political Right tended to dominate here.

The March 1938 *Anschluss* was a watershed in the consideration of alliances as an alternative to appeasement. Now a sizeable minority of politicians, supported by elements within pressure groups and the press, rallied around Churchill's call for a Grand Alliance as the future of Czechoslovakia became the issue of the summer. Although still dominated by the Right, figures from all parties and groups now joined this growing band who felt that a tougher line was needed, while disagreeing amongst themselves over the precise formula required. The French connection emerged as a common bond for supporters of alliances, although some believed renewing Italian relations could offer the best hope of deterring Hitler from war. Others looked to America as the most suitable ally in the quest for peace, while many on the Left felt the Soviet Union was the obvious candidate to join with and encircle Nazi Germany. Some thought that it was a huge coalition of the many which was required to dissipate the shadow of an approaching war.

If the *Anschluss* was the watershed, events in Prague one year later broke the dam in terms of alliance calls as an alternative to appeasement. In the final six months before war, they became overwhelmingly the most-favoured policy of all sections of society - in politics, the press and the general public. Indeed, Chamberlain's Government adopted the Peace Front, as it came to be termed, as its policy in April 1939. An alliance with Russia in particular emerged as the

most commonly suggested means to defeat Fascism. The Government began negotiations to this end in the spring of 1939, ultimately to prove fruitless - although there is some debate on the real intentions of both sides, as has been demonstrated. One cannot escape the conclusion that the majority of Britons now felt that it was not a case of 'if', but 'when', war would erupt and alliances were discussed increasingly as a means to prepare for this war rather than how best to deter it, although this was obviously still the predominant hope.

Like opponents of appeasement in the final months before hostilities began, later critics of that policy's most famous practitioner - his contemporaries in their memoirs and historians alike - felt that the alternative of alliances was worthy of much discussion. Indeed, alliances have emerged as *the* policy which the verdict of history on Chamberlain and the causes of the Second World War has perhaps adjudged to be the most favourable alternative available. First trumpeted by Churchill, the charge that Chamberlain should have formed a Grand Alliance is just as popular with Parker and Shaw writing at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Of course hindsight, which Chamberlain could never enjoy at the time, substantially influences this judgement. Those defending the Government's record with regard to allies are also very numerous and doubtless the debate will continue over coming years.

Chamberlain considered alliances as a possible alternative to appeasement extensively. It was the alternative he eventually adopted after Prague and was discussed at great length many times in the years before. As we have seen, Chamberlain was one of the leading advocates of Regional Pacts as a replacement for the failing system of collective security before he had even become Prime Minister. Once he had assumed the role, major events like the *Anschluss* led him and his many advisors to think strongly about walking such a path. One could even argue that a revival of the Stresa Front played a large role in his early appeasement strategy in 1937 and first months of 1938.

Why, then, did he ultimately resist alliances until so late in the day? His was an era which had suffered the Great War and he entered high politics in a period where social and economic priorities were key, at a time when alliances were widely believed to have been one of the main causes of the catastrophe. It was not until after the Prague Coup that alliances ceased to be the dreaded policy of a minority within Britain, to say nothing of opinion in the rest of the world.

Ever a realist, it was, according to Chamberlain, the practicalities which militated against a Churchillian Grand Alliance in the summer of 1938. Its defective component parts only added to the widespread view that dividing Europe into camps would hasten a war, especially when dealing with figures so easy to provoke as Hitler. The Soviet Union, in particular, was widely reckoned to have this effect on the Nazi leader. The balance of risks between allies strengthening the British hand and yet also increasing the likeliness of conflict was a constantly recurring problem with which the Government had to grapple. Alliances, fundamentally, were felt to be a policy for war and Chamberlain was ever a man for peace, still thinking it could be saved long after his colleagues had abandoned hope. After Prague, when many thought war was now inevitable, Chamberlain refused to do so. He reluctantly accepted alliances as necessary but distasteful, hoping for the best but preparing Britain for the worst.²²⁹ Yet still he was not keen. They had been tried before and history had proven the results.

Long-term prejudices, short-term squabbles and personal animosity characterised Britain's relations with the most often suggested potential allies, France, the USA and Soviet Russia. Much of this was mutual. Many within the Government feared that France might just suck Britain into a European war it did not want and was not ready for. Beset with severe economic and political instability, in a woeful military shape, the attraction of even Britain's closest ally at this time as a reliable partner was very limited indeed. An 'after you' relationship developed in foreign affairs between the two powers, neither willing to act alone, nor wanting to take the initiative in events themselves. France tended to prefer following Britain's lead - the Czech crisis is an obvious example - rather than standing shoulder to shoulder.

With the USA, the personal acrimony and historical tensions were exacerbated by a feeling that Roosevelt could never quite deliver the goods to match his fine words. Vague speeches about quarantines were accompanied by few concrete actions, even in the Far Eastern theatre, and often just provoked further statements by other influential Americans about the benefits of detachment. Bound by the Neutrality Acts and leant on heavily by an isolationist public, the President's options were limited, even if he wanted to partner Britain in some bold stand against Dictatorship. The famed Roosevelt Peace Initiative has assumed much more importance in the eyes of Chamberlain's later critics

than it ever held at the time. David Reynolds even characterises the Anglo-American relationship in the late 1930s as one of 'competitive cooperation', with economic rivalries almost as important to the respective leaders as the question of how to deal with the Fascists.²³⁰ There is little doubt that both Chamberlain and Roosevelt could have done more to foster closer relations, as many critics of the Prime Minister, like Churchill or Rock, have suggested. However, rightly or wrongly, Chamberlain felt peace would be more likely to be secured by tackling the central problem - Hitler - head on, and removing the distractions and provocations of an impotent America from the picture.

The reluctance to consider Russia as an ally for so long was doubtlessly influenced by old mutual ideological suspicions and mistrust. 'Better Hitler than Stalin' was a prevailing sentiment among Britons in the early 1930s. However, fear that lining up with the Soviets would just provoke Nazi Germany into war - it was, of course, even more hostile to Russia than Britain was - also emerges as a constantly recurring factor. The division of Europe into hostile blocs, together with the encirclement of Germany, could all be accomplished in no easier way than by an alliance of Britain, France and Russia. On the face of it, this would seem to matter less after March 1939, but Chamberlain would never give up hopes of peace, no matter how frail they became. Besides, the Red Army seemed in a very sorry shape indeed, suited only to the defence of its homeland. Its lamentable performance against the Finns in 1939 and 1940 was evidence of this. It was only in the middle of May 1939 that the Chiefs of Staff came to support a Russian pact and talks to this end were then sanctioned by the Prime Minister, despite his personal doubts and hesitancy. Chamberlain may have been dragged into the talks by senior colleagues, but the Soviets were at least as much to blame for their failure to terminate in agreement as he was. Russia, not Britain, kept raising new demands and moving the goalposts each time agreement seemed so close.

Chamberlain is often accused by his detractors of having a provincial mind and lacking the capacity to think beyond short-term goals, regularly ignoring the longer-term repercussions of his actions. The Polish Guarantee is a much cited example of such a knee-jerk reaction which could not, in fact, be implemented with any great chance of success. Simple geography, naval priorities and declining British power in face of the rise of several potential enemies were all

factors here. However, there is some evidence to support the assertion that a great deal of the Prime Minister's reluctance with regards to alliances with Russia and America was born from lucid and far-sighted concerns about the future, which few of his contemporaries shared. For example, Chamberlain realised that a victorious war against Fascism with the Soviets on Britain's side would more than likely result in a shabby, dangerous peace for whole swathes of Central and Eastern Europe. As Orwell noted in 1940, 'we cannot win the war without introducing Socialism', and the Prime Minister greatly feared this eventuality.²³¹ 'We must pay him a carefully assessed tribute for keeping his eye on the dark monster on the horizon', stated Robert Sencourt in 1954.²³² Colonel Beck's fears about Russia in 1939 were fully realised in the Cold War world when Soviet occupation became an unwelcome substitute for the Nazis. It is a popular truism that Churchill sat down with Stalin over a map of Europe during the Yalta conference in 1945 in a desperate effort to claim some spheres of influence on the Continent. This is something he did not factor as a possibility when clamouring for an alliance in the spring of 1939.

Where America is concerned, Chamberlain also saw that limited help in the short-term might cost Britain more in the long-term, with a post-war challenge to the Empire and Britain's fragile pre-eminence in Europe.²³³ Whilst ending up as an American satellite would be preferable to becoming a Nazi dominion, it was hoped that neither option would pass. Even during the war itself, Chamberlain wrote to his sister: 'Heaven knows I don't want the Americans to fight for us - we should have to pay too dearly for that if they had a right to be in on the peace terms'.²³⁴ The broad tide of events in the post-war world shows that much of Chamberlain's fears about Britain's place *vis-à-vis* the two eventual Superpowers were indeed well-founded.

Would alliances or a Grand Alliance have averted hostilities? History has proven that an Anglo-French union did little to deter Hitler from war. Reforming the Stresa Front was explored as an early part of Chamberlain's appeasement strategy but was doomed once Mussolini moved squarely into Hitler's camp. America, meanwhile, would not enter the conflict until it was attacked itself at Pearl Harbour. Its sympathetic isolation in the final months before war did not help the Allies slow the invasion of Poland or France. Moreover, even if the Roosevelt Peace Initiative *had* led to America and Britain standing together in

some formal anti-Fascist front - which it almost certainly would not have - there is little concrete evidence to suggest that Hitler would have been deterred from his foreign adventures in Europe at the time. A stronger line by the United States may have emboldened other anti-Fascist powers in Europe or put a seed of doubt in the *Führer's* mind, but, as Rock points out, Hitler's estimation of the fighting qualities of what he regarded as 'a mass of immigrants' was in fact extremely low.²³⁵ Hitler believed fundamentally that 'the United States was incapable of conducting war' and only a few figures in the upper echelons of the Nazi Party - Goering for example - showed any concern at Roosevelt's increasingly vague statements regarding the maintenance of neutrality as 1939 progressed.²³⁶ It is also to be remembered that Hitler declared war on America during the struggle itself, just days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.

If America's readiness for war (and the likely affects of this) were so doubtful, would a Grand Alliance including the Soviet Union have avoided a conflict breaking out? Such a pact in the spring of 1938 would seem unlikely to have deterred the Sudeten crisis unless the Allies could convince Hitler that they were prepared to use force, and Britain and France were most certainly not willing to bluff. Russia, of course, was treaty bound to protect Czechoslovakia if France also did so and Germany knew this - yet still Hitler threatened to march. It is far from certain that Russia would have stood by its commitments to Czechoslovakia in September 1938, as Ragsdale in particular points out. Even if Britain, France and Russia *had* stood firm at this juncture, is there any indication that Hitler would have backed down without another Munich-style conference? He was known to be furious that Chamberlain had robbed him of his chance for a small, quick war in the aftermath of events. The pros and cons of such a 1938 war will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Six.

Furthermore, it is also far from certain that a Grand Alliance containing Russia could have been made in the summer of 1939, even if Chamberlain wholeheartedly wanted to do so. This is something critics of the Prime Minister such as Parker seem to sweep under the carpet. Events show that Chamberlain, while personally reluctant, agreed to pursue an alliance in May and even agreed to a straight forward Tripartite Pact between Britain, France and Russia in early July. At this point, as with most of the key junctures in discussions, a new demand was raised by the Soviet delegation. There seems little doubt that both

sides played for time at various points in the negotiations during that period - Russia in the hope of a better offer from Germany, Britain in the hope that they could keep Nazi-Soviet talks at bay.

Like Strang and others active in events at the time, some still believe that Russia never meant to sign any agreement with Britain and France at all. As Kaiser points out, there is evidence to suggest that Molotov may still have had more new demands to make of these two powers at the time when talks broke down.²³⁷ This view of Soviet duplicity may be a little over-cynical, especially given the recent work of academics like Roberts, but it is clear that the German offer, when it came, was by far the more attractive to the ultra-cautious and opportunistic Stalin. It secured peace for Russia, at least in the short term, gained time for him to rearm and reorganise the front, as well as acquiring large sections of Poland, carved up between the signatories of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Chamberlain's hesitance may have played a part in the collapse of the talks but these other, wider factors are at least as important in explaining their demise. Whether Stalin decided to throw his lot in with Germany at the last moment or not is largely irrelevant anyway, since he did indeed do so in the end. Even if both sides of the Anglo-Soviet talks genuinely wanted a deal at the outset of discussions, it was never the *same* deal and this is why it ultimately failed to materialise.

Chamberlain's whole strategy of appeasement was designed to avert war and it is unlikely that even a successfully concluded Anglo-Soviet pact would have done this in the autumn of 1939. No doubt it would have influenced the precise timing or even the particular flash-point for conflict, maybe putting off an invasion of Poland for a few months or temporarily moving Hitler's focus elsewhere. The fact that Germany invaded Poland little more than a week after concluding the Nazi-Soviet Pact is clearly evidence that having avoided possible hostilities with Russia at that juncture was of high importance to him. However, that Germany eventually invaded its temporary partner in 1941 confirms that it was always a long-term aim for Hitler to crush the Bolsheviks, despite the fact that many of his foreign coups were opportunistic. An Anglo-Soviet alliance, unlikely as it was, may have delayed a coming war but it is doubtful whether it would have averted it altogether. Indeed, it may have even brought war closer or

made the eventual catastrophe a near certainty. This was never the case before talks began.

Events demonstrate that Soviet forces were indeed suited to a defensive war, as the Chiefs of Staff repeatedly stressed, and it is uncertain what concrete help Russian soldiers could have offered France as German tanks rolled across the borders. A simultaneous Soviet offensive on Germany's Eastern front would serve as a distraction to the Nazi forces, but it is doubtful whether it would have been powerful enough (or come sufficiently quickly) to stop France falling. The attitude of Poland would have been key again. Would the Russians have been welcome on their soil or in fact treated as invaders? If Britain was ultimately to go to war against Germany for the defence of Poland, it could hardly sanction the sacrifice of that power to Russia's grip. Either way, with a successfully concluded Soviet pact, Britain and France would have been honour-bound to consider the defence of Russia in a way that they were not in 1939, as events actually unfolded. This may have hindered their own defensive plans and made the fall of France or the Low Countries come more quickly than it actually did.

Would the Soviets have stood by their part of the agreement anyway or merely concerned themselves with defence of the homeland and acquiring local, vulnerable territories? Nothing can be certain and we are once again reminded of the dangers of speculating too widely in matters of counterfactual history. Finally, if critics of Chamberlain are quick to claim that the Prime Minister failed to understand Hitler's true nature, or that he was even immoral to appease a regime like Nazi Germany, they cannot then ignore the barbarous character of Stalin's Russia. In blithely advocating an alliance with the Soviets as an alternative to appeasement, they are, in fact, substituting the pursuit of better relations with one devil for the close embrace of another.

Some of this will be touched upon again in the sixth chapter on War and the Threat of War as an alternative to appeasement, when the likely outcomes of such possible 'other' conflicts shall be considered. It is difficult to believe, however, that a Grand Alliance would have led to any other result, and this fear was at the heart of the Government's calculations in the late 1930s.

1. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Commons*, vol.333, cols 99-100, 14 March 1938.
2. Churchill did not coin the phrase 'Grand Alliance' but revived its popular use at this time.
3. See, for example, Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement, Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-37* (London: Praeger, 1997).
4. They were designed largely to complement and build upon the established security platform of the League, rather than to amass huge blocs of rival powers against one another, as had occurred in 1914.
5. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, col.546, 10 Feb. 1936.
6. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, col.120, 24 Feb. 1936.
7. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, col.105, 24 Feb. 1936.
8. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1469. Nicolson echoed these sentiments in his diaries and letters at this time. See, for example, N. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters, 1930-39* (London: Collins, 1966), 8 April 1936, pp.256-7.
9. HC Deb 5s, vol.311, col.115, 21 April 1936. The previous chapter has shown how many within the Government were thinking along similar lines at this time - more towards alliances than the League.
10. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, cols 1522-3, 26 March 1938.
11. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, col.1459, 18 Feb. 1937.
12. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, col.2270, 25 Feb. 1937. Josiah Wedgwood was far more general in his attack on Baldwin, demanding to know whether the Prime Minister was discussing alliances with his Chiefs of Staff. He then mentioned France and Russia as specific nations for consultation. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, cols 1445-6, 18 Feb. 1937.
13. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.581, 4 March 1937.
14. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.635, 4 March 1937.
15. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, cols 621-2, 4 March 1937.
16. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, col.1484, 18 Feb. 1937.
17. Quoted, Robert Boothby, *I Fight to Live* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947), Feb. 1937, pp.141-2.
18. Nick Smart (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays, 1932-39: An Insider's Account of the House of Commons* (New York: Edward Mellen Press, 1996), p.273. After all, the Stresa Front kept Italy out of the hostile Nazi sphere and eased the Mediterranean position for Britain and France, as well as providing a useful ally to act as a lever against Hitler in Southern Europe.
19. John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, vol.5, 1929-45* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 17 March 1936, p.411. He claims in his memoirs that he held this view for a long time and welcomed Chamberlain's early efforts to court Italy and 'renew Stresa' in the autumn of 1937. See, for example, Leo Amery, *My Political Life, vol.3, The Unforgiving Years, 1929-40* (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p.228.
20. Leo Amery to Neville Chamberlain, 11 Nov. 1937, AMEL 2/1/27, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Leo Amery (AMEL) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
21. HC Deb 5s, vol.325, col.1599, 25 June 1937.
22. HC Deb 5s, vol.325, col.1538, 25 June 1937.
23. Quoted, W. S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1948), p.222.

24. Here Roosevelt had suggested to a US audience that 'epidemics of physical disease' within the international community could be quarantined. His obvious inference here was the Dictator states.
25. HC Deb 5s, vol.327, cols 87-9, 21 Oct. 1937. Attlee, meanwhile, in a speech immediately preceding Sinclair's, also welcomed Roosevelt's statement. On 21 December he then talked of his desire for the 'greatest amount of cooperation with the United States'. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1798, 21 Dec. 1937.
26. Quoted, FO371/21626/C1935, 17 March 1938, The National Archives (TNA). Foreign Office (FO) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London. Calculated use of the term 'collective' here (typical of Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov at the time) obviously also appealed to League enthusiasts.
27. See HC Deb 5s, vol.332, col.241, 21 Feb. 1938. Of course, many people spoke of improved relations with Italy at this time as a step towards Chamberlain's appeasement and most certainly did *not* want to revive the Stresa Front - an effective alliance against Germany with Italy firmly on Britain's side. The two positions should not be confused.
28. Even this statement must be clarified, somewhat, as others used the term in the mid to late 1930s well before the *Anschluss*. Robert Bernays, for example, complained in his diary that 'the Grand Alliance against Germany is at present in ruins' on 5 November 1936. Quoted, Smart (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays*, p.273.
29. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 1503-4, 24 March 1938.
30. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.52, 14 March 1938. As France was pledged to assist Czechoslovakia in the event of war, calls to ally with either country would effectively tie Britain to the other as well.
31. *Manchester Guardian*, 30 April 1938.
32. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 78-9, 14 March 1938.
33. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 1470-4, 24 March 1938.
34. *Notes on the European Situation*, March 1938 (my emphasis). Quoted, Harold Macmillan papers, MS Macmillan 119, fol. 168, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Harold Macmillan papers (MS Macmillan) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Like Churchill, Liberal Geoffrey Mander now envisaged a huge union of France, Belgium, Holland, Poland, the Little Entente, the Balkan states, Turkey, Russia, the Baltic nations and Scandinavia all ranged against Germany and backed by the 'good will and cooperation' of the USA, when he addressed the House of Commons earlier that month. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 109-11, 14 March 1938.
35. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.147, 14 March 1938.
36. Here Britain recognised the Italian conquest of Abyssinia in return for promises from Mussolini to reduce his forces in Spain. The Agreement was little more than polite words, however, and remained unimplemented until November.
37. *News of the World*, 15 May 1938.
38. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, cols 2949-59, 4 July 1938.
39. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, col.3030, 4 July 1938.
40. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, col.3004, 4 July 1938.

41. See, for example, Independent Labour Party, *The Socialist Challenge to Poverty, Fascism, Imperialism, War: The Basic Policy of the I.L.P.* (1939).
42. Communist Party, *Labour and Armaments* (1937). Furthermore, by March 1939, it was sure that a 'Peace Front' centred around Britain, France and Russia, with American support, would deter Hitler from war in the wake of the Prague Coup. Communist Party, *Can Conscription Save Peace?* (1939), p.19. Left-wing publisher Victor Gollancz produced the book *Is Mr Chamberlain Saving Peace?* in 1939, which made similar claims.
43. Examples of this pro-American stance can be found regularly in the LNU's published material between 1936 and 1939. See, for example, League of Nations Union, *Policy Manifesto* (1936).
44. League of Nations Union, *Resolutions of the Executive Committee* (1939). Quoted, Donald S. Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918-45* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.199.
45. See, for example, Murray to Lady Howard of Penrith, 16 May 1938, Gilbert Murray papers, MS Gilbert Murray 232, fol. 177, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Gilbert Murray papers (MS Gilbert Murray) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
46. International Peace Campaign to Macmillan, Sept. 1938, Quoted, MS Macmillan 123, fol. 289. The reference to Spain was appropriate to events, yet also suggests a general Left-wing bias.
47. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 March 1938. Russia and America were added to its favoured anti-German bloc after the Munich settlement. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Oct. 1938.
48. *News Chronicle*, 16 March 1938.
49. *News Chronicle*, 7 Oct. 1938.
50. Arthur Mann, editor of the *Yorkshire Post*, to Halifax, 31 Aug. 1938, Arthur Mann papers, MS Eng c. 5236, fol. 10-13, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Arthur Mann papers (MS Eng) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
51. See, for example, Mann to Halifax, 30 June 1939, MS Eng c. 5236, fol. 42.
52. *Daily Express*, 20 March 1939.
53. *Daily Herald*, 20 March 1939.
54. *News Chronicle*, 18-21 March 1939.
55. *The Times*, 16 March 1939.
56. *Daily Herald*, 16 March 1938.
57. F. W. Balch, Stockton constituent, to Macmillan, 22 March 1938, MS Macmillan 131, fol. 51. Reverend W. Wallace of Stockport, meanwhile, was one of many who felt that Hitler would have crumbled and Munich could have been avoided if Britain, France and Russia had stood firm. *Daily Herald*, 5 Oct. 1938.
58. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 21 March 1939.
59. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 20 March 1939.
60. The same question asked in June, meanwhile, yielded 84% agreement with 9% against. George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain, 1937-75*, vol.1 (New York: Random House, 1976), p.17.

61. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.20. Furthermore, a huge 76% maintained that Britain should stand by its commitment to Poland if that country was attacked when asked in July 1939, with only 13% in favour of breaking the guarantee. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.21.
62. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.2482, 3 April 1939.
63. See, for example, Arthur Greenwood's speech in the House of Commons on this subject. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.356, 5 Oct. 1938. Lord Snell made a similar attack in the House of Lords. See *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Lords*, vol.110, cols 1313-4, 3 Oct. 1938.
64. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1454, 5 Oct. 1938. Churchill spoke on the same day in a similar vein in the House of Commons. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 363-6, 5 Oct. 1938.
65. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, cols 2475-80, 3 April 1939.
66. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, cols 2486-93, 3 April 1939. Many other important individuals like Lloyd George, Churchill, Eden and Hugh Dalton all expressed approval at the Government's actions in this debate, and yet also concluded with the demand for Russia to be brought into the Anglo-Franco-Polish union. Lloyd George, for example, pointed out that Russia's troops were the only ones that could get into Poland quickly enough to help and asserted that Britain was therefore 'walking into a trap' without Soviet aid. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, cols 2509-10, 3 April 1939.
67. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, cols 615-6, 13 April 1939.
68. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.619, 13 April 1939.
69. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, cols 1823-4, 19 May 1939.
70. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, cols 421-3, 12 June 1939.
71. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, col.1847, 19 May 1939 (my emphasis).
72. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, col.1996, 31 July 1939.
73. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, col.2037, 31 July 1939.
74. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.x.
75. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.239.
76. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.223.
77. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.229.
78. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.246.
79. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, pp.325-7.
80. Earl of Avon, *Facing the Dictators: The Eden Memoirs* (London: Cassell, 1962), p.317.
81. See Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, pp.569-602.
82. Harold Macmillan, *The Winds of Change, 1914-39* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p.529.
83. A. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), p.191.
84. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, p.210.
85. Amery, *My Political Life*, p.163.
86. Amery, *My Political Life*, p.227.
87. Amery, *My Political Life*, pp.189-93.
88. Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), pp.481-2.
89. Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, pp.501-3.
90. Boothby, *I Fight to Live*, pp.229-30.

91. Francis Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers* (London: Heinemann, 1961), pp.13-15 (my emphasis). The major historical work from the orthodox school, *Guilty Men*, was perhaps most concerned with the state of Britain's armaments during the Chamberlain period, but still found time to attack his record with regard to allies: 'Surely there was still a good chance' of building a united front after the Prague Coup, it asked? And had not Chamberlain failed Britain again? CATO, *Guilty Men*, 21st edn (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940), p.67.
92. Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1956), pp.194-8.
93. Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), p.262.
94. See Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, pp.342-70.
95. N. Henderson, *Failure of a Mission: Berlin 1937-39* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), pp.238-9. Lord Home also echoed this charge in his memoir *The Way the Wind Blows* (London: Collins, 1976). See, for example, p.68.
96. Viscount Simon, *Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Viscount Simon* (London: Hutchinson, 1952), p.253.
97. Earl of Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, 2nd edn (London: Collins, 1957), p.194.
98. Lewis Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude, 1938-39* (London: Macmillan, 1948), p.ix.
99. A. L. Rowse, *Appeasement: A Study in Political Decline, 1933-39* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961), p.63.
100. See, for example, A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 1961 edn (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), pp.243-4.
101. F. S. Northedge, *The International Political System* (London: Faber, 1976), p.323.
102. Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1895-1980* (London: Harper Collins, 1985), pp.245-6.
103. John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p.64.
104. Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, p.212.
105. Peter Neville, *Neville Chamberlain: A Study in Failure?* (Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), p.92.
106. R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the coming of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp.324-44.
107. R. A. C. Parker, *Churchill and Appeasement* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.ix.
108. Roy Denman, *Missed Chances: Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp.85-98.
109. David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Arnold, 2001), pp.164-5.
110. A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936-39* (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p.358.
111. Martin Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement: Anglo-French Relations in the Popular Front Era* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Ltd, 1996). See also G. Stone, 'From Entente to Alliance: Anglo-French Relations, 1935-39', in A. Sharp and G. Stone, (eds.), *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.180-204.
112. William R. Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt: British Foreign Policy and the United States* (Ohio: Ohio State Press, 1988), pp.293-314.

113. See, for example, David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-41: A Study in Competitive Cooperation* (London: Europa Publications Ltd, 1981), p.15.
114. Arnold A. Offner, *American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).
115. Gary B. Ostrower, *Collective Insecurity: The United States and the League of Nations in the early 1930s* (London: Associated University Presses, 1976), p.206.
116. David Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War: Germany, Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930-39* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp.313-4.
117. Geoffrey Roberts, 'The Soviet Decision for a Pact with Nazi Germany', *Soviet Studies*, vol.44 (1) 1992, pp.57-78.
118. Michael Jabara Carley, *1939: The Alliance that Never was and the Coming of World War Two* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999).
119. Louise Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p.4.
120. Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*, p.16.
121. Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*, p.190.
122. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, cols 160-1, 24 Feb. 1936. This view was shared by many military figures. Admiral Drax regularly warned of the dangers of alliances for Britain in 1936 - ironic, given his later role at Moscow - although as a fan of isolation he was less enthusiastic for blocs and commitments than most. See 'British Foreign Policy', 17 July 1936, DRAX 2/18, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Admiral Drax (DRAX) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre.
123. Stanley Baldwin had even stated in the House of Commons on 18 February 1937 that, 'the most hopeful prospect' of peace in the immediate future was Regional Pacts. HC Deb 5s vol.320, col.1510, 18 Feb. 1937.
124. Phipps to Eden, 29 Feb. 1936, PHPP 1/16/27, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Sir Eric Phipps (PHPP) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Coordination of Defence, echoed these views again in Cabinet towards the end of the year. Quoted, FO371/20412/R6694, 4 Nov. 1936.
125. Vansittart's memoirs confirm their author's preoccupation with this issue in the mid to late 1930s.
126. See Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, pp.191-200.
127. FO371/20702/C8477, 8 Dec. 1937. Lawrence Collier, head of the Northern section of the Foreign Office, produced another memo at the end of this month which underlined how it was 'always useless' to think that Britain could undermine the axis bloc and regain Italy as a friend. FO371/20704/C8961, 31 Dec. 1937.
128. See, for example a statement he made in the House of Commons on 4 July 1937. Here he claimed that restoring relations with Italy 'to their old terms' remained a part of his general European appeasement plan. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, cols 2961-63, 4 July 1937.
129. FO371/23818/R6506, 21 July 1939.

130. See, for example, Eden's statements in the House of Commons after the Nyon Conference on 21 October 1937. HC Deb 5s, vol.327, col.58, 21 Oct. 1937.
131. This quote comes from Pownall's diary. Quoted, B. Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.286.
132. Martin Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*. The post-war resettlement of the Turkish Empire had been a point of particular agitation
133. See G. Stone, 'Britain, France and the Spanish Problem, 1936-39', in D. Richardson and G. Stone (eds.), *Decisions and Diplomacy: Essays in Twentieth Century International History* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.129-52.
134. See, for example, Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p.486. It was believed in some sections of Britain that France was as much to blame for the state of interwar Europe as Germany was - seeking to keep that power down and utilising the League as an instrument to maintain the Versailles *status quo*. See, for example, Lord Arnold's anti-French tirade in Lords on 24 March 1936. HL Deb 5s, vol.100, cols 546-52, 24 March 1936.
135. Halifax to Phipps, 1 Nov. 1938, PHPP 1/21/59.
136. Quoted, Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p.xv.
137. John Herman, *The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps: Anglo-French relations and the Foreign Office, 1937-39* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 1998), p.51.
138. Phipps to Halifax, 26 March 1938, PHPP 1/20/5.
139. See, for example, among others, The Chiefs of Staff paper from March 1938. Quoted, Foreign Policy Committee Memoranda, 21 March 1938, CAB 27/627/FP(36)/56, The National Archives (TNA). Cabinet (CAB) papers are located at the National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
140. FO371/21600/C11641, 4 Oct. 1938.
141. Quoted, Herman, *The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps*, p.54.
142. J. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-40* (London: Collins, 1970), p.71.
143. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 27 Oct. 1934, Neville Chamberlain Papers (NC), NC18/1/893, Special Collections Department, University of Birmingham (BU).
144. Ian Cowman describes relations between the Navies, for example, as very poor at this time Ian Cowman, *Dominion or Decline: Anglo-American Naval Relations on the Pacific, 1937-1941* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Ltd, 1996).
145. Quoted, Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p.12. There exists a large amount of anti-British American literature on the issue of foreign affairs from this period. See, for example, William Allen White, 'An American View', in E. J. Tarr, *After Munich: Where do we go from here?* (1938), pp.21-2.
146. FO371/20473/W5075, 3 June 1936, pp.202-3.
147. FO115/3411/410, 12 Sept. 1936.
148. *The World Situation and British Rearmament*, 31 Dec. 1936, Quoted, VNST 1/1/19, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Sir Robert Vansittart (VNST) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
149. FO115/3413/506, 16 March 1937, pp.31-5.

150. Sumner Welles, Under-Secretary of State, to Franklin D. Roosevelt, American President, 27 May 1937, Quoted, Offner, *American Appeasement*, p.180.
151. This comment was made in a letter to his sister Hilda on 17 Dec. 1937. Quoted, Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1946), p.325.
152. Chamberlain to Tweedsmuir, 19 Nov. 1937, Quoted, R. Ovendale, *Appeasement and the English Speaking World: Britain, the USA, the Dominions, and the Policy of 'Appeasement', 1937-39* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), p.313.
153. FO371/21041/F11265, 12 Nov. 1937.
154. FO371/20665/A9142, 17 Dec. 1937.
155. Quoted, Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p.552.
156. Halifax described the initiative as little more than a 'tentative suggestion' in his memoirs. Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, p.194.
157. Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, pp.636-43.
158. See FO371/21526/A2127, 12 Jan. 1938.
159. The President said that he hoped the plan would parallel the Prime Minister's efforts. FO371/21526/A2127, 12 Jan. 1938.
160. Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p.297.
161. Eden to F. S. Northedge, historian, 18 Aug. 1966, STRN 2/12, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Lord Strang (STRN) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
162. Chamberlain to Morton Prince, cousin, 16 Jan. 1938. Quoted, Feiling, *The Life of Nevile Chamberlain*, p.322.
163. Chamberlain to Prince, 16 Jan. 1938. Quoted, Feiling, *The Life of Nevile Chamberlain*, p.322.
164. Drax to Lord Astor, owner of the *Observer*, 7 Sept. 1938, DRAX 2/19.
165. Lord Home, *The Way the Wind Blows* (London: Collins, 1976), p.66.
166. Quoted, FO115/3415/35, 3 Nov. 1938.
167. Halifax and Vansittart were among the most insistent on the need to get American help in this case. Foreign Policy Committee Proceedings, 23 Jan. 1939, CAB 27/624/FP(36)/35, The National Archives (TNA).
168. CAB 27/627/FP(36)/80, 20 April 1939.
169. FO371/20731/C6212, 1 Sept. 1937.
170. Diary, 9 Sept. 1937, ACAD 1/6, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Alexander Cadogan (ACAD) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
171. Quoted, John Ruggiero, *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament: Pride, Prejudice, and Politics* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), p.99.
172. Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p.571.
173. D. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45* (London: Cassell, 1971), p.61.
174. FO371/21626/C1935, 17 March 1938.
175. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 20 March 1938, NC18/1/1042.
176. Quoted, CAB 27/623/FP(36)/26, 18 March 1938, Appendix 1.
177. CAB 27/627/FP(36)/56, 21 March 1938, pp.15-16.
178. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1403, 24 March 1938.
179. See, for example, CAB 27/624/FP(36)/35, 23 Jan. 1939.

180. Britain had, of course, fought against the victorious Bolshevik forces during the Russian Civil War in the early 1920s and the resulting mutual resentment fostered well into the following decade.
181. B. Pimlott (ed.), *The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918-40, 1945-60* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1986), p.239. Lord Halifax, for example, as a deeply religious man, was particularly hostile to the Soviets, viewing that power, according to Oliver Harvey, as the 'Anti-Christ'. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, p.290.
182. See Eden to Phipps, 28 Feb. 1936, PHPP 1/16/26.
183. Quoted, A. Howard, *The life of R. A. Butler* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), p.85.
184. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 298-304, 4 Oct. 1938.
185. See HC Deb 5s, vol.345, cols 2485-2586, 31 March 1939.
186. FO371/22944/C4311, 23 March 1939. Even after Chamberlain had approved the Soviet talks, he was at pains to make it clear to Hitler and the wider world that this was 'not a policy of lining up opposing blocs of power in Europe, animated by hostile intentions towards one another' and he played up the defensive nature of negotiations. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, col.1833, 19 May 1939 (my emphasis).
187. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.259. It is to be remembered, of course, that Churchill overestimated the military capabilities of France before the war.
188. Quoted, Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, p.343. Estimates of the exact figures vary and are often even higher. See, for example, Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis, and the Coming of World War Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.156.
189. FO371/21104/N4148, 7 Aug. 1937.
190. FO371/21102/N6137, 14 Dec. 1937.
191. Keith Neilson, "'Pursued by a Bear": British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1922-1939', *Canadian Journal of History*, 28 (2), 1993, pp.189-221.
192. Ragsdale, *The Soviets*, pp.156-66. As late as spring 1939, meanwhile, the bleak assessments continued to come in to Chamberlain and the Foreign Policy Committee. In a paper written on 24 April, entitled *The Military Value of Russia*, The Chiefs of Staff warned that discipline and effective communication within the Red Army were very low and that it 'would not be in a position to afford material support to Poland' should a war break out in the near future. Moreover, its Air Force could only 'produce a limited threat against Germany and Italy' at this time, and only then if Poland and Romania consented to allow it use of their air bases. Russia in general, meanwhile, 'could not assist us or our allies to any considerable extent by the supply of war material'. Quoted, CAB 27/627/FP(36)/82, 24 April 1939, pp.1-12.
193. Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, NC18/1/1091, 26 March 1939.
194. Quoted, Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p.223.
195. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 9 April 1939, NC18/1/1093.
196. Vansittart and Collier were two long term advocates of the Russian alliance option, for example. For a brief summary of Foreign Office opinion on Russia at this time see Neilson, *The Soviets*, pp.208-11.
197. CAB 27/625/FP(36)/47, 16 May 1939, Appendix 2.

198. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/38, 27 March 1939, p.2. This opinion was echoed by the Polish Foreign Minister Colonel Beck in conversations with Halifax during the following week. See Halifax to Phipps, 6 April 1939, PHPP 1/22/30. It was also known that the Dominions had been split by the Russian talks. Whereas Australia and New Zealand were keen, Canada and South Africa were against them.
199. CAB 27/624/FP(36)38, 27 March 1939, pp.4-6. This is suggestion rarely mentioned by Chamberlain's critics.
200. CAB 27/624/FP(36)38, 27 March 1939, p.8. It was felt that Poland brought much fewer disadvantages with it than Russia did and had an army which, while numerically inferior, had not been devastated by Stalinist purges. See, for example, the generally favourable impression of the Polish Army given by the Ambassador in Warsaw to the Foreign Office on 26 June 1939. Quoted, FO371/23145/C9071, 26 June 1939.
201. See, for example, the comments made by Frank Roberts, Orme Sargent and Vansittart on this issue in 5 April 1939. Quoted, FO371/23144/C4898, 5 April 1939. The Chiefs of Staff later contradicted this view, as has been shown.
202. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.646, 12 April 1939 (my emphasis).
203. Drax's private papers give a good flavour of the difficult and intimidating atmosphere in Moscow. See *Account of the August 1939 Moscow Mission*, 4 Aug. 1966, DRAX 6/5.
204. See CAB 27/625/FP(36)45-9, 5-19 May 1939.
205. See CAB 27/625/FP(36)50, 9 June 1939.
206. Quoted, Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.189.
207. See CAB 27/625/FP(36)57-8, 10-19 July 1939.
208. These provisionally included powers like Poland, Romania, Turkey, Greece, Finland and Latvia, among others.
209. See CAB 27/625/FP(36)54, 26 June 1939.
210. CAB 27/625/FP(36)56-7, 10-19 July 1939.
211. Even the French Ambassador in Moscow, Robert Coulondre, whose homeland had an existing alliance with Russia, complained to the British Foreign Office on 16 May 1938: 'it was extremely difficult for anybody to secure up-to-date information regarding the situation in Russia... Everything in that country was impalpable and indefinite, and the difficulty of tendering a concrete opinion was greater than in any post he had yet been to'. Quoted, FO371/21720/C4656, 16 May 1938.
212. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1528, 2 March 1936.
213. Attlee had famously stated that in February 1936, 'we shall never agree to piling up armaments and following a policy either of imperialism or of alliances' and Labour generally resisted pacts and blocs until the last few months before war, despite one or two individuals veering from the Party line. Quoted, C. R. Attlee, *As it Happened* (London: Heinemann, 1954), p.119.
214. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.406, 5 Oct. 1938.
215. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, cols 636-7, 13 April 1939. On 19 May, Henry Raikes attacked this policy which, he felt, would also alienate the anti-Communist regime in Bulgaria, the Catholic rulers of Portugal and turn influential voices within the Vatican against Britain and France. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, cols 1851-4, 19 May 1939.
216. Barnes and Nicholson (eds.), *The Empire at Bay*, p.426.
217. Amery to Chamberlain, 11 Nov. 1937, AMEL 2/1/27.

218. Amery to David Lloyd George, former Liberal Prime Minister, 25 Aug. 1939, AMEL 2/1/28.
219. *Glasgow Forward*, 26 Nov. 1938.
220. Murray to E. Lyttelton, 14 April 1938, MS Gilbert Murray 232, fol. 115.
221. Tory MP Ronald Tree asserted in the House of Commons in December 1937 that, 'there is nothing more calculated to make Americans draw back than the feeling that we are asking them to pull our chestnuts out of the fire'. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1848, 21 Dec. 1937.
222. Pimlott (ed.), *The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton*, p.285.
223. *Daily Express*, 1 Oct. 1938.
224. A. J. P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), p.383.
225. See Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, pp.8-9.
226. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.2.
227. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.22.
228. Gillett to Halifax, 6 April 1939, FO800/315/H/XV/146, Public Opinion 10.
229. The phrase 'hope for the best while preparing for the worst' is attributed to Chamberlain by Dilks as a way to describe his favoured policy to Lord Halifax following the Munich Agreement. Quoted, D. Dilks, "'We must hope for the best and prepare for the worst": The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937-39', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol.73, 1987, pp.309-52.
230. Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, pp.11-15.
231. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy*, p.322.
232. Quoted, Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*, p.191.
233. Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p.286.
234. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 27 Jan. 1940, NC18/1/1140.
235. Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p.293.
236. James V. Compton, *The Swastika and the Eagle: Hitler, the United States and the Origins of World War Two* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p.32.
237. See Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy*, p.314.

FIVE: ARMAMENTS AND DEFENCES

They have too long delayed the rearming of Britain... If you want peace you must prepare for war.¹ (Viscount Wolmer, 1936).

(1) INTRODUCTION

For many of his critics, Chamberlain should have attempted to deter Hitler from war in the late 1930s by a programme of rearmament on a colossal scale, as an alternative to the policy he adopted. Many, like Tory peer Viscount Wolmer, above, believed that the only language the Fascists understood was force and reasoned that a huge arsenal of weapons would be the best means to secure peace, or win the ensuing struggle if that mission failed. A number of later historians shared this indictment of the National Government's record with regard to arms and asserted that Chamberlain left the country woefully under-prepared for the task which eventually faced it. In short, they accuse him of dangerously neglecting the country's defences - rearming too little and too late.

Conversely, there were also many who felt that total *disarmament* should be the Prime Minister's ultimate aim and these shall also be addressed. War could be averted, they thought, if only the Government would embark on a mass decommissioning scheme and could succeed in inducing other major powers to do the same. This notion was more prevalent in the early 1930s, especially with enthusiasts for the League, but proved too seductive to abandon easily later on. It also partly explains why the Labour Party was hostile to rearmament for the vast majority of Chamberlain's premiership.

This chapter will examine the origins and viability of the strategies of mass rearmament and, to a lesser extent, disarmament as alternatives to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. The many ambiguities in attitudes to the question of arms and defences at this time will become more obvious as this chapter progresses. For example, while introducing a new arms bill or defence initiative, members of the Government could also express their ultimate desire to see all arms eventually destroyed. Measures of *quid pro quo* disarmament were often envisaged as being part of appeasement itself. The Anglo-German

discussions about a colonial deal in early 1938, for example, are evidence of this. Similarly, many advocates of long-term disarmament came to recognise that such defensive measures were often necessary in the short-term, to protect the homeland in face of a rising threat.

It will also be shown that rearmament in itself was not necessarily in opposition to appeasement. Indeed, they could even be described as twin parts of the same strategy. Chamberlain presided over the largest arms programme in Britain since the First World War - many felt excessively so - and it was not uncommon for appeasement supporters to call for more to be done in this field. Put simply, rearmament was a central pillar of Chamberlain's strategy. It is, therefore, more accurate to describe this chapter as being more about advocates of greater and quicker rearmament, than of rearmament itself; about an alternative to the Prime Minister's conception of foreign policy, rather than to appeasement *per se*. The question is largely one of extent. The main Government critics covered by this chapter, both contemporary and later historians, often felt that Chamberlain should have done much more than he did.

Rearmament is loosely defined here as increasing the size, power and capabilities of any of the three main service departments - the army, air-force and navy. As well as basic issues of manpower, the quality and quantity of weapons and equipment the services possessed will also be considered. Improving Britain's defences, its anti-aircraft guns, bomb-shelters and so on, was also very important. Issues of supply and national service - that is conscription of wealth and industry as well as men - shall also be addressed. The idea of limiting the arms of other nations, whilst not really part of Britain's own programme at this time, should not be ignored either. Churchill is perhaps the most obvious example of those who have argued in retrospect that if only the Government had acted to keep Germany disarmed, war might never have occurred. That country was, of course, prohibited from maintaining anything but the smallest of forces by the Versailles Treaty. Despite conflicting reports about the precise extent to which Germany was rearming - a problem for the duration of the 1930s as a whole - it was well known that it was. It will also become clear as this chapter progresses that economics were a vitally important factor in rearmament considerations. This chapter is justified by the existence of such nuances and ambiguities as these.

It will begin by charting the origins and development of substantial rearmament as an alternative to Government policy. It will then consider the main historiography produced on this topic before closing with an assessment of how much it was considered by Chamberlain's pre-war administration and how viable it was perceived to be. As those opposing rearmament were often, but not always, the same people advocating total *disarmament*, there will be no section at the end of the chapter on wider critics of the arms programme. These will be covered alongside the main disarmament supporters at the end of the following segment.

(2) ORIGINS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

This section will chart the development of mass rearmament and disarmament as alternatives to Chamberlain's policy by focusing on some of the main advocates active in politics at the time. While rearmament was vastly unpopular in a country with recent memories of the Great War and suffering the severe economic hardships born of the Depression (which was, after all, why the National Government was created), the arms situation nevertheless caused alarm in one or two quarters during the late 1930s. Churchill, famously, had been talking about Germany's illegal rearmament for several years and ominously warned of 'the great wheels revolving and the great hammers descending day and night in Germany, making the whole industry of that country an arsenal', on 26 March 1936.² However, this was not so much a call to arms for Britain - he advocated collective security as his favoured policy in response to the Rhineland crisis later on in this speech - but a call for the democracies of the world to think about how best to limit the arms of another nation.

There were, however, a few demands for Britain to make good the gaps in its own defences, largely neglected during the inter-war period, in face of the increased militarism of Germany, Italy and Japan. These tended to be almost exclusively from Conservatives and those on the Right of the political spectrum. Labour was generally opposed to all arms expenditure in the late 1930s, unless it was in order to enable Britain to play its role in collective security. The Liberals often advocated a middle way between these two positions, opposing Government foreign policy yet recognising the need for limited arms in order to make the League an effective instrument for peace. In a debate about proposed defence increases in the House of Commons on 5 February 1936, for example, Liberal Leader Archibald Sinclair admitted that, 'differences of opinion are bound to arise when we come to discuss the methods, but on the principle that we must have adequate and efficient defences there will be none'.³ Churchill, meanwhile, sniped that, 'this work should have been begun in vigour three years ago'.⁴ On 9 April 1936, Conservative Robert Boothby suggested that League sanctions against Italy over the continuing Abyssinian conflict could not be

adequately pursued by Britain in its current state of armed weakness: 'We have not at the present moment defences in any field sufficient enough to enable us to carry out the foreign policy we are attempting to follow'.⁵

In the summer of 1936 Viscount Wolmer made the stinging attack on the Government's defence record quoted at the start of this chapter. However, he added that it was the Labour Party which had 'constantly denied the policeman his truncheon' by refusing to support the last bill they tried to initiate.⁶ This quarrel escalated when Paul Emrys-Evans accused the Opposition of being 'the greatest sinners' with regards to rearmament, espousing collective security and yet frustrating any defence improvements the Government tried to bring.⁷ Labour's Hugh Dalton, who was perhaps the most congenial of the senior figures within his party on the question of arms, responded to this attack.⁸ He claimed that the Labour position had been misrepresented by the Government and that his party was not Pacifist, opposing every arms increase in all instances. Instead, he announced, Labour frustrated so many of the bills largely to register its disapproval at the lack of clarity and coherence which characterised the British foreign policy in general.⁹

The Defence Loans Bill debates in the House of Commons in February and March 1937 were an important catalyst in the discussion of mass rearmament, coming as they did in the wake of the Government's proposal of £1,500 million expenditure over five years on arms and its announcement that £400 million of this should be raised by loans. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chamberlain had moulded this policy. Taking such a move as a sign of new resolve on the Government's behalf, Tory advocates of rearmament rallied to the cause. On 4 March, Churchill, who was by now espousing 'Arms and the Covenant' as his policy, welcomed the move but called for even more to be done, especially with regards to the Royal Air Force and particularly bomber aircraft: 'Financial sacrifices alone will not suffice; the whole nation must pull together'.¹⁰ Sir Thomas Moore backed increased rearmament, 'not only for the safety of this country, but for the peace of Europe and the general appeasement of the tense situation existing in the world today'.¹¹ This emphasises that one could support the Government and appeasement yet still seek much more to be done in the realm of defence.¹²

In a private memo at this time Robert Boothby penned, 'Let us admit at once that we started to arm two years too late... A catastrophe can still be averted... We must arm and arm and arm again'.¹³ Even a Labour MP, Josiah Wedgwood, spoke in favour of the bill and advocated the stockpiling of huge reserves of ammunition. He claimed that many of his colleagues would oppose this, not because they were unprepared to fight for Britain, but because they had no faith in the precise nature of Government policy.¹⁴ In the end Labour abstained. The Liberals opposed the bill, to no avail, although they agreed with the general need for limited increase in arms.

By the time Chamberlain assumed the premiership, therefore, there was a small but significant band of politicians calling for much more to be done in the sphere of rearmament. These were mostly Conservatives, although many Liberals often came on board in recognising the necessities of the day. Labour was almost exclusively against the policy at this time. Following the success of the Nyon Conference and President Roosevelt's tough-talking 'Quarantine Speech' (in September and October 1937 respectively) Tory MP Commander Archibald Southby adopted an almost Churchillian tone. Arms rather than appeasement was the line he favoured:

If you review the whole course of history since the war I do not think there is any fair-minded or impartial person who would not agree that had our policy as regards armaments been different we should be in a position to speak with much greater authority throughout the world.¹⁵

The March 1938 *Anschluss* caused much debate about Chamberlain's foreign policy and provided a new, somewhat panicked spur for rearmament on a scale as yet unseen. From the Tory benches, on 14 March, Robert Boothby begged the Government to make 'a substantial addition in the very near future to our first line air strength'. He then demanded 'parity with Germany, whatever the cost; even if it involves some form... of industrial conscription'.¹⁶ By this Boothby meant imposing strict controls on those factories which manufactured planes or the materials used in their construction, in order to force rearmament at a much greater pace and with a clearer sense of priorities. Leo Amery called for 'whatever preparations may be necessary' to make Britain secure, while the Duchess of Atholl advocated a scheme of national military training to be

introduced for all men of a service age.¹⁷ She also suggested increased taxation could pay for such initiatives.¹⁸ In a debate in the House of Commons just one week later, Churchill floated the idea of creating a Ministry of Defence, something that did not exist in Britain before the Second World War, to coordinate rearmament efforts. He concluded: 'We should lay aside every hindrance to endeavour, by uniting the whole force and spirit of our people, to raise again a Great British nation'.¹⁹ Even the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, admitted in the House of Lords that 'necessity is laid upon us' as far as arms were concerned.²⁰

The Liberals continued their twin policy of cautious support for rearmament in general, alongside their lack of faith in appeasement in particular. Sinclair stated on 14 March 1938 that, 'of course we should rearm... but rearmament is not enough,' before reiterating his belief that faith in the League of Nations was the best means to avert war.²¹ Even one or two Labour MPs now admitted that more arms were needed if Britain was to be safe in the future, although this never equated to support in the lobby for the Government arms programme. At its Edinburgh conference in October 1937, the party endorsed limited rearmament and this allowed some speakers the freedom to call for moves more openly. Subsequently, on 24 March 1938, Attlee announced to the House of Commons that Labour believed in 'the maintenance of forces', but only for the pursuit of collective security and not to buttress the 'uneasy equilibrium' in Europe created by appeasement.²² Lord Snell also welcomed such measures in the upper chamber and attempted to clarify Labour's position, though one can sense a degree of back-tracking here in face of new developments:

It has always been a part of our advocacy that we could not indulge in unilateral disarmament... We have always expressed our wish to give what arms were required to the nation to enable her to take her proper place and fulfil her proper responsibilities as a part of a great international undertaking for peace.²³

Tory peer Lord Lothian, meanwhile, in an uncharacteristically bellicose outburst in the same sitting, called for 'some form of national service' to be adopted and the compilation of a national register of men fit for conscription as a necessary first step.²⁴ He also advocated far-reaching improvements to the R.A.F. and

Britain's air defences. Lothian, as has been demonstrated in the first chapter, was a committed isolation supporter for much of the 1930s and many advocates of this policy were vocal in their demands for greater arms, for obvious reasons. Leo Amery's statement, above, provides another example.

The consideration of some form of national service as a response to the *Anschluss* had also been mooted in the House of Commons just two days earlier by Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, along with vast expenditure on naval improvements.²⁵ Alongside the suggestions of industrial conscription, national training programmes and a Ministry of Defence, it marked a new epoch in calls for colossal rearmament and defence measures as an alternative or supplement to appeasement. As the country passed into the spring of 1938, not only were calls to re-equip and improve the three defence services now widespread, but some diehards also advocated bolder measures akin to establishing a war economy in Britain and thereby create a radically different society. Even much of Labour now came on board. Hugh Dalton records in his diary on 12 April, for example, that he told Vansittart in the Foreign Office, 'I was deeply disturbed by the failure of the British air rearmament programme' at this time. Just a day earlier he had impressed upon Attlee, 'that this failure of the Air Ministry and of private enterprise to give us aircraft was the biggest single issue at present'.²⁶

The 1938 Czech crisis only exacerbated these trends. When partial mobilisation of the Czech army in response to rumoured German troop movements on the border resulted in a war scare in May, National Liberal Robert Bernays penned to a friend: 'If only we can impress upon Germany our potential strength, *then* we can negotiate with them on any grievances that there may be'.²⁷ For Bernays, appeasement should be a secondary concession after the primary need to deter aggression through the force of arms. Tory MPs like Leo Amery and Edward Grigg began to coordinate the growing ranks of support for national service in the party and collected 174 signatures between July and October 1938 supporting a motion to this effect.²⁸

Disarmament and Opposition to Increased Arms Expenditure

A brief consideration of advocates of disarmament as an alternative to appeasement is also necessary in order to better understand the broad range of views on defence at this time. The Labour Party, as has been suggested, had been a long term opponent of rearmament, with Herbert Morrison condemning Chamberlain, as Chancellor, for being keen to 'spend on the means of death, but not on the means of life' in the build up to the 1935 General Election.²⁹ Philip Noel Baker, meanwhile, derided the Government for arming Britain 'to the edge of lunacy' later that year.³⁰ Baldwin's perceived abandonment of his election pledge of no great armaments fuelled such rancour. Statements like these serve as a reminder of the mood of the nation at this time to those later critics who casually abuse Chamberlain for failing to prepare adequately for war.

In early 1936 there remained vague, though widespread support for the notion of universal disarmament, born in the sobering aftermath of the Great War. Arms equated to conflict in many people's eyes and spending on instruments of death detracted from the social and economic recovery programme necessitated by the Depression. A great number of League supporters in particular were keen for this body to coordinate an international effort in disarmament, something widely discussed in the 1920s and revived by the 1932 Disarmament Conference and initiatives like the 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement.³¹ This sort of idealistic sentiment, though prevalent among the Left, often transcended party lines. Thus, Robert Boothby, a prominent figure in the rearmament lobby, could also express his ultimate desire for all arms to be destroyed when he spoke in the House on 24 February 1936.³² Former Labour leader and Pacifist spokesman George Lansbury, meanwhile, was moved to ask, 'Why do nations want to arm? Why do they pile up these devilish instruments of destruction one against the other?' a few days earlier.³³

The debates following the Rhineland crisis afforded the leaders of the Opposition parties an opportunity to restate their general position with regards to arms. While Sinclair lamented the 'drift to war and the armaments race' which currently raged in Europe on 26 March 1936,³⁴ Attlee called for support for the League's efforts to 'get a real reduction in armaments' and establish collective

security across the world.³⁵ In June Labour firebrand Sir Stafford Cripps castigated the Government for the far-reaching effects of cancelling League sanctions on Italy:

So far as any disarmament is concerned, the complete surrender of democracies to Dictatorships, signified by the present act of the Government, is leading... to more rapid rearmament throughout the world.³⁶

The Defence Loans Bill debates in February and March 1937 provided a platform for those opposed to the Government's rearmament strategy. Criticising both foreign policy in general and the diverting of much needed economic resources from social welfare into arms loans, neither Labour nor the Liberals felt they were able to support the bill.³⁷ In March Wilfred Robert underlined the party's main grievance with the bill, claiming it was 'fundamentally wrong' that 'we can afford to make these armaments, but cannot afford to pay for them'.³⁸ Sir Stafford Cripps, meanwhile, was now moved to condemn the vast spending in more general terms on 18 February: 'It is the poor housewife and her family who will feel the pinch as wages crawl up far behind the price rise in the next few months and years'.³⁹ Attlee went even further: 'It is clear that what we have now is the organisation of this country permanently on a war basis. The Government have absolutely no policy for peace'.⁴⁰

If Parliamentary opposition to Chamberlain's rearmament bill was widespread at this time, as has been shown, support for disarmament in specific was becoming less vocal as events progressed. The Anti-Comintern Pact, for example, had been concluded at the end of the previous year and brought Germany, Italy and Japan into closer alignment. Nevertheless, on 2 March 1937 former Labour Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson felt moved to declare 'long live disarmament!', and expressed his hope, 'that the Government will carry on with their efforts to bring about some sort of convention for the limitation and regulation of arms', through support for the League's Disarmament Commission.⁴¹ A foreign affairs pamphlet published later this month, entitled *Labour's Immediate Programme*, reiterated that the party, if elected, would maintain the weapons necessary to defend the Empire and collective security, but would go much further on the bigger question:

It will play its full part in every effort to check the present Arms Race, and to promote Disarmament by international agreement, and, in particular, to substitute an International Air Police Force for National Air Forces.⁴²

Chamberlain became Prime Minister in May 1937 assailed from both sides. A sizeable lobby dominated by Conservatives was inducing him to rearm *en masse*, as an alternative to present Government policy, and deter the Fascists from war. Meanwhile, a far larger portion opposed his arms programme in general with a dwindling body of these, now almost exclusively from the Left, also advocating total *disarmament* as the best means to peace. Eden's resignation in February 1938 and the *Anschluss* in March stimulated more debate on the question of defence, as has been shown. Both Labour and the Liberals now acknowledged the need for more arms spending, though not for appeasement, over the coming weeks. However, despite this broad consensus, the Opposition ranks again refused to support the new arms bills brought by the Government later this month. Moreover, previous abstentions now turned into votes against such measures - from both parties - and demonstrate how old political rivalries still overwhelmed whatever common ground now existed.⁴³

The occasional advocate of universal and complete disarmament, albeit now envisaged in the much longer term, could still also be found in wake of such events. On 22 February 1938, the day after Eden's resignation, Labour's George Ridley accused the Prime Minister of creating the 'mad arms race' which now existed in Europe.⁴⁴ His colleague Major James Milner, meanwhile, decried the 'arms, arms and more arms' ethos of the Government on 24 March.⁴⁵ Philip Noel Baker concluded the debate from the Opposition benches by reminding the House of Chamberlain's failure to stand by the League as both Chancellor and Prime Minister, thereby disregarding the cause of universal disarmament.⁴⁶ Well into 1938, therefore, there existed those who felt universal disarmament was a better alternative than appeasement in the quest for peace. Even Germany's absorption of Austria had not shaken this conviction.

Wider Advocates: Other Groups, Press and Public Opinion

And what of wider opinion in the country on arms and defences during the Chamberlain period? The following brief section will summarise what other political groups, the major newspapers and public opinion had to say on rearmament or disarmament as alternatives to appeasement. There is, of course, a distinction between opposing rearmament in general and advocating total disarmament in specific, as has been shown, and this must not be overlooked.

Unsurprisingly, many Pacifists loathed the idea of rearmament and favoured universal disarmament as their preference to appeasement. Presented with Chamberlain's Defence Loans Bill in early 1937, for example, the Executive Committee of the National Peace Council responded with 'profound dismay' at the proposals, which it felt would only lead to a European arms race and hit the poorest sections of society hardest.⁴⁷ As war loomed closer and the Government had to introduce more militant measures (partial national service on 26 April 1939, for example, where 310,000 men were called up for the first time ever in peace-time) there were widespread protests from many Pacifist groups, though this was understandable from those in society with the greatest abhorrence of war. It has to be noted that some Pacifists drew a distinction between what they saw as more defensive measures and rearmament for comparatively offensive purposes. Improving Britain's Air Raid Precautions (A.R.P.) would be more acceptable than, say, building tanks, as the example of Pacifist MP Ernest Thurtle - mentioned in Chapter One - demonstrates: ' "You can be the finest Pacifist in the world and still take part in A.R.P. with a clear conscience", Mr Thurtle said'.⁴⁸

It is no surprise that a group with many links to the Pacifist movement, the League of Nations Union, was also hostile to rearmament and wholeheartedly supported the League Disarmament Commission's efforts to rid the world of weapons.⁴⁹ That said, as the major events in the approach to war made it apparent that a degree of rearmament was a vital necessity, whether it be for collective security or not, many within the Union now accepted the inevitable. However, on 31 May 1938, LNU Chairman Gilbert Murray pointed out that rearmament need not be immense to achieve the desired effect:

It is not necessary to create an “overwhelming force” capable of utterly crushing any aggressor or group of aggressors, but merely a force so strong and so determined that war against it will obviously not pay.⁵⁰

The brutal realities of the Czech crisis forced Murray to rethink his position. In a letter to a LNU member in September 1938, he admitted that, ‘to preserve our skins but to lose our souls seems to me a terrible choice, but the conditions of modern wars are such that a grave responsibility rests on any Government which allows a country to be involved unless fully prepared’. He went on to recommend that ‘each one of us should do what we can in regard to A.R.P. or any other national service’.⁵¹ By December the LNU Executive even demanded that the Government rearm far more than it was doing, specifically in anti-aircraft weaponry to protect the civil population from potential German bombers.⁵² This stipulation demonstrates that the Union had travelled full-circle on the question of arms. Angry with the Chancellor for arming in the first place, it then opposed the amount of rearmament Chamberlain sanctioned, before attacking him as Prime Minister for not arming well *enough* in the months following Munich - all well within a period of two years.

Elements of the extreme Left also fiercely opposed rearmament and some within the ranks of the British Communist Party thought, like many Pacifists, that war would best be avoided by destroying all weapons. A party pamphlet from late 1936, for example, asked: ‘Can the strengthening of those very forces which are the most powerful factors making for war hold back the outbreak of war itself?’ It went on: ‘To argue this way is as dangerous as to argue that the piling up of armaments in the hand of Imperialist Governments is the best way to secure peace’.⁵³ While they campaigned for a better A.R.P. strategy in 1938, the announcement of peace-time conscription in April 1939 provoked particular hostility. It not only amounted, they maintained, to the enforcement of ‘industrial slavery on the British workers’, but was tantamount to making Britain as brutal and authoritarian as Nazi Germany itself: ‘We oppose conscription because it would mean a defeat for democracy and a strengthening of the powers of reaction in Britain’.⁵⁴

However, and again like many Pacifists, one or two individuals strayed from the official line as events progressed and war drew closer. Ernest Thurtle,

above, was a Socialist MP, and the Conservative 'Points for Propaganda' files from the late 1930s list several examples of former rearmament critics from the far Left now wholeheartedly supporting rearmament policy. The Socialist Lord Provost of Glasgow, P. J. Dollan, for example, helped organise National Voluntary Service in his city during February 1939: 'I feel it is necessary for the workers to defend Glasgow and other cities and towns under Labour control as it is for the workers in Spain to defend Madrid', he stated.⁵⁵

The national press expressed a diverse range of opinions on the question of arms. One or two newspapers were particularly keen on a huge rearmament drive during the Chamberlain period irrespective of their views on his foreign policy. The *Observer*, for example, was generally enthusiastic for appeasement but nevertheless had a strong pro-arms bias. It wanted arms as part of the policy and its editor J. L. Garvin was particularly strident on the issue. He wrote to Amery during the pinnacle of the Czech crisis: 'The peril will come again unless we turn out guns and planes with might and main for the next six months. Hideous deficiencies with respect to preparedness have been revealed'.⁵⁶ Much less keen on appeasement, the pro-isolation *Daily Express* also backed intensive rearmament, announcing that, 'war can be fended off as flood and fire can be fended off - with wise and strong precautions', when voicing its support for the 1937 Defence Loans Bill.⁵⁷ In response to the *Anschluss*, the *Express* backed rearmament even at the expense of the wider health of the economy. On 14 March 1938 it asked: 'What is our business? To build up our air strength to the level of our most formidable neighbour... If this vital requirement interferes with present trade no matter. We must face it, tackle it, and pay for it'.⁵⁸ Likewise, the *Daily Telegraph* was sceptical of appeasement and felt that the *Anschluss* ought to occasion a mass A.R.P. effort on behalf of the people: 'The more efficient our precautions the less likely will be the emergency which would call for their use'.⁵⁹

Most other papers shared the general mood of hostility towards rearmament prevalent in Britain in the 1930s. For example, the *Manchester Guardian* sneered '£400 million for death' in response to the Defence Loans Bill on 15 February 1937.⁶⁰ The *Daily Herald*, unsurprisingly, backed Labour's take on arms for most of the Chamberlain period. Its immediate response to the *Anschluss*, for example, was recriminatory and returned to older themes of

universal disarmament: 'If Labour's policy of international pacification had been followed from the start', it mused, Europe would not be in this position.⁶¹

The *News Chronicle* initially backed rearmament 'to the full' in its panicked response on 14 March 1938, but then claimed that 'rearmament alone is no sort of answer' just one day later.⁶² By 17 March it suggested that the Government's arms programme was too great for a country with other priorities, in an article headed '£3 on Armaments for Every £1 on Health and Education'.⁶³ The *Chronicle* even felt that the Munich Agreement heralded a new opportunity for the country to seize upon, now that appeasement had served its purpose:

Disarmament is the one issue on which all peoples would agree... What is required above all else is the discovery of a technique which will harness the wills of these peoples and so influence their Governments in a new drive for disarmament, military, economic and mental.⁶⁴

However, even papers like these were forced to back Chamberlain's rearmament programme in the wake of the major flashpoints on the road to war and many even began criticising the Government for its tardiness in respect of defences. The *Daily Herald* welcomed rearmament after the 1938 Munich Agreement, for example, stating on 3 October that, 'we cannot remain unarmed or supine against future aggressions'.⁶⁵ It had even come all out in favour of mass rearmament by February 1939:

In the coming financial year we will spend a total of £580 million on the defence of our country... It is a grim business for democracy. But as things stand today it is an inevitable business... and the Government is right to spend the money.⁶⁶

Even the *News Chronicle*, which had called for a new disarmament drive after Munich, responded to the Prague Coup in March 1939 in vaguely Churchillian terms: 'A great effort of physical preparation and of will is called for... Peace may yet be secured by strength and firmness; but peace or war, the one supreme necessity is preparedness of armed power on a scale to match whatever may challenge us'.⁶⁷ Hereafter, following Prague, support for intensified rearmament in the press was more or less universal, though there was some debate over the timing of specific measures such as national service.

There is strong evidence to suggest that public opinion broadly followed suit - or perhaps even led the way - in support for disarmament as the best route to peace earlier on, and *then* favoured massive rearmament, urging more on the Government as events progressed. There are countless examples of letters to the press and to MPs from the public which travail the whole gamut of views on rearmament. To give just a couple of examples only one day apart, F. Lucas of Cambridge told the *Guardian* that the Government's policy after Munich should be arms and conscription rather than appeasement: 'Unless we propose to barricade ourselves behind pieces of paper kindly autographed by Herr Hitler, we shall look a little better to our defences, even if it means conscription in the near future'.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, just one day later, James Bailey of Middlesex wrote to the *News Chronicle* expressing precisely the opposite view - disarmament was his desired strategy:

As I read letter after letter in the *News Chronicle*, the one thought uppermost was: "Cease this recrimination and insist upon immediate and total disarmament". This is the only way in which we can attain the end all nations desire, peace on earth and good will to men.⁶⁹

There is no doubt that public opinion was used by politicians as a justification for the policies they espoused, despite the ambiguities in views on rearmament and obvious questions over how politicians gauged the general mood. Thus Leo Amery told an audience in Canada during September 1936 that, 'whatever may be said by way of formal opposition in Parliament I believe the people in England are united today in recognising the necessity of adequate defence on seas or land or air'.⁷⁰ Yet Lord Halifax was moved to tell his Foreign Policy Committee colleagues that, 'the great majority of responsible people in the country would be opposed to any new [arms] commitments' shortly after the *Anschluss*.⁷¹ Not including Baldwin's landslide 1935 election victory on the platform of no great armaments, it is the infant Gallup Polls once again that give us the most accurate indication of public opinion during the late 1930s. Asked in January 1937, 'Do you favour compulsory military training?' exactly three quarters of those asked did not.⁷² Even more telling is the fact that when asked in December 1937, 'Are you in favour of the all-round reduction of armaments by international agreement', 49% answered in the affirmative, more

than double the 24% who said they were not (although 16% of those asked claimed to be 'doubtful' about the prospects).⁷³ It seems clear, then, that in the year Chamberlain became Prime Minister, the nation was not only firmly against any form of national service - voluntary or compulsory - but also favoured disarmament over rearmament by a ratio of 2:1.

The tide of events dramatically shook this conviction. By October 1938, just after the Munich Agreement, 72% of those asked favoured increased expenditure on arms, with an even larger 78% agreeing that the Government should immediately compile a national register of all men fit for service.⁷⁴ By February 1939, only 21% asked expressed satisfaction with the Government's A.R.P. programme, with 70% favouring mass construction of deep air-raid shelters in all towns and cities.⁷⁵ By April, in the wake of the Prague Coup, a slim majority of those asked now even favoured the immediate introduction of compulsory national service - 48% in favour, as opposed to 45% against.⁷⁶ In little over a year, then, the British public had gone from wanting universal disarmament and opposing military training to demanding vast rearmament, conscription and being wholly unimpressed with Chamberlain's programme. This is a powerful indication of the rapidly shifting sands of criticism his Government had to tread and the swift flow of events with which the country had to contend.

Late Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

Did the politicians catch up with the views expressed by pressure groups, the press and the general public on arms and defences in the last year of peace? Was mass rearmament now predetermined and universal disarmament seen as an outdated ideal, vastly unsuited to the needs of the day? The following section will conclude the development of rearmament as an alternative to appeasement in order to answer these questions.

After the Munich settlement in September 1938 a great deal of stocktaking about foreign policy took place. On the one hand, the immediate future seemed to offer hope and optimism that Britain could build upon the Anglo-German declaration which accompanied the Agreement. On the other hand, the crisis had

demonstrated serious flaws in Britain's defensive preparations which greatly alarmed the pro-rearmament lobby and won many new recruits to the cause. 'There is a real feeling in the country that we were grossly under-prepared', wrote Bernays to a friend shortly after Munich and this sentiment dominated the thoughts of a large number of political figures over the coming months.⁷⁷ To give just a few examples, former Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden launched a broadside against his previous colleagues on 3 October, the first day of the Munich Parliamentary debate:

There is surely no excuse for our failing to take every precaution in our power, in every sphere of national defence and national life... None of us ever wants to find himself in this position again... Our rearmament has been, too slow... [We need] a national effort in the sphere of defence very much greater than anything that has been attempted hitherto.⁷⁸

Nor did other leading Tory rebels hold back. Churchill spoke on 4 October and lambasted the 'gross neglect and deficiency in our defences' which had been revealed by the crisis, urging acquirement of 'that supremacy in the air which we were promised, the security in our defences which we were assured we had' as the best means to protect Britain from the Nazi advance.⁷⁹ Members of what would become known as the Eden and Churchill Groups (that is, the rebels on foreign affairs who came to gather around these men) joined the attack on the Prime Minister's record at this time and demanded improved arms and defences ahead of further appeasement. National Labour's Harold Nicolson, for example, recorded in his diary on 26 September the general feeling at the height of the crisis: 'Meeting at WC's flat: We discuss plans... We shall press for a coalition Government and the immediate application of war measures... then national service, even if it entails conscription of capital'.⁸⁰ Leo Amery, a sometime associate of both rebel camps, called for a wide range of measures in the House of Commons on 4 October. These included 'some scheme of national registration and national service' as well as 'military training for all', whatever the economic cost.⁸¹ Writing in his diary two days later, he recorded that 'no doubt the real blame lies on the nation as a whole, or on our national character, but still that is not the complete excuse for the successive drifting of Baldwin and Neville over the whole field of foreign policy since 1935'.⁸² Harold

Macmillan produced a pamphlet in November entitled *The Price of Peace* which called for 'any sacrifice required from our people' in the pursuit of vast rearmament and in getting the country to a near-war footing.⁸³

Other Conservatives less opposed to appeasement in general also spoke out about the wake-up call provided by Munich. On 4 October Captain Sidney Herbert referred to a famous quote Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Coordination of Defence, had made in late 1936 about 'the years the locust hath eaten' in Britain's rearmament during the early 1930s: 'I was led to suppose that the locusts had stopped nibbling about two years ago, but I can hear their little jowls creaking yet under the front bench', stated Herbert.⁸⁴ A day later John Sandeman Allen succinctly summarised what was to become a regular line of criticism of the Government's policy over coming months: 'An air force cannot win a war, but the lack of an air force might very well lose a war. For that reason we must increase, improve and further strengthen our air force'.⁸⁵

There was now great support for vast rearmament as an alternative to appeasement from the Opposition benches as well. In the House of Lords on 4 October, for example, former Liberal leader Viscount Samuel expressed the growing feeling within his party that, 'we must be armed and be prepared... to make great sacrifices'. He continued, 'This country cannot yet be relieved of the enormous expense and cannot yet relax the tremendous effort which it is making for its own protection'.⁸⁶ Even most of the Labour Party now came firmly on board. Herbert Morrison opened the debate on 4 October by crediting the breathing space Chamberlain had gained at Munich but warned him not to waste it: 'You have some further time for rearmament and the development of Air Raid Precautions; but remember that the enemy has further time, too'.⁸⁷

An important debate in the House of Commons later that month further clarified many positions on the issue of rearmament, now the immediate danger of war had died down. The issue in discussion was whether or not a Ministry of Supply should be established in peace-time to coordinate rearmament efforts. A sort of precursor to the Ministry of Defence which Churchill had mooted after the *Anschluss*, a supply ministry would provide a central body orchestrating the national rearmament effort and regulating the arms industry. Politicians from across all parties and with varying opinions on Chamberlain and his foreign policy called for such a body to be set up during this debate. From the

Conservative benches, Churchill claimed that he had been making these sorts of demands for the better organisation of arms production for three years now, and they had been met with a limited response:

I submit that these evil tendencies, this lamentable lag, will continue... unless new efforts are made to lift the whole process to a higher and more efficient basis of organisation and production... More than ever there is a need to establish without delay one supreme controlling authority over the whole field of supply... Now we have 'adequacy'.... Adequacy is no standard at all... Is this not this the moment when all should hear the deep, repeated strokes of the alarm bell?⁸⁸

Duff Cooper, the former Cabinet minister who resigned in protest at the Munich Agreement, echoed many of Churchill's criticisms. He asserted that, 'what was recommended three years ago is now antiquated and out of date' with regards to fighter planes and many army vehicles and weaponry.⁸⁹

Many within the Liberal and Labour Parties also backed the establishment of such a ministry. Accusing the Government of being 'always behind the needs of the time', Sinclair claimed that setting up a Ministry of Supply now would mean it would be firing on all cylinders a year or so hence, at which point Britain might well need it to be.⁹⁰ Introducing it at the start of a war itself might be too late. Attlee, meanwhile, felt a Ministry of Supply should be just one part of a wider Ministry of Defence, both of which could help better control the location of arms factories and depots. Constructing new factories in specially selected areas would increase supply efficiency and decrease the vulnerability of civilians living near industrial centres. A new ministry would also, he believed, provide a check on the huge profiteering of many arms manufacturers, a practice widely condemned in such a vital yet distasteful industry.⁹¹ Attlee's colleague Major Owen, moreover, was keen to explore the wider effects of such a move on the British economy in general:

If a Ministry of Supply is set up and it finds in the carrying out of its task that nationalisation of the whole armaments industry is necessary, we on this side of the House will not quarrel with that conclusion... If armament production is nationalised, the Ministry will be able to control and mobilise it with real efficiency.⁹²

The Prague Coup provided yet another spur for calls for mass rearmament as an alternative to appeasement; indeed, Chamberlain effectively abandoned the old policy of concessions in favour of alliances and rearmament on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Now calls for the conscription of men and labour were widespread, demands for improved A.R.P. and a Ministry of Supply even more so. In the House of Commons swathes of politicians from all parties now urged the Government to redouble its efforts in the construction of arms and especially aeroplanes. In the immediate aftermath of Prague, on 15 March 1939, Viscount Wolmer called for national service to be established.⁹³ Leo Amery had made a stirring call for conscription in Parliament in December 1938, in which he stated ‘the Prime Minister described himself as a go-getter for peace. Had he not better be a go-getter for safety first - for security?’⁹⁴ On 6 April 1939, however, he questioned the extent to which Chamberlain was truly committed to rearmament, pouring scorn upon his recent decision to double the size of the Territorial Army as being a far from adequate move.⁹⁵ Former Prime Minister David Lloyd George described himself as ‘not at all satisfied with our own preparations’ just a few days earlier.⁹⁶ From the British leader during the last World War these words carried weight.

On 13 April in the House of Lords a whole host of peers joined the clamour, with Viscount Astor, the Earl of Mansfield, Lord Mottistone and Lord Lothian - all Tories - each calling for conscription, military training and the reorganisation of the economy to facilitate the arms effort. The former, for example, demanded that the Government ‘mobilise the whole industry, the whole manpower, and the whole wealth of this country’ in a new drive to prepare for war.⁹⁷

The Government’s decision to introduce a Ministry of Supply and partial conscription, on 20 and 26 April 1939 respectively, did little to quell the criticism from all directions on the matter of arms. A feeling that war was now inevitable gripped both Houses. By May, Churchill was calling in Commons for improvements with regards to ‘aeroplanes, tanks, artillery, ammunition and equipment’, and subsequent speakers talked less and less about preventing or deterring war and more about the means to survive the coming onslaught.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, in the same debate, Lloyd George felt war could be averted by a pact with Russia and ‘the strengthening of our own military forces to prepare for any emergency’.⁹⁹ In June, Liberal peer Viscount Elibank urged not only the

improvement of Britain's own defences but also those of its Imperial interests overseas. He was particularly keen to buttress the defence force garrisoned at Shanghai, for example, and to reinforce Britain's Far East naval presence.¹⁰⁰ Labour's Josiah Wedgwood, meanwhile, on 31 July 1939, announced that the position was now so dire that old party loyalties no longer held: 'We are all united on one point - rearmament'. His concern was not just with that on land, sea and air, however, but also with 'a moral rearmament of the people' - waking the masses to their responsibilities in struggle ahead.¹¹¹

Late Calls for Disarmament and Opposition to Increased Arms Expenditure

And what, briefly, of disarmament advocates in the final months of peace? It is perhaps not surprising that concrete references to universal disarmament as a policy to adopt declined sharply as events progressed and war loomed near. More and more, if it was mentioned at all, it was in the vague terms of an old ideal or future aspiration many years hence, to be pursued once the current threat of war had diminished. Furthermore, it was almost always viewed as subservient to the need to rearm *now* in the shorter term. The above quote advocating rearmament by Viscount Samuel was preceded with the line, 'unless we can secure some general measure of disarmament', for example, and this sort of vague statement was not uncommon during the years before war.¹⁰²

In the wake of the Munich Agreement, however, there was hope that the new mood of Anglo-German cooperation could be built upon in the immediate future, in a real and definite manner, by a few disarmament advocates. These figures were all from the political Left and often tended to be older than most of their Parliamentary colleagues, perhaps with longer memories of the grand, post-Versailles ideal. Labour peer Lord Ponsonby, for example, on 4 October 1938 attacked Chamberlain's policy and called for a fresh disarmament drive:

You say 'Trust Hitler,' and yet you come home and say you must go on with rearming. I do not think those two things really stand side by side logically... I believe the reduction of armaments must be the very first question that is tackled between the nations of the world.¹⁰³

On day earlier the Archbishop of Canterbury, meanwhile, called for ‘a check, and then, I should hope, a stop’ to the arms race as the logical next move in diplomacy.¹⁰⁴ In the lower chamber on the same day, Labour MP Arthur Henderson concurred with this sentiment: ‘We shall never secure world peace as long as the world is armed to the teeth’.¹⁰⁵

More general opposition to the Government’s arms policy - though not actually advocating *disarmament* in itself - was much more widespread in the House of Commons at this time. Again this was dominated by senior Labour figures, despite the official party line now being to accept the need for major defence improvements. On 5 October 1938 Deputy Leader Arthur Greenwood, for example, announced that ‘just as unilateral disarmament is, in my view, futile, so unilateral rearmament is of no avail against powerful aggressors’.¹⁰⁶ Sir Stafford Cripps, meanwhile, sneered that ‘our newfound dove of peace seems to insist upon a sharpening of the claws as the most vital factor’.¹⁰⁷

Criticism of more specific rearmament measures, like the much touted Ministry of Supply, was also to be found by the turn of the year. In the Commons debate on 17 November 1938, for example, Conservative MP Sir Arnold Gridley defended the Government’s reluctance to establish such a ministry at this juncture by pointing out that Britain had won the Great War without one, as well as having no ministries of Air, Labour, Mines or Transport. He was certain that introducing a Ministry of Supply in peace-time would just result in more delays and bureaucracy that would hinder, rather than help, the required arms effort: ‘If ever there was a time for not swapping horses while crossing a stream... I should have thought that time was now’.¹⁰⁸

The Prague Coup witnessed a rapid decline in Parliamentary opposition to the Government’s rearmament policy and from now on calls for disarmament in specific were very rare indeed and envisaged at some distant point in the future. Attlee mentioned disarmament talks as being one likely result of a possible economic appeasement drive during May 1939, for example.¹⁰⁹ Tory Lord Mottistone called for a revived League of Nations in June, with the abandonment of submarines - ‘a sign to all and sundry that our Christian professions are as nought’ - as an early item on the agenda.¹¹⁰ Viscount Cecil, meanwhile, in the same sitting, thought that ‘an immense improvement’ would

be made if you could induce 'all countries in the world to abandon armaments'. However, he then frankly admitted, 'I see no prospect of it'.¹¹¹

More general statements of opposition to the Government's arms programme were more prevalent than calls for disarmament in specific after Prague, although they were still on the sharp decline. Nevertheless, despite the recent dramatic turn of events, a greater sense of imminent danger, and widespread recognition that faster rearmament was needed, some resistance to certain measures remained. Both Labour and the Liberals voted against the introduction of peace-time conscription in April 1939, for example - Cripps describing it as 'a method for servile and suppressed people but not for free people' - and a fundamental distaste for piling up weapons lingered in many, despite the fragility of the current peace.¹¹² To give just two final examples, Cecil chided the Government on 19 April for what he saw as its unimaginative and warlike policy: 'Merely to say we are going to pile up arms and pile up alliances and leave it at that is not enough'.¹¹³ Lord Ponsonby attacked Chamberlain in June, meanwhile, for 'disturbing the life of this country with rearmament, A.R.P., various activities all over the country, straining the nerves of the people and straining the resources of the country'.¹¹⁴ It seems on the question of rearmament the Government could not win.

(3) HISTORIOGRAPHY

The following section will examine the most important and influential works on the question of rearmament in order to understand better how perceptions of the viability of this alternative have developed and how views on Chamberlain's record have progressed. The orthodox school on appeasement had much to say on this topic and only a select few of these works can be covered here. Critics of appeasement began abusing Chamberlain's rearmament record before the war was even over, as they sought someone to blame for the precarious position the country was in. Alfred Duff Cooper attacked his former Cabinet colleague as early as December 1939, for example, accusing him of being 'sadly remiss in making adequate preparations for war'. He continued in no uncertain terms:

As Chancellor of the Exchequer and the dominant figure in Mr Baldwin's Cabinet he never ceased to apply the brake to expenditure on armaments... A year ago he preferred to put his trust in Adolf Hitler and to denounce as alarmists those who thought differently. And so he resisted the demand which came from his own colleagues in the Cabinet for the setting up of a Ministry of Supply and the introduction of conscription.¹¹⁵

Another more famous war-time work was dominated by similar bitterness and rancour on the question of the country's arms, the state of which was its central theme. In 1940 *Guilty Men* attacked Chamberlain's rearmament record, painting the soldiers at Dunkirk as brave victims of a neglectful Government: 'One infantryman said "Why didn't we send more planes? Why? Why? Why?"'¹¹⁶ 'Cato' - that is, Michael Foot, Peter Howard and Frank Owen, of course - likened Chamberlain's choice of Inskip as Minister for the Coordination of Defence to when the Roman Emperor Caligula made his horse a Consul and concluded the work in similarly stark terms:¹¹⁷ 'The soldiers of Britain had insufficient tanks and airplanes to protect them for the simple reason that insufficient money had been spent on them'.¹¹⁸

Churchill, obviously, also touched upon the issue of arms at great length in *The Gathering Storm* (1948) and indeed the 'theme of the volume', according to the inside cover, was 'how the English-Speaking peoples through their

unwisdom, carelessness and good nature allowed the wicked to rearm'.¹¹⁹ 'It was a simple policy to keep Germany disarmed and the victors armed', asserted the author, before describing how his own repeated warnings about Nazism were ignored and how his calls for the Government to make good its defence shortages fell on deaf ears.¹²⁰ Churchill even went so far as to speculate that 'much could have been done to make us better prepared and thus lessen our hazards. And who shall say what could not have happened?'¹²¹ The obvious inference was that he thought Hitler might have been deterred by a huge arsenal.

These early, highly critical accounts of Chamberlain's rearmament programme were continued by many of the Prime Minister's former colleagues most wary of appeasement. Harold Macmillan described 'sufficient force of arms' as the first essential in any successful foreign policy.¹²² He then claimed that 'Arms and the Covenant' was the one strategy which might have averted war.¹²³ He even concluded by asserting that Churchill's leadership in 1937 or 1938 would have made good the deficiencies so often identified at this time by the Chiefs of Staff and so often ignored by Chamberlain:

If Churchill had been in power, every aspect of this advice would have been relentlessly examined and probed. Neither the Prime Minister nor any of his Ministers had either the knowledge or the experience to understand this task, even if they had the will.¹²⁴

Eden, Vansittart, Amery and Boothby all presented similar works from the orthodox camp accusing Chamberlain of neglecting the country's defences and ignoring their concerns about the slow pace of rearmament. Many of the critics writing at this time did so under the shadow of Keynesian economics, covered below, which was popular in the post-war period and held that bold rearmament initiatives could stimulate economic growth. Amery and Boothby, like Churchill, were particularly keen to present the Rhineland crisis as an alarm bell unheeded which should have prompted a rearmament drive that might have prevented war.¹²⁵ Eden, meanwhile, now Lord Avon of course, not only painted himself as a sort of inner-Cabinet Churchill for the duration of the mid-1930s, but also hit out at the hypocrisy of the Opposition on the question of arms:

I was convinced that we could only reach worthwhile agreements if we were strong in spirit as our rearmament made itself felt. The Labour and Liberal Opposition, though detesting the Dictators, failed in their duty by voting and speaking against all measures to provide their country with the armaments to which alone the Nazis and Fascists would give heed.¹²⁶

Clement Attlee had his chance to respond to these sorts of attacks in the Francis Williams interview *A Prime Minister Remembers* (1961). To his credit, the former Labour leader acknowledged that voting against such moves as conscription in April 1939, ‘probably wasn’t awfully wise’.¹²⁷ However, he was keen to point out that much of his opposition to Defence Estimates did not mean that he necessarily opposed rearmament *per se*, but often just disagreed with the Government’s specific policy: ‘We wanted combined thinking on defence problems... a combined doctrine with a proper allocation between the services based on a coordinated plan and not just on which particular service had a pull on the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time’.¹²⁸

Not all Chamberlain’s contemporaries - many of whom were dubbed ‘Guilty Men’ - were critical with regards to the Prime Minister’s rearmament policy. As might be expected, Viscount Simon was keen to hammer home Eden’s assault on the Opposition for regularly undermining the Government’s efforts.¹²⁹ Lord Home praised Chamberlain’s farsightedness in shaping Britain’s future war strategy during the late 1930s, a process which ultimately contributed to victory in the Battle of Britain:

Did Chamberlain fail to pursue rearmament with sufficient vigour?... It has to be remembered that he and Lord Swinton [Secretary of State for Air] saw the absolute importance of air defence in any future war. The fighter planes, which they had authorised, which enabled Britain to survive, were only just in time. They were decisive in victory.¹³⁰

In his memoirs, Samuel Hoare claimed ‘I doubt whether even Churchill, if he had been a member of the Government, could have roused the country in the spring and summer of 1939 to an all-out war effort’. He continued, ‘even if we had possessed a great and popular leader, I do not believe that the country would have accepted war conditions in the months before war started’.¹³¹ Chamberlain’s Secretary of State for War, Leslie Hore-Belisha, made a similar

statement about public opinion, claiming that, until well after Munich, ‘neither Parliament nor the people was prepared to abandon peacetime methods and to gear the industrial machine of the country to war production as in Germany’.¹³²

Chamberlain’s official biographer Keith Feiling offered one of the most stoic defences of his subject’s rearmament policy as early as 1946. Feiling credits Chamberlain as being the one figure within the Cabinet who most recognised the need to rearm during the mid-1930s, orchestrating scheme after scheme of expenditure on defence in his time as Chancellor. Yet his was also a delicate balancing act: ‘No man could feel more disgust at diverting all the national resources to destruction, or the peril to the financial stability which he had laboured to restore... yet the initiative and determination for decisions in rearmament were chiefly his’.¹³³ As Prime Minister, Feiling’s Chamberlain was the driving force behind the predominance of spending on the air force over that of the army and navy, as well as on fighter planes rather than bombers - both bold and unpopular decisions which enabled Britain to survive in the war. Furthermore, Feiling noted that Chamberlain presided over the decision to view financial stability as a ‘fourth arm of defence’, where a strong economy in the long term was held to be as important as an efficient military machine in the short. Based upon the idea that Britain’s economy could outlast Germany’s in a long war - and that all that was required was to repel the feared ‘knock-out’ blow, rather than win a decisive all-out victory - this strategy was to prove remarkably far-sighted and contributed greatly to British survival in 1940.¹³⁴

A number of professional historians took Feiling’s views on board and were generally much kinder to Chamberlain’s record than the orthodox camp had been. Those from what might be termed the revisionist school on appeasement (certainly on the question of rearmament anyway) were keen to point out the severe financial constraints Chamberlain was under and the importance attached to maintaining economic recovery after the Depression. To give just a couple of examples, Robert Shay’s 1977 work *British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits* adopted a more understanding tone than most. Shay explained how appeasement was born from the need to keep a balanced budget and low inflation in the fragile economic climate of the 1930s, even to the detriment of immediate arms spending. While the author acknowledged the risks

Chamberlain was taking with this policy in such dangerous times, the overall result was generally a success:

It is a testimony to Chamberlain's abilities as an administrator that, despite the restraints he continued to impose on rearmament, Britain was better prepared for war when it came than she would have been had defence planning been allowed to continue as it had under Baldwin.¹³⁵

Following shortly after this work, George Peden's 1979 *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-39* took a similar yet even more positive line, asserting that Chamberlain's cautious stewardship of the nation's finances actually helped the rearmament effort: 'Far from being paralysing, the Treasury's use of the power of the purse forced Ministers and military men to come to decisions about priorities, and thereby ensured that essential elements in Britain's defences were completed first'.¹³⁶ A follow-up article from February 1984, entitled 'A Matter of Timing: The Economic Background to British Foreign Policy, 1937-39', was even more generous, claiming that Chamberlain's 'fourth arm of defence' rearmament policy enabled Britain to win the war. There was no better alternative:

The balance struck between defensive strength and economic stability in 1937-39 at least allowed Britain to survive the initial Nazi onslaught, and to have the financial credit to draw upon the considerable resources of the Empire and Commonwealth during the war.¹³⁷

Paul Kennedy would doubtless concur with this general view. For example, in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, he explained that there is a strong correlation between the outcome of major wars and the amount of productive resources mobilised by each side.¹³⁸ He also pointed out that where rearmament was limited during the late 1930s it was not always Chamberlain's fault. After so many years of peace and slow growth in arms, as well as the crippling effects of the Depression, 'industry itself could not adequately respond' to the new drive until well on into the war.¹³⁹ In short, the often uncontrollable conditions of the 1930s frequently hindered preparations for the 1940s.

Not all of the works from the 1970s and 1980s revised the critical interpretation of Chamberlain's arms record so firmly entrenched by the *Guilty Men* orthodox thesis. J. P. D. Dunbabin, for example, conceded that while Chamberlain's preparations for war eventually proved adequate, they did not succeed in preventing that war - the very result the Prime Minister craved. Indeed, Chamberlain's cautious approach to rearmament actually provoked Hitler into acting more quickly than he might otherwise have done: 'Insofar as British rearmament influenced him at all, it was to bring forward the time when he was prepared to risk war, not to deter him from war'.¹⁴⁰

The latest and most important works from the post-revisionist period of appeasement literature have continued the debate over the viability of mass rearmament as an alternative to appeasement. Mark Harrison's collection of essays entitled *The Economics of World War Two* (1998), for example, seem to cast doubt over the claim that the 'fourth arm of defence' policy had a positive impact on the war effort, crediting as it does early Axis success in the war to the initial lag in production. Moreover, 'it was also largely the military failures of the Axis powers, not their economic weakness, which brought this first period of the war to an end without the decisive victory which had previously appeared within their grasp'.¹⁴¹

John Ruggiero produced a book fiercely critical of Chamberlain's rearmament record in 1999 which almost takes us back full-circle to the *Guilty Men* thesis. Ruggiero asserts that Chamberlain was far too slow in rearming Britain, and that his resistance to doing so was explained by a 'prejudicial hidden agenda' to keep the labour movement at bay.¹⁴² A Ministry of Supply, for example, could have led to changes in the economy with potential benefits for Labour and the Left and this was precisely why he resisted such a move until so late in the day. 'Given a choice between Hitler and Labour, Chamberlain chose the former', the author asserted.¹⁴³ Ruggiero's concluding line is that things would have been much better for the rearmament effort without this Prime Minister involved:

That Britain failed to rearm in a manner consistent with its international obligations in the 1930s was due largely to the baneful influence of Neville Chamberlain on the defence programme. Without his commanding presence... British defence (and hence foreign) policy would have taken a vastly different turn.¹⁴⁴

Other recent contributors, however, have revived some of the main arguments of the revisionist school. In 1996, for example, Scott Newton produced *Profits of Peace: The Political Economy of Anglo-German Appeasement* in which he claimed that the Government's arms programme was limited by its overriding concern to keep Britain from the economic woes it suffered during the 1920s. It was also feared that rearming *en masse* (and moves like peace-time conscription) would only turn the country into one with values more akin to Nazi Germany than those which were traditionally British. All in all, held Newton, the balance struck by the Government was just about right:

As a result of these preparations Britain was able to defeat the Luftwaffe in 1940... Overall, as Chancellor and Prime Minister, Chamberlain presided over an increase in the share of defence spending unprecedented in peacetime and which by 1939 compared well with the efforts of Nazi Germany.¹⁴⁵

James Levy produced *Appeasement and Rearmament: Britain, 1936-1939* last year in 2006 which defended Chamberlain's tenure. Not only was the Prime Minister's arms record in fact very solid given the conditions he inherited (especially with regards to R.A.F. improvements in 1939) but an earlier drive than the one Chamberlain sanctioned would have only been counterproductive:

A rush to rearmament in the mid-1930s would have frozen in place the production of weapons that would have been obsolescent in 1939-40. Early attempts at arms build-ups by France, Italy and the Soviet Union seem to have hurt those countries early in World War Two, not helped them... They were burdened with an abundance of weapons one generation behind the steep technological curve.¹⁴⁶

These recent offerings, as adversarial as Ruggiero and Levy are, indicate that the debate over rearmament will continue and that no settled consensus currently exists. However, with this better understanding of the most significant literature produced on the topic, an informed assessment of viability can now be made.

(4) VIABILITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Links between the Alternative and Government Policy

The following brief section will broadly outline the extent to which the National Government actually carried out a rearmament effort in the late 1930s. This is necessary to bring clarity to an area largely shrouded in lazy assumptions and mythology, before an accurate assessment can be made of how viable Chamberlain deemed colossal rearmament to be. Furthermore, a few signposts are needed to make navigating the next section easier and, indeed, some of what is written here will be referenced again in the following pages.

As Chamberlain rearmed substantially as part of his appeasement policy, and yet also limited arms expense in a carefully controlled manner, there is often confusion over what the Government actually did. The main highlights in its arms programme are often overlooked. This is made all the more confusing when such radically contradictory accounts as those of Ruggiero and Levy can be written just a few years apart, both within the past decade and enjoying the benefit of a great deal of similar evidence. It is clear that in the mid to late 1930s the vast majority of people thought the Government was rearming on a colossal scale and far too much. It was common for critics to talk alarmingly of the huge arsenal Chamberlain was amassing, as some of the Labour Party already discussed have demonstrated - Noel Baker's arming 'to the edge of lunacy' quote is a good example. And yet, by the mid to late 1950s, with the passing of the war and the benefit of hindsight, the majority of commentators felt that Chamberlain had woefully under-prepared Britain for the challenge it faced.

The Prime Minister could have done substantially more in the field of arms and defences had he wanted to, certainly in the earlier part of his premiership, and he deliberately and routinely exercised the breaks on rearmament for the majority of his time as both Chancellor and Prime Minister. However, it is also clear now that many of the enduring *Guilty Men* myths and stereotypes need to be dispelled and we should acknowledge that Chamberlain presided over the greatest increase in peace-time rearmament that this country has ever seen - certainly the largest arms effort in the twenty years since the Great War.

What then, briefly, were the main watersheds in Chamberlain's rearmament record which are so often overlooked? It is true to say that he felt rearmament needed to be given more emphasis in the mid-1930s and impressed upon his colleagues the need to place arms and defences at the centre of the upcoming election campaign in 1934.¹⁴⁷ Chamberlain also sanctioned spending on the first major R.A.F. expansion scheme for many years at this time, production of military aircraft nearly doubling between 1934 and 1935 from 740 to 1140.¹⁴⁸ Long before he had become Prime Minister, then, Chamberlain demonstrated that he recognised radical defence spending was required, despite finding it personally distasteful and having numerous other financial priorities to consider. In the spring of the 1937, the year that he moved to Number 10, Chamberlain had not only engineered the £1,500 million figure over five years for rearmament that has already been covered, but also went against the vast majority of his own party in proposing the establishment of a new national tax for defence. The National Defence Contribution tax hence became one of Chamberlain's pet projects but was buried under the weight of wider Tory opposition. Nevertheless it demonstrates that he was more alive to the need for rearmament at this time than many of his peers. The highest amount of spending on the army since the First World War was also sanctioned in 1937.

Chamberlain's rearmament programme gathered pace in 1938, total percentage of GNP on military expenditure climbing to 8.1% this year from 5.6% in 1937 (and 4.2% in 1936).¹⁴⁹ This was also the year in which the Cabinet voted to cancel the rule that defence expenditure could not impinge upon normal trade - in March, as covered below - and in which Chamberlain shifted spending priorities in the R.A.F. to fighter planes from bomber aircraft. This flew in the face of conventional wisdom and ruffled the feathers of those like Churchill who favoured constructing traditional bombers ahead of fighters. There were also great improvements in radar stations and anti-aircraft weaponry in this year, all despite the apparent success of appeasement at Munich.

It was 1939, however, in which the most startling rearmament improvements were made by the Government and vast expenditure was sanctioned in particular after the Prague Coup. Conscription and a Ministry of Supply were both ratified in April as well as a doubling of the Territorial Army in March, as we have seen. Alistair Parker observes that industry delivered 3753

aircraft in the first half of 1939, compared to 1045 in the same period for the previous year.¹⁵⁰ Feiling, meanwhile, has the figure for *total* planes produced in 1939 at just under 9000, compared to under 3000 in 1938.¹⁵¹ GNP spending on the military shot up nearly threefold to a huge 21.4% in 1939, almost on a par with Nazi Germany itself, and a widespread feeling that Britain was becoming strong again now spread among most people.¹⁵² Even a critic of Chamberlain's arms record within the Foreign Office, Oliver Harvey, happily proclaimed in May 1939 that 'our own air rearmament is going ahead by leaps and bounds'.¹⁵³

Overall, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chamberlain presided over an increase in defence spending from £136 million in 1935, to £186 million in 1936, and £197 million in 1937. As Prime Minister this increased to £254 million in 1938 and soared to a colossal £626 million by 1939, more than a fourfold increase in little over as many years.¹⁵⁴ *Guilty Men* does not acknowledge these facts. As well introducing some of the main arms initiatives he presided over, this section demonstrates that it is a gross oversimplification to present Chamberlain, as he so often is, as being vehemently 'anti-arms' in the late 1930s, even if he did carefully regulate defence expenditure for much of the period. The following section will seek to explain why.

The Extent to which the Government Considered the Alternative as Viable

Why did Chamberlain adopt the apparently self-defeating approach of carrying out a huge rearmament programme and yet also carefully controlling arms spending? There seems little doubt that he could have done more in the way of rearmament and probably also at a greater pace. Why did his Government view a truly colossal arms effort - which some of its critics claimed might have prevented war - as an unviable prospect until so late in the day? The following section will discuss the extent to which Chamberlain considered total disarmament and massive rearmament as alternatives to appeasement, as well as how viable he perceived both policies to be.

It is fair to say that the option of pursuing universal disarmament was given very little serious thought in any concrete form by the National Government during the late 1930s. Instead, it only paid lip-service to this far away ideal

which was usually only mentioned in passing from time to time as a means to placate the Opposition or wider public opinion. Those in charge of Britain's defence spending in this period were realists. While they recognised the obvious attractions of such a utopian vision - indeed many shared the popular dream of the 1920s - they also had a responsibility to ensure that Britain was capable of mounting at least a minimal defence of its vital interests, should they ever be threatened in these uncertain times. Even many League of Nations enthusiasts, both within the Government and outside of it, recognised that a degree of rearmament was necessary should Britain be called upon to fulfil its collective security obligations. As such, much hand-wringing and expressions of sorrow tended to accompany Government announcements on rearmament, especially in the earlier part of the period. For example, on 24 February 1936, Eden announced in the House of Commons that, 'I deeply regret that increased expenditure upon armaments by this country should have become inevitable... but there is a measure of comfort that rearmament to strengthen collective security is the cheapest form of rearmament'.¹⁵⁵ Again, it is to be remembered that Baldwin pledged no great armaments in the 1935 election campaign. Explaining his foreign policy on the day of Eden's resignation two years later, Chamberlain himself talked of his distaste for these arms, forced upon him by the actions of others, and expressed his hope that all the world's weapons could one day be destroyed.¹⁵⁶

All of this was rather vague and sentimental, however. Where there *were* more concrete discussions within the Government were for measures of partial disarmament or arms limitation, but again these were largely hazy proposals for some distant point in the future and often yielded few concrete results. The 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement was an obvious exception, but even this did not last for long. Such moves were discussed on a few occasions before Chamberlain assumed the premiership. Eden addressed the House of Commons on 18 January 1937, for example, and signposted his eventual aim to 'bring armaments down to a level sufficient for the essential needs of defence and no more'.¹⁵⁷ Chamberlain penned a memo for the Foreign Policy Committee in April of this year, proposing an 'international arms limitation agreement' as part of any future colonial deal with Germany.¹⁵⁸

Consideration of arms limitation measures continued when Chamberlain assumed the premiership and formed one particular strand, albeit a thin one, of his wider appeasement policy. Part of the agenda for the January 1938 Roosevelt Peace Initiative, for example, which the Prime Minister did not welcome at first but then gave his support to, was international arms limitation. The pursuit of an air deal, in specific, with Germany was also a regularly occurring feature of Cabinet discussions throughout this year. In early 1938, for example, when the Foreign Policy Committee met on several occasions to discuss the possible *quid pro quo* desiderata of a general colonial settlement, an air limitation agreement featured heavily. On 3 February Halifax, Hoare and Inskip all impressed upon Chamberlain the importance of ‘some substantial measure of air disarmament’ as being part of this deal.¹⁵⁹ However, the vague and uncertain nature of such proposals - even for a measure of air disarmament alone - is evidenced by Chamberlain’s assertion in the same meeting that, ‘this was a matter which must in the most favourable conditions take a very long time to arrange’.¹⁶⁰ Hence, on 10 October 1938, despite preliminary Anglo-German conversations on this issue and the new spirit of cooperation prevailing after the Munich Agreement, Lord Strang in the Foreign Office was still writing memoranda to the effect that:

An offer of limitation of armaments or restriction of air warfare should be sympathetically received, and carefully considered in light of our own interests. But no agreement should preclude us from reaching substantial air parity with Germany if we can.¹⁶¹

Such an air deal was never made, although wider measures of Anglo-German disarmament were still considered from time to time, even as late as 1939. In February, for example, Nevile Henderson wrote to Chamberlain advising him to ‘keep away from the colonial question. I think Hitler... fully realises that the question must wait a long time yet and that economics and disarmament must come first’.¹⁶² The fact that the Prague Coup came before either is testament to the true nature of Nazism. It demonstrates why total disarmament was never considered seriously by the Government in the late 1930s and why measures of arms limitation were only ever discussed sporadically, although a possible air pact in specific was considered.¹⁶³

Rearmament was obviously carried out to a huge extent by Chamberlain's Government, although there were many reasons why it was regulated so tightly. As we shall see, until less than a year before the outbreak of war, the Prime Minister presided over an arms effort in which every two steps forward were preceded by one step back. He authorised what was necessary given the major developments of the day yet cautiously reined in any measure he deemed too provocative or damaging to the wider national interest. There was considerable conflict within Government ranks - inside departments and among key individuals - between those who wanted to accelerate rearmament and those who sought to keep a tight check on defence improvements. As early as 8 December 1935, Chamberlain wrote to his sister claiming, 'If only our defences were stronger I should feel so much happier but though we are working night and day they aren't what I would like'.¹⁶⁴ Yet in the same month he turned down a recommendation from the Defence Requirements Committee to increase armament spending over the next five years by two thirds. This sort of seemingly contradictory approach was to characterise his attitude to rearmament over the next few years.

The National Government had been created to deal with the economic consequences of the Depression and Chamberlain, as Chancellor since 1931, had a primary responsibility to ensure that the recovery took precedence over greatly unpopular policies like rearmament. Baldwin admitted in November 1936 that 'I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain' than informing the people that he intended to rearm.¹⁶⁵ Chamberlain loathed war and saw himself as a social reformer above all else, as evidenced by two successful spells as Health Minister in the 1920s, where he forged his political reputation. Unemployment had fallen year on year from 2.9 million in 1932 to a low of 1.7 million in 1937 and the Chancellor was not about to upset this trend if he could help it.¹⁶⁶ The Jarrow Marches were well within memory. Hence, despite Baldwin's proclamation in the House of Commons during March 1936 that, 'to secure peace, and in the name of peace, you have to have increased armaments', Chamberlain's duty to the public was to see that the economy came first.¹⁶⁷ So while Churchill sniped from the sidelines, and important figures within Foreign Office like Vansittart penned bitterly, 'for fifteen years we have starved our fighting services and

made a virtue of it', the Chancellor's loyalty to Treasury objectives remained steadfast.¹⁶⁸ A diary entry from 26 October 1936 spelled out his major concerns:

If we were now to follow Winston's advice and sacrifice our commerce to the manufacture of arms, we would inflict a certain injury on our trade from which it would take generations to recover. We should destroy the confidence which now so happily exists and we should cripple the revenue.¹⁶⁹

Chamberlain assumed the premiership, therefore, recognising the need to rearm significantly but with clear spending priorities. The fact that he had proposed in February 1937 to borrow more than a quarter of the entire budget for defence over the next five years from a specially created loan, rather than increased taxation, is indicative of the precedence of economic stability. A plethora of conflicting interests within his Cabinet also added to his woes. A few weeks before assuming office he penned to his sister:

No-one is more convinced than I am of the necessity for rearmament and for speed in making ourselves safe. But the Services, very naturally, seeing how good the going is now and reflecting that the reaction is sure to follow, want to be 100% or 101% safe on everything.¹⁷⁰

The three Defence Ministers, of course, often led these demands but there was also pressure for mass rearmament emanating from within the Foreign Office. Vansittart was a constant thorn in Chamberlain's side. As well as comments like that above, he wrote a memo on 31 December 1936 lambasting 'the years the locusts hath eaten', bemoaning that 'we have begun the cure full late' and calling for a 'really impressive display of strength on our part'.¹⁷¹ Other Foreign Office figures shared Vansittart's concerns during Chamberlain's first year as Prime Minister, although perhaps not quite so vociferously. Oliver Harvey made little secret of his desire to see the pace of rearmament increased in early 1937.¹⁷² Eden himself advised the Cabinet in July that a demonstration of Britain's rearmament in the Mediterranean would be advantageous from the point of view of relations with Italy.¹⁷³ The attitude of Alexander Cadogan (who succeeded Vansittart as Permanent Under-Secretary in early 1938) is particularly illuminating as he demonstrated the dual approach to rearmament

that Chamberlain favoured. On 10 May 1937 he penned in a Foreign Office memo that 'our armaments must, of course, go on at all speed'.¹⁷⁴ Yet by 24 May he wrote in his diary of an impending Vansittart paper: 'I hope it won't be another in his usual German-scare style, simply urging rearmament and disclaiming the complete bankruptcy of our foreign policy'.¹⁷⁵ For Cadogan, like Chamberlain, rearmament was to be only one part of the strategy and not a substitute for it.

By 1937 the military experts were fully alive to the need to rearm and improve Britain's defences. To give just a couple of examples, shortly before Chamberlain assumed the premiership, the Air Raid Precautions Department of the Home Office had called for sweeping reforms to overcome the chaos in Britain's A.R.P. programme.¹⁷⁶ The Defence Plans Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, in close consultation with Lord Swinton, had issued a panicked warning in October 1937 that British aircraft production was inadequate and that they remained in 'a position of grave inferiority to Germany in effective air strength'.¹⁷⁷

The *Defence Expenditures in Future Years* paper, which was presented to the Cabinet on 22 December 1937 by Minister for the Coordination of Defence Thomas Inskip, was to have a major impact on rearmament policy for the remainder of Chamberlain's premiership. One important passage stated:

We must therefore confront our potential enemies with the risks of a long war, which they cannot face... It is true that the extent of our resources imposes limitations upon the size of the defence programmes which we are able to undertake... Seen in its true perspective, the maintenance of our economic stability would more accurately be described as an essential element in our defence strength: one which can properly be regarded as a fourth arm of defence, alongside the three defence Services, without which a purely military effort would be of no avail.¹⁷⁸

In neatly encapsulating what was to become known as the 'fourth arm of defence' thesis, this paper set down as policy a measured rearmament drive based upon the twin pillars of a long, defensive war, coupled with economic stability. Given strong support by Hore-Belisha and the influential military expert Sir Basil Liddell Hart, this theory advocated limited liability with the role and size of the British Expeditionary Force greatly curtailed. The idea was to be

strong enough to be able to survive the feared German 'knock-out blow' in the short term, and then rely on the perceived greater financial strength of the British Empire to win any war in the longer run.

This calculated gamble remained the strategy until the not long before war. As Chamberlain penned shortly before hostilities: 'You don't need offensive forces sufficient to win a smashing victory. What you want are defensive forces sufficiently strong to make it impossible for the other side to win except at such a cost as to make it not worth while'.¹⁷⁹ Ably assisted within the Treasury by his successor as Chancellor, Sir John Simon, and the Permanent Under-Secretary, Warren Fisher, Chamberlain held that economic strength should remain paramount over short-term rearmament. He took on those within the Foreign Office who advocated a rival approach, evidenced by Vansittart's replacement by Cadogan. Support from industry and important financial bodies outside the Government buttressed this line. These tended to favour a cautious appeasement strategy over a Churchillian call to arms. It was widely reported within the Government that the City of London, for example, generally backed concessions and vehemently opposed increased arms expenditure.¹⁸⁰

The comparatively radical theories of Economist John Maynard Keynes, a critic of the Government's rearmament programme in 1938 and 1939, were thus supported by many within the Foreign Office like Vansittart, but rejected by the Treasury leading lights. Keynes came to advocate mass rearmament (as well as a cap on borrowing from the Empire) as a way to stimulate the domestic economy and create jobs. Chamberlain and Fisher, however, favoured the more cautious approach of maintaining stability.¹⁸¹ Growing tensions between the Foreign Office and Treasury over defence policy came to a head at the end of the year when Chamberlain and Eden had a series of fierce rows over rearmament priorities.¹⁸² These were to contribute to the latter's forthcoming resignation.

The March 1938 *Anschluss* was to test Chamberlain's resolve on the issue of rearmament but reinforced the dual approach he favoured. Just a few weeks before the crisis, for example, he had written in his diary, 'our own armament programme continues to grow, and to pile up our financial commitments to a truly alarming extent', and this was indicative of his concerns about the necessities he had to undertake.¹⁸³ In face of this crisis, the Cabinet decided to cancel the rule that defence expenditure could not impinge upon normal trade - a

significant move given Chamberlain's priorities - and Halifax produced a memo for the Foreign Policy Committee calling for 'acceleration and intensification of our military preparations in every sphere, coupled with measures for the reorganisation of national life for war purposes'.¹⁸⁴ Defence Ministers like Hore-Belisha and Duff Cooper pressured Chamberlain and Simon to give them more resources at this time.¹⁸⁵ In the House of Commons on 24 March Chamberlain announced:

If Britain is to make a substantial contribution... she must be strongly armed for defence and for counter-offence... In the present circumstances acceleration of existing plans has become essential and, moreover, there must be an increase in some parts of the programme, especially in that of the R.A.F. and the anti-aircraft defences... Rearmament work must have the first priority in the nation's effort.¹⁸⁶

Despite these significant words, however, the Government did not embark upon a colossal rearmament effort of the kind demanded by Churchill or Vansittart but instead only moved production up through one or two gears. There would certainly be no military effort to try and defend Austria, or the obvious next target Czechoslovakia, and the Committee of Imperial Defence's frank assessment of German strength towards the end of the month seemed only to buttress the 'fourth arm of defence' strategy. For example, it found that 'the weak point in Germany's defensive position is that she cannot face the prospect of a long war with confidence'.¹⁸⁷ Chamberlain still found many supporters for his measured arms approach within the Cabinet and Foreign Office. In April 1938, Simon told his colleagues that a greatly accelerated rearmament programme of the kind advocated by Keynes was impossible 'unless we turned ourselves into a different kind of nation'.¹⁸⁸ Vansittart's successor Cadogan, meanwhile, noted in his diary that 'the parrot-cry of "rearmament" is a mere confession of the failure of our foreign policy'.¹⁸⁹ This emphasised the distance between the two camps on the issue - one seeing arms *and* appeasement as the best strategy, others calling for arms instead of appeasement as their preferred choice (and arms to a much greater extent).

Again, the Munich crisis spurred further rearmament efforts and increased calls by Chamberlain's critics within the ranks for much more to be done.

Munich, however provided a wake up call that the *Anschluss* failed to do, because Britain had come so close to the edge of war and its defensive weaknesses had been illuminated under a fierce spotlight. Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons on 5 October that, 'there has been an awakening on our own side'.¹⁹⁰ Just one day later he stated even more boldly, 'we must arm ourselves to the teeth'.¹⁹¹ Predictably, those within the Cabinet most keen on rearmament voiced their demands to make good the deficiencies so graphically demonstrated by the crisis. Samuel Hoare, for example, joined the Defence Ministers in calling for rapid A.R.P. improvements. General Pownall of the C.I.D. noted of Hoare in his diary on 24 October: 'he has not a thought in his head except anti-aircraft guns; he'd put in a million of them if he could manage it'.¹⁹² Within the Foreign Office, even the traditionally more restrained figures on the question of arms, like Strang and Jebb, called for an intensified rearmament drive in their post-Munich review of policy.¹⁹³ Even the cautious Cadogan felt that 'our vital first step... is to get on equal terms... or at least put our defences in order'.¹⁹⁴

Yet the Munich crisis also provided a quandary. Surely an intense arms drive now would run counter to the new mood signified by the Anglo-German declaration which accompanied the Agreement, and risk jeopardising the apparent successes of international appeasement? Viscount Cranborne attempted to address this issue in the House of Commons on 4 October by explaining to an audience, both inside the chamber and beyond, the finer subtleties of Chamberlain's policy: 'Appeasement is no alternative to rearmament, and conciliation is no alternative to firmness. They are complimentary. They must go hand in hand, because one is no use without the other'.¹⁹⁵

Munich hence witnessed the start of the Government's mass rearmament effort which saw the significant improvements in British strength during the last year before war, as already mentioned. However, Chamberlain was still concerned enough to tell his Cabinet on 3 October 1938 that he felt 'oppressed with the sense that the burden of rearmament might break our backs'.¹⁹⁶ This emphasises that economic concerns were still important to him and would retain a decisive influence on the pace of his rearmament efforts.

As early as 15 October 1938 Chamberlain wrote that, 'something will have to be done about national service'.¹⁹⁷ The issue of a national register as a

preliminary step towards this was debated within the Foreign Policy Committee in November. While Halifax, Hoare and Lord Runciman, the Lord President, all backed the compilation of such a list on 14 November, as well as military training schemes and the acceleration of the anti-aircraft defence programme, Chamberlain and Inskip were much more cautious.¹⁹⁸ Economics were again the decisive factor in slowing these improvements. While the Prime Minister 'was in favour of any acceleration that we could obtain', he also felt that he 'must couple it with the warning which the Federation of British Industries had given' in a meeting with Inskip earlier that morning.¹⁹⁹ The Federation contained representatives from leading industrial groups and had, according to Inskip, stressed the labour difficulties involved in speeding up the air defence programme. These included the costs for lodging allowances and extra wages needed for workers to complete the longer shifts required. According to Inskip: 'The effect of any such arrangements on cost would of course be devastating but if we were determined to go all out, to pay attractive wages and to work three shifts we could, in a comparatively short time, greatly increase production'.²⁰⁰ It was decided to delay a decision on this matter. Runciman also intimated that such measures of labour control, as well as the introduction of a national register, would be difficult to implement given the vehemence of Labour's opposition to Government foreign policy. He also advocated attempting to carry the trade unions with them in all they did.²⁰¹

Further evidence that Chamberlain still sought to protect the health of the economy, as well as resisting labour controls, even to the detriment of the defence programme and in face of Cabinet unrest, was found during the House of Commons debate on a Ministry of Supply on 17 November 1938. Again Inskip and the Prime Minister made the key contributions. Both stressed that much of industry opposed the establishment of such a body at this juncture which would impose authoritarian controls on their practices and only cause more delays and bureaucracy. The former, for example, noted that 'it would not be helpful, but would be definitely harmful' to the arms effort, while the latter felt it would only mean that 'you would now have two people to consult instead of one'.²⁰² The Prime Minister also stressed that a Ministry of Supply could never completely eradicate profiteering within the arms industry, something the Labour Party was particularly keen to address.²⁰³ Inskip went on to explain that

the rearmament programme had so far made only slow progress because of the technological complexities of the state-of-the-art weaponry being built, as well as years of inactivity in factories during the 1920s and early 1930s. 'Productive capacity was allowed to fall into arrears' during this time, he conceded.²⁰⁴

The January 1939 war scare obviously led to even more demands within the Government for an accelerated rearmament drive and for more efficient defensive preparations. A.R.P. spending was increased in this month and the Foreign Policy Committee considered organising black-out drills for areas of London.²⁰⁵ Still the advocates of mass rearmament urged much greater action on behalf of the Prime Minister. Vansittart announced his dissatisfaction with the limited liability formula and called for Britain's contribution to the defence of France and Belgium to be, 'let us say at least 20 divisions'.²⁰⁶ Hore-Belisha wrote to Inskip of his frustrations with the rearmament process at the end of the month: 'The great difficulty always has been the financial control. I don't blame the Treasury in the very least but it has slowed down everything, almost, that has been done'.²⁰⁷

Prompting the Government to authorise the establishment of both peace-time conscription and a Ministry of Supply in April 1939, the Prague Coup led to a dramatic acceleration in Chamberlain's rearmament policy. The Treasury shackles were removed from defence spending as the Prime Minister sought to couple arms with alliances in a last, desperate bid to deter Hitler from war. As such, and whereas in the past Chamberlain had sought keep his rearmament as low key as possible so as not to provoke Hitler or jeopardise appeasement, he now boldly flouted his defence programme in an attempt to scare the Dictators from making trouble. However, mass rearmament, conscription and a Ministry of Supply were all, he wrote privately in April 1939, 'designed not to wage war but to prevent it'.²⁰⁸ In late February 1939 Chamberlain had, according to Cadogan, considered making a speech to the effect of announcing: 'Come the three corners of the world in arms, and we shall shock them!', but rejected doing so for fear of provoking some new Nazi outrage.²⁰⁹ After Prague, however, his approach was different, as evidence by a statement in the House of Commons on 31 July 1939. Here he proudly announced that 'our defences are now indeed of a formidable character'.²¹⁰ In little over a month they would need to be.

(5) CONCLUSION

The issue of arms as an alternative to appeasement during the late 1930s is complex and multi-faceted. Not only were rearmament and arms limitation parts of Chamberlain's strategy itself, but they were also suggested by Government critics as policies to pursue in their own right. Disarmament had a huge number of advocates in the early 1930s, in politics, the press and among the wider population, and many remained into the Chamberlain period. The Prime Minister himself recognised the obvious attraction of a utopian world, free of all weapons, and in this sense he was a product of his era, of the 'never again' ethos attitude which dominated after the First World War. International events in the early to mid-1930s caused more and more people to realise that universal disarmament was a dream, a fading ideal for some far off day, made increasingly unlikely by the belligerence of Nazi Germany, to say nothing of Italy, Japan and the old Soviet fears. Many who opposed rearmament, especially from the political Left, also hoped that universal disarmament might one day come to pass, and this only serves to cloud the picture further. Opposition to rearmament and enthusiasm for *disarmament* were not always the same thing.

As time moved on, even the idealists realised that disarmament was an unviable peace policy in a rapidly rearming world. Hardly anyone spoke openly of total disarmament by 1939. The Government hence gave little consideration to it, though measures of arms limitation were envisaged as part of appeasement itself. This would only ever be a *quid pro quo* initiative, however, and Hitler's actions put pay to such dreams ever becoming reality - although the Government never gave up hope of concluding some arms limitation deal, especially in the air, as one a step on the way to a general settlement.

Advocates of intense rearmament as an alternative to Government policy were few in number in the mid-1930s, though there were one or two people (as well as some newspapers) who were greatly concerned at the rearmament of Nazi Germany in violation of the Versailles Treaty. Churchill is the obvious example of a rearmament advocate and indeed his foresight in speaking so early on this issue, and of warning of the dangers of Nazi Germany, brought him back from the wilderness into mainstream politics once more. Advocates of a vast

arms drive as an alternative to the heavily regulated rearmament of Chamberlain's appeasement tended to be largely from the Right of the political spectrum, although one or two Left and Centre-Left wing figures also came of board, though usually only if the rearmament was to be part of collective security. As time moved on, more and more people within politics and the press thought that rearmament should be carried out to a far greater extent and more quickly than the Government was doing, in an attempt to deter the Fascists from war. By mid to late 1938, wider issues like A.R.P. became talking points and measures to ready the nation for war, such as conscription of wealth and manpower or a Ministry of Supply, also had increasing numbers of supporters.

After Prague, almost everybody came to advocate intensive rearmament and a marshalling of the defences as part of the strategy to stop Hitler, although this was increasingly viewed less as a policy to avert war and more as a means to survive or win one. The press and public overwhelmingly came on board and the Government dramatically increased its arms production during 1939. One has to question the muddled thinking of the Opposition on this issue, constantly opposing Government measures and yet abusing its lack of progress later on from the sidelines. Even when Labour swung round to backing rearmament late in the day, it often voted against the specific measures proposed and hampered and frustrated Chamberlain's programme at every turn. Both Labour and the Liberals voted against the conscription bill in April 1939, for example.

Chamberlain's Government *did* rearm and rearmed hugely given the norms of inter-war Europe. It is an enduring myth, propagated by the *Guilty Men* school, that Chamberlain was always 'anti-arms', although it is fair to say that he carefully limited production until before Munich as a part of a delicate balancing act between economic stability and national defence.²¹¹ The thesis of a 'fourth arm of defence' came to recognise that both strands were important, but that longer-term financial power could be as much of a weapon as short-term rearmament. Nevertheless, there were many in the Government machine, especially Foreign Office figures like Vansittart (or the Defence Ministers for that matter) who felt that Chamberlain's balancing act was dangerously uneven. They constantly demanded he quicken the pace of rearmament as a means to make good the gap between Britain and Germany. As a consequence, fierce political infighting between the Treasury and Foreign Office on the question of

arms and defence priorities characterised most of Chamberlain's rule. It was only after Munich provided the spur for the Prime Minister to authorise rearmament in a democracy on a similar scale to that within a Dictatorship when such infighting diminished - although it never disappeared altogether.

A plethora of historians and Chamberlain's contemporaries, writing later on with the benefit of hindsight, asked why the National Government seemingly did so little in face of such an obvious threat. However, the finer intricacies of the 'fourth arm of defence' concept were little understood in the orthodox camp, dominated by the black and white Churchillian interpretation of events. A debt is owed to Feiling and the subsequent revisionists like Shay and Peden who have painted a much more complicated but realistic picture and offered a fairer assessment of Chamberlain's arms record. The recent works of Ruggiero and Levy indicate that the debate about the successes and limitations of this is alive and well and will doubtless go on for some time yet. As ever, there exists no settled historical consensus on the question just now.

It is easy to forget how economic stability was a priceless commodity when Chamberlain inherited the premiership, and most thought that rearming *en masse* might only provoke further hostility and similar action from the Dictators. It seemed a safer and less provocative plan to steer a middle course between doing just enough to ensure that Britain could survive an attack and maintaining an economy and society so rocked by war and the Depression in recent years. Chamberlain's original mandate was to save the economy, not to churn out weapons. Popular opinion was overwhelming against rearmament until late in the day - highlighted by the 1935 election victory - and Chamberlain feared a massive arms drive would turn Britain into a state beset with those problems it had endured in the immediate post-war era, or, worse, into a country well on the way to Fascism itself. The fear that an extensively rearming Britain would become more like the very countries it was preparing to oppose haunted the Government constantly. It also partially explains the reluctance of many to introduce conscription or labour control measures like a Ministry of Supply in peace time. The problem of how a democracy can ever compete with a Dictatorship on the issue of rearmament and labour mobilisation is enduring.

Not all of the reasons rearmament was slow in Britain in the late 1930s were Chamberlains' fault. Germany had a massive head start due to the nature of its

leadership and form of Government and two decades of relative inactivity in the sphere of rearmament, overwhelmingly supported by the British people, could not be quickly transformed into well-oiled machine. The underground roots had to be planted before the tree could shoot up. Nothing has been said as yet of the Ten Year Rule either, which operated in Government defence planning until the early 1930s and dictated arms spending and military strategy on the basis of no war being fought for the next ten years. This was only revoked in 1932 and so 1942 was the earliest date at which many in Britain anticipated war. Defence was planned this way for the majority of the 1930s. Incidentally, it is perhaps a historical irony that Churchill played such an important role in establishing this tenet as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the mid-1920s. Nor has Chamberlain's own personal contribution in rearmament been given enough credit. His was the driving force behind the decision to switch air spending priorities from bombers to fighters. The Spitfires and Hurricanes which won the Battle of Britain were built in the year's grace won between Munich and war and under his specific instruction. It is difficult to believe that a Churchill-led National Government would have constructed so many fighter planes in the years before war.

Was Chamberlain correct, then, to take the stop-start rearmament approach he did? What might have happened had he adopted a policy of massive rearmament or total disarmament instead of the strategy he pursued? One cannot deny that Chamberlain did just enough. Events prove that his vision of surviving the 'knockout blow' turned out to be eerily prescient as the developments of 1940 show. If his arms and defence policy, so linked to the notion of limited liability, may have contributed to French defeat, it probably allowed Britain to survive Operation Sea-lion and soldier on long enough for America's economic and material help to eventually swing the war in Allied favour. The fact that Nazi Germany adopted a lightening-quick, *Blitzkrieg* strategy in the early phases of the war would seem to suggest that British perceptions of German economic weakness and its inability to fight a long struggle (central, of course, to the 'fourth arm of defence' thesis) were broadly accurate.

Had Chamberlain adopted a pacific, total disarmament policy - which the vast majority of the Conservative Party never favoured even in the 1920s - the results would have been disastrous in the hothouse of 1930s Europe. Had he joined in a huge arms race with Germany, as Churchill and Vansittart suggested

he should have, Britain may have lost less lives in the early stages of the war that came, but it would almost certainly have made that conflict inevitable and this was never the case under appeasement. Furthermore, the lives saved in the first instance by being more heavily armed might have been dwarfed by the lives lost towards the end of the war, had the British economy been under greater strain, extending and undermining the war effort as a whole. And suppose the war had *not* come - which Chamberlain strove for - then Britain would have shifted billions of pounds into a needless rearmament effort and the country might have descended once again into severe Depression. Britain's economic position and world status after victory in the Second World War was bad enough as it was - one can only imagine the effects had the arms budget been bigger.

To accurately gauge whether the risky 'fourth arm of defence' strategy worked or not is impossible given the twists and intricacies of how the war actually developed. There is little doubt, however, that the arms Chamberlain sanctioned were sufficient for Britain to survive and the economy he maintained allowed the country enough credit to borrow from the Empire until American Lend-Lease entered the picture. Admittedly, it was a close run thing. Would rearming *en masse* have deterred Hitler from war? It may certainly have affected the timing of his assaults but it is doubtful that even a heavily armed Britain could have deterred Hitler from launching attacks in Central Europe - geographically remote from its tanks, planes and ships. Could a Britain with a huge arsenal have turned a tiger into a pussy cat anyway? Hitler declared war on both Russia and the United States during the conflict, irrespective of the vast resources and arms capacity these countries had. There seems little hope that a Britain as strong and determined as Germany was in 1939 - if that vision was at all possible given the differences in the type of states they were - would have deterred Hitler from war. Furthermore, rearming too early, as Levy has recently pointed out, might have only produced an outdated arsenal insufficiently suited to fight the war that came.

It seems likely that mass rearmament as an alternative to appeasement would have caused just as many problems and offered no better solutions, than the path that was actually taken. Things might have been a lot worse had the arms-economy fine balance that Chamberlain struck been unsettled significantly in any way.

1. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Commons*, vol.313, col.1243, 18 June 1936.
2. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1528, 26 March 1936.
3. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, col.1853, 5 Feb. 1936.
4. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, col.2011, 5 Feb. 1936.
5. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.3049, 9 April 1936.
6. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, col.1241, 18 June 1936.
7. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, col.1654, 18 June 1936. Labour had also opposed a similar bill on defence one year earlier in March 1935.
8. Oliver Harvey records in his diary that 'Dalton said he fully supported rearmament' as early as April 1937. See J. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-40* (London: Collins, 1970), p.27. For a detailed analysis of the role and views of Dalton, see D. M. Roberts, 'Hugh Dalton and the Labour Party in the 1930s', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kingston upon Thames (1978).
9. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, col.1654, cols 1707-14, 18 June 1936.
10. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.580, 4 March 1937.
11. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.647, 4 March 1937.
12. The Duchess of Atholl, meanwhile, on the same day, called for mass rearmament to begin immediately in order to send a strong message to the Fascists and gear up the arms industry to fire on all cylinders in two or three years hence. She concluded: 'I can imagine no better guarantee of peace for Europe than a Britain rearmed, united and resolute in the determination to use its arms in the cause of peace'. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.658, 4 March 1937.
13. Quoted, Robert Boothby, *I Fight to Live* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947), Feb. 1937, pp.141-2.
14. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, cols 1443-9, 18 Feb. 1937.
15. HC Deb 5s, vol.327, cols 133-4, 21 Oct. 1937.
16. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.64, 14 March 1938. Boothby also wrote to Chamberlain and called for the number of planes to be doubled. See Robert Boothby, Conservative MP, to Chamberlain, 12 March 1938, Neville Chamberlain Papers (NC), NC7/11/31/30, Special Collections Department, University of Birmingham (BU).
17. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.85, 14 March 1938. Amery had also been leading a campaign for army improvements and better service conditions for recruits for much of the previous year. See, for example, *Report of the Army League Committee*, 26 July 1937, AMEL 1/5/24, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Leo Amery (AMEL) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
18. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.127, 14 March 1938.
19. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1455, 24 March 1938. This idea shall be returned to again later when the creation of a Ministry of Supply was widely touted.
20. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Lords*, vol.108, col.450, 29 March 1938.
21. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 60-1, 14 March 1938.
22. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1419, 24 March 1938. Fred Bellenger, meanwhile, preceded his leader's comments a week or so earlier with the bold affirmation: 'I can support rearmament in its entirety... providing we face it on the correct terms'. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.100, 14 March 1938.

23. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, cols 131-2, 16 March 1938.
24. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, cols 135-7, 16 March 1938.
25. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 112-4, 14 March 1938.
26. B. Pimlott (ed.), *The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918-40, 1945-60* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1986), pp.229-32.
27. Robert Bernays, National Liberal MP, to L. Brereton, friend, 27 May 1938. Quoted, Nick Smart (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays, 1932-1939: An Insider's Account of the House of Commons* (London: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p.273 (my emphasis).
28. N. J. Crowson, 'The Conservative Party and the call for National Service, 1937-39: Compulsion versus Voluntarism', *Journal of Contemporary British History*, vol.9 (3), 1995, pp.507-28 (pp.514-6).
29. Quoted, Harold Macmillan, *The Winds of Change, 1914-39* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p.433.
30. Quoted, C. R. Attlee, *As it Happened* (London: Heinemann, 1954), p.509.
31. The Agreement limited the size of Germany's navy to 35% of that of Great Britain.
32. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, col.119, 24 Feb. 1936.
33. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, cols 212-3, 5 Feb. 1936.
34. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1463, 26 March 1936.
35. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1535, 26 March 1936. Labour peer Lord Strabolgi, meanwhile, claimed that universal disarmament was, 'the long-range policy which we should be working up to' in the House of Lords during April. HL Deb 5s, vol.100, col.576, 8 April 1936.
36. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, col.1695, 23 June 1936.
37. Sinclair did, however, concede the 'inescapable necessity' for increased rearmament on 17 February HC Deb 5s, vol.320, col.1235, 17 Feb. 1937
38. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.586, 4 March 1937.
39. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, col.1462, 18 Feb. 1937.
40. HC Deb 5s, vol.320, col.1501, 18 Feb. 1937.
41. HC Deb 5s, vol.321, col.235, 2 March 1937.
42. Labour Party, *Labour's Immediate Programme* (1937).
43. It also underlines how much Labour and the Liberals were keen to register their disapproval with the specifics of Chamberlain's foreign policy.
44. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, col.281, 22 Feb. 1938.
45. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1438, 24 March 1938.
46. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 1504-10, 24 March 1938. Viscount Cecil echoed this broad attack in the House of Lords a few days later, though this is not surprising given his position within the League of Nations Union at this time. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, cols 453-4, 29 March 1938.
47. Quoted, FO371/20704/C1588, 18 Feb. 1937, The National Archives (TNA). Foreign Office (FO) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
48. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 5 July 1938.
49. 'Reduction and limitation of armaments by international agreement' was one of the first resolutions adopted in December 1936 by the LNU Executive. Quoted, FO371/21240/W2920, Dec. 1936.

50. Quoted, 'Statement of Policy', 31 May 1938, Gilbert Murray papers, MS Gilbert Murray 232, fol. 214, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Gilbert Murray papers (MS Gilbert Murray) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
51. Murray to Mr N. de Garis Davies, Stockton constituent, 22 Sept. 1938, MS Gilbert Murray 233, fols 140-1.
52. Quoted, FO371/24029/W323, 8-10 Dec. 1938.
53. Communist Party, *Colonies, Mandates and Peace* (1936), p.15.
54. Communist Party, *Can Conscription Save Peace?* (1939), pp.1-17. Left wing publisher Victor Gollancz concurred, accusing Chamberlain of 'fastening a form of Fascism on this country' in a pamphlet widely disseminated that summer. Victor Gollancz, *Is Mr Chamberlain Saving Peace?* (1939), p.31.
55. *Glasgow Forward*, 18 Feb. 1938. Quoted, Conservative Research Department papers, CRD 1/78/2, fol. 114, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Conservative Research Department papers (CRD) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
56. J. L. Garvin, editor of the *Observer*, to Amery, 28 Sept. 1938, AMEL 2/1/28(1).
57. *Daily Express*, 9 March 1937.
58. *Daily Express*, 14 March 1938.
59. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 15 March 1938.
60. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Feb. 1937.
61. *Daily Herald*, 14 March 1938.
62. *News Chronicle*, 14-15 March 1938.
63. *News Chronicle*, 17 March 1938.
64. *News Chronicle*, 3 Oct. 1938.
65. *Daily Herald*, 3 Oct. 1938. Many pro-appeasement papers such as *The Times* also felt that the Munich Agreement warranted increased rearmament.
66. *Daily Herald*, 16 Feb. 1939.
67. *News Chronicle*, 18 March 1939.
68. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 Oct. 1938.
69. *News Chronicle*, 5 Oct. 1938.
70. Speech to the Winnipeg National Council of Education, 19 Sept. 1936. Quoted, AMEL 1/5/24.
71. Foreign Policy Committee Proceedings, 21 March 1938, CAB 27/623/FP(36)/27, The National Archives (TNA). Cabinet (CAB) papers are located at the National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
72. George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain, 1937-75*, vol.1 (1976), p.3 In November of this year, meanwhile, 62% of men said they would not even volunteer for service if war broke out. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.4. Cecil's 1935 'Peace Ballot' recorded 93% approval for international arms reduction. Quoted, Frank McDonough, 'Why Appeasement?', *Modern History Review*, 5 (4), 1994, pp.6-9 (p.7).
73. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.4.
74. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.10.
75. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.13.

76. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.17. A *Daily Mail* survey on 26 Oct. 1938, meanwhile, showed an exact 50-50 split between readers favouring the introduction of compulsory national service and the voluntary equivalent.
77. Bernays to L. Brereton, 21 Oct. 1938. Quoted, Nick Smart (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays*, p.377.
78. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 87-8, 3 Oct. 1938
79. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 372-3, 4 Oct. 1938.
80. N. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters, 1930-39* (London: Collins, 1966), p.366.
81. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 205-7, 4 Oct. 1938.
82. John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, vol.5, 1929-45* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), p.528.
83. Quoted, Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.643. He was shortly to lose the party whip for campaigning on the question of national service.
84. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.245, 4 Oct. 1938.
85. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.407, 5 Oct. 1938.
86. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, cols 1381-6, 4 Oct. 1938.
87. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.180, 4 Oct. 1938. Considering Morrison's earlier attack on the Government in 1935, this marked quite an about-turn. In a leaflet entitled *The Full Facts of the Czech Crisis*, published in November, the Labour Party - glossing over its own record on arms voting in recent years - attacked the Government once more for neglecting Britain's defences. Labour Party, *The Full Facts of the Czech Crisis* (1938), p.16.
88. HC Deb 5s, vol.341, cols 1130-45, 17 Nov. 1938.
89. He concluded with a demand for an enquiry into why Britain was in the state it was. HC Deb 5s, vol.341, col.1183, 17 Nov. 1938.
90. HC Deb 5s, vol.341, cols 1187-9, 17 Nov. 1938.
91. HC Deb 5s, vol.341, col.1121, 17 Nov. 1938. Earlier this month Herbert Morrison had called for a vote of censure against the Government for its inability to prepare the country adequately for war.
92. HC Deb 5s, vol.341, col.1098, 17 Nov. 1938.
93. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.466, 15 March 1939. His Conservative colleague Geoffrey Nicholson demanded 'some strong move, a move of intrinsic value and of psychological value' in the field of rearmament as a response to events.
100. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.510, 15 March 1939.
94. HC Deb 5s, vol.342, col.1068, 6 Dec. 1938.
95. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, cols 3118-9, 6 April 1939.
96. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.2510, 3 April 1939.
97. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.626, 13 April 1939. The latter, meanwhile, who is traditionally perceived as a vehement pro-appeaser but was actually now taking a firmer line, ominously announced that 'the shortage of our own military forces may be the greatest of the dangers we have to face'. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.621, 13 April 1939.
98. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, col.1847, 19 May 1939.
99. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, col.1812, 19 May 1939.
100. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, col.412, 12 June 1939. On 31 July 1939, when discussing his policy priorities, Sinclair stated that 'obviously the first step is our own rearmament'. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, col.1994, 31 July 1939.
101. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, col.2067, 31 July 1939.

102. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, cols 1381-6, 4 Oct. 1938.
103. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1400, 4 Oct. 1938. Just one day earlier, his colleague Lord Noel-Buxton announced that ‘the acid test of the new time to which the Prime Minister asks us to look is disarmament’. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1350, 3 Oct. 1938.
104. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1324, 3 Oct. 1938.
105. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.102, 3 Oct. 1938.
106. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.358, 5 Oct. 1938.
107. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.409, 5 Oct. 1938. Attlee rounded off the debate on 6 October with a warning that ‘armaments themselves are not a policy’ before making a renewed call for collective security as the best overall strategy. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.541, 6 Oct. 1938.
108. HC Deb 5s, vol.341, cols 1145-8, 17 Nov. 1938.
109. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, col.1826, 19 May 1939.
110. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, cols 391-5, 12 June 1939.
111. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, col.405, 12 June 1939. Even as late as 31 July 1939, Sinclair hoped that a conference could be called with Germany - though after an alliance with Russia was concluded - at which the ‘reduction and limitation of air armaments’ would be discussed. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, col.2005, 31 July 1939.
112. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.2545, 3 April 1939.
113. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.705, 19 April 1939.
114. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, col.372, 8 June 1939.
115. *Article on Neville Chamberlain* Quoted, DUFC 8/1/14, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University, pp.9-10. The papers of Alfred Duff Cooper (DUFC) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
116. CATO, *Guilty Men*, 21ST edn (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940), p.14.
117. CATO, *Guilty Men*, p.76.
118. CATO, *Guilty Men*, p.99.
119. W. S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1948), p.x.
120. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.16.
121. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.214.
122. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.382.
123. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.524.
124. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.574.
125. See, for example, Leo Amery, *My Political Life*, vol.3, *The Unforgiving Years* (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p.193, and Boothby, *I Fight to Live*, p.136.
126. Earl of Avon, *Facing the Dictators: The Eden Memoirs* (London: Cassell, 1962), p.318.
127. Francis Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers* (London: Heinemann, 1961), p.18.
128. Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers*, p.11.
129. Viscount Simon, *Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Viscount Simon* (London: Hutchinson, 1952), p.181.
130. Lord Home, *The Way the Wind Blows* (London: Collins, 1976), pp.62-3.
131. Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), p.340.

132. R. J. Minney (ed.), *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), p.33. This is a crucial point so often undervalued. Admiral Drax agreed that the British public wanted many things ahead of more arms. He wrote in 1966: 'We were spending more than any country in Europe on education, housing, social services, etc, and it was universally assumed that a reduction in this expenditure would not be tolerated by the people'. See *Account of the August 1939 Moscow Mission*, 4 Aug. 1966, DRAX 6/5, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University, p.1. The papers of Admiral Drax (DRAX) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre.
133. Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1946), p.312.
134. Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, p.316.
135. Robert P. Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp.285-6.
136. George Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-39* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979), p.184. This quote refers to Duff Cooper's famous description of the 'paralysing hand of the Treasury' shortly after his resignation in October 1938. Quoted, David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Arnold, 2001), p.174.
137. Quoted, Robert Caputi, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (London: London Associated University Press, 2000), p.146.
138. See, for example, Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), pp.xxiii-iv. While Kennedy was thinking more in terms of the Allies versus the Axis here - rather than Britain against Germany - he pointed out that the Empire was outstripping Germany in both aircraft and tank production by 1940, long before America entered the conflict. This was doubtless influenced by Chamberlain's steady marshalling of resources in the earlier period. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, p.441.
139. Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1895-1980* (London: Harper Collins, 1985), p.230.
140. J. P. D. Dunbabin, 'British Rearmament in the 1930s: A Chronology and Review', *Historical Journal*, vol.18 (3), 1975, pp.587-609 (pp.608-9).
141. Mark Harrison (ed.), *The Economics of World War Two: Six Great Powers in International Comparison* (1998), p.2. It has to be noted that little attention has traditionally been drawn to the military deficiencies of the Axis powers. For a refreshing exception, see P. Neville, *Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), p.127.
142. He also asserts that Labour and the trade unions would have enjoyed much more influence in a nation with a healthy arms industry, carrying out the mobilisation required in a vast rearmament effort. John Ruggiero, *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament: Pride, Prejudice, and Politics* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), p.8.
143. Ruggiero, *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament*, p.228.
144. Ruggiero, *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament*, p.223.
145. Scott Newton, *Profits of Peace: The Political Economy of Anglo-German Appeasement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.69.

146. James P. Levy, *Appeasement and Rearmament: Britain, 1936-1939* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Inc, 2006), p.xiv.
147. This was largely in vain, given Baldwin's famous election pledge. Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*, p.172.
148. Quoted, McDonough, 'Why Appeasement?', p.9.
149. Quoted, Newton, *Profits of Peace*, p.69.
150. Quoted, R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the coming of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p.283.
151. Quoted, Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, p.388.
152. Quoted, Newton, *Profits of Peace*, p.69.
153. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, 27 May 1939, p.292.
154. Quoted, McDonough, 'Why Appeasement?', p.9.
155. HC Deb 5s, vol.309, col.85, 24 Feb. 1936.
156. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, cols 52-64, 21 Feb. 1938.
157. Quoted, FO371/20705/C475, 18 Jan. 1937, The National Archives (TNA). Foreign Office (FO) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
158. Foreign Policy Committee Memoranda, 2 April 1937, CAB 27/626/FP(36)/23, The National Archives (TNA).
159. Chamberlain himself thought that an arrangement for the abolition of bomber aircraft 'would be an enormous advance and of incalculable value to all concerned'. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/22, 3 Feb. 1938, pp.14-17.
160. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/22, 3 Feb. 1938, p.15.
161. FO371/21659/C14471, 10 Oct. 1938.
162. Henderson to Chamberlain, 23 Feb. 1939, FO800/315/8.
163. Even this, however, the area where the most concrete Anglo-German discussions were held, was only seen as something to be realised at some point in the future.
164. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 8 Dec. 1935, NC18/1/940.
165. Quoted, 'England's Last Chance', *Naval Review*, 10 Oct. 1938, DRAX 2/18.
166. Quoted, McDonough, 'Why Appeasement?', p.9.
167. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, col.1830, 9 March 1936.
168. Cabinet Minutes, 25 April 1936. Quoted, VNST 1/2/35(3), Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Sir Robert Vansittart (VNST) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
169. Quoted, Ruggiero, *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament*, p.67.
170. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 25 April 1937, NC18/1/1003.
171. *The World Situation and British Rearmament*, 31 Dec. 1936, Quoted, VNST 1/1/19, pp.15-16. By November 1937 he was writing to Eden abusing much of the Cabinet for failing to see 'the real urgency and danger of our position' and demanding an increase in defending spending as 'cheaper than destruction'. FO371/21162/R7532, 1 Nov. 1937.
172. See, for example, a diary entry from Harvey on 27 February 1937 on this subject. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, 27 Feb. 1937, p.19.
173. Quoted, FO371/21160/R4854, 14 July 1937.
174. FO371/20735/C3621, 10 May 1937.

175. Diary, 24 May 1937, ACAD 1/6, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Alexander Cadogan (ACAD) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
176. See, for example, FO371/20701/C1586, 22 Feb. 1937.
177. Air Cabinet Papers, Oct. 1937. Quoted, SWIN 1/2/7, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Lord Swinton (SWIN) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. Admiral Drax also regularly contributed papers in this year calling for wholesale improvements in all rearmament areas. See, for example, 'Five Foreign Policies', *Naval Review*, 1937, DRAX 2/18.
178. Quoted, Caputi, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p.138.
179. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 23 July 1939, NC/18/1/1108.
180. See, for example, FO371/22341/R2184, 3 March 1938. Hence, the fierce opposition to rearmament from London-based financial groups like the Public Economy League during 1937 was used by Chamberlain to support his line. It asserted: 'On the eve of the Budget of 1937 taxpayers are confronted with the most alarming addition to Expenditure and Debt that has ever been proposed by a British Government in peace time... Unless a more stringent system of financial control can be established... and unless public opinion can be awakened to the dangers of extravagant and excessive taxation, the country will be brought to a state of grave economic peril, while our Government will be marching down the road to social unrest and to the political dangers which result from financial mischiefs and incompetent statesmanship'. Public Economy League, *Armaments and their Cost: High Taxes and High Prices* (1937), pp.1-13.
181. Newton, *Profits of Peace*, pp.70-2.
182. Harvey's diary, for example, claims that Eden was 'profoundly disturbed at the slowness and inadequacy of our rearmament programme' at this time. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, 7 Nov. 1938, p.416.
183. Quoted, Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, 19 Feb. 1938, p.322.
184. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/26, 18 March 1938, p.187.
185. Orme Sargent in the Foreign Office even advocated sending arms to those 'who urgently need them' in Europe. FO371/21674/C1866, 17 March 1938.
186. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 1401-10, 24 March 1938.
187. It also cited that country's lack of foodstuffs and raw material reserves as contributing factors. CAB 27/627/FP(36)/56, 21 March 1938, p.10.
188. Quoted, Newton, *Profits of Peace*, p.72. The inference here is that Britain would have to become more like Nazi Germany to protect itself against such powers.
189. D. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45* (London: Cassell, 1971), 25 April 1938, p.71.
190. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.348, 5 Oct. 1938.
191. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.551, 5 Oct. 1938.
192. Quoted, Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack in British Politics, 1932-39* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980), p.136. Pownall himself, meanwhile, like many of his colleagues among the Chiefs of Staff, called for intensified rearmament in the aftermath of the Agreement during October 1938. See, for example, Dunbabin, 'British Rearmament in the 1930s', p.602.
193. FO371/21659/C14471, (various dates) Oct. and Nov. 1938, pp.44-78.

194. FO371/21659/C14471, 14 Nov. 1938, p.43.
195. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.236, 4 Oct. 1938.
196. Quoted, Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*, p.176.
197. Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 15 Oct. 1938, NC/18/1/1072.
198. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/32, 14 Nov. 1938, pp.5-19.
199. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/32, 14 Nov. 1938, pp.15-16.
200. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/32, 14 Nov. 1938, p.18.
201. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/32, 14 Nov. 1938, p.19.
202. HC Deb 5s, vol.341, cols 1115-1203, 17 Nov. 1938.
203. HC Deb 5s, vol.341, cols 1198-1203, 17 Nov. 1938.
204. HC Deb 5s, vol.341, col.1105, 17 Nov. 1938.
205. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/35, 23 Jan. 1939, pp.18-20.
206. FO371/22922/C940, 30 Jan. 1939.
207. Hore-Belisha, Secretary of State for War, to Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Coordination of Defence, 30 Jan. 1939, HOBE 7/19, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Leslie Hore-Belisha (HOBE) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
208. Chamberlain to Major E. O. Kellett, Conservative candidate, Aston, 29 April, 1939, CRD 1/24/3.
209. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, 21 Feb. 1939, p.150.
210. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, col.2020, 31 July 1939.
211. He also found intensive rearmament personally repugnant, but he was not alone in this view.

SIX: WAR AND THE THREAT OF WAR

The Prime Minister has believed in addressing Herr Hitler through the language of sweet reasonableness. I believed that he was more open to the language of the mailed fist.¹ (Alfred Duff Cooper, 1938).

(1) INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most obvious alternative to appeasement in dealing with the menace of Nazi Germany in the late 1930s, certainly with the benefit of hindsight anyway, was war. Indeed, Chamberlain eventually abandoned his policy of reconciliation in favour of conflict in September 1939 - not soon enough, according to some critics. Though the flood of works which claimed that Hitler should have been strangled at the time of the Rhineland affair in March 1936, or resisted during the Czech crisis in the summer of 1938, were almost entirely retrospective, some of the Prime Minister's contemporaries urged a much tougher line during events themselves. It will be shown that the majority of this number tended to talk mostly in vague terms of 'standing firm', or more usually of the *threat* of military action as a means to deter the Dictators. However, the occasional individual, such as Duff Cooper, above, who resigned from the Cabinet in protest at the Munich Agreement, openly advocated combat itself as the best means to deal with the Fascists long before war actually came.

This chapter will discuss the origins and viability of war and the threat of war as alternatives to appeasement in the late 1930s. One of the more counterfactual analyses in this study, this chapter will constitute a comparatively unique departure in several ways. Notwithstanding the obvious fact that other chapters in this work have considered alternatives designed primarily to avert war - while the rival policy in this case was war itself - there will be some divergence from the norm here in terms of chapter structure and section length.

Given the massive unpopularity of war in Britain during the 1930s, as evidenced by the enthusiasm for Pacifist groups and their rhetoric, widespread opposition to rearmament, and the prevailing 'never again' sentiment that has already been discussed, the usual section at the end of each chapter addressing wider critics of alternatives will be very brief in this case. Similarly, as war

marked the effective final break with appeasement, and the ultimate alternative to it, the usual segment addressing the links between alternatives and Government policy will not be required here. The final viability section will therefore focus on the extent to which Chamberlain ever considered war and the reasons why he deemed it an unrealistic strategy, as well as shedding some light on the wider question of how successful a war might have been, had it been fought on an earlier occasion.

Given that the National Government might have sanctioned war in many instances during the late 1930s, special attention will be paid to the key year of 1938. This was the year when combat was considered most in the wake of the *Anschluss* and during the months of the Czech crisis which culminated in the Munich Agreement and the averting of hostilities at the eleventh hour. While the Abyssinian affair and the Rhineland crisis, in 1935 and 1936 respectively, have also been popularly presented as great, missed opportunities to have stopped the Fascists in their tracks early on, and thereby avoided the Second World War altogether, these events will be considered much more briefly. As well as being largely outside the main chronological scope of this study, almost nobody in Britain suggested a war for the Rhineland in the spring of 1936 and the Government gave it little serious thought. Moreover, it shall be demonstrated that Chamberlain and his Government gave much greater consideration to war at other times, when the public actually knew very little of the imminent threat. One such occasion was in January 1939, for example, when intelligence reports warned of a likely German invasion of the Low Countries. Although this chapter will obviously shed some light upon the many reasons for the Munich Agreement (and even, more broadly, for appeasement itself) it will seek to remain focussed on the key dates and specific issues involved, rather than generally explaining Chamberlain's policy.

This chapter will illuminate the many subtle nuances and ambiguities in the consideration of war as an alternative to appeasement - a necessary prerequisite in our understanding of the period. It shall be seen, for example, that very few Government critics ever actually mentioned the word 'war' overtly. Instead, they often couched statements in deliberately vague language about 'standing firm' or 'drawing a line'. The obvious links between this and previous chapters considering alliances and mass rearmament as alternatives to appeasement will

also be seen, as many who backed war only did so on the assumption that certain alliances would follow or on the proviso that the gaps in Britain's defences would be remedied. The more alert reader might also note the seeming contradiction in how even those advocates of the League of Nations option, who have traditionally been described as Pacifists, were also often among the first to call for war. In being the foremost advocates of military sanctions against states like Italy in 1935, for example, League of Nations Union members such as Viscount Cecil were effectively backing a form of limited conflict. This serves as a useful corrective to the widely held impression of League supporters being excessively timid during this period.

Finally, the varying gradients in the descent to war shall be exposed. For example, while alliances and mass rearmament have already been covered elsewhere, the threat of war shall be addressed regularly here as this was often suggested as a means to deter the Fascists or call Hitler's bluff over one foreign crisis or another. However, in raising the stakes for conflict, this did *not* always actually envisage the outbreak of war itself. Similarly, it shall be shown that guarantees and ultimatums also marked another step towards hostilities, without them actually beginning, as such moves clearly signalled when battle would occur. They would also mark a departure from the traditional Government policy of not wanting to place the final decision for war into another country's hands. Various methods of threatening war are included alongside war itself in order to clarify the position of many appeasement critics at the time. Many merely advocated talking loudly of war, as opposed to actually declaring it, and this is an important distinction which will be addressed.

Notwithstanding the structural divergences already identified, this chapter will begin, as usual, by charting the origins and development of the suggestion of war as an alternative to Chamberlain's policy. It will then consider the main historiography on the subject before closing with an assessment of how viable this option was perceived to be, given the conditions of the late 1930s.

(2) ORIGINS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

Despite the widespread revulsion for war still prevalent during the 1930s, events in the middle of this decade caused the first rumblings from a small band of political figures that a more robust response to the Fascist problem was required. Following on from Manchuria, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935 led to increased foreign policy discussion. One or two League of Nations supporters, such as Tory peers Viscount Cecil and Lord Lothian, mooted a League-approved Anglo-French blockade of the Suez Canal in late 1935 and early 1936, to cut supplies to the Italian army and force Mussolini to capitulate. Even some figures less enamoured with the League, such as National Liberal MP Robert Bernays, for example, felt privately that ‘if the British and French fleets took up their stations in front of the Suez Canal, Mussolini would be powerless’.² This strategy would, of course, run the risk of war with Italy.

The German remilitarisation of the Rhineland soon after in March 1936 broadened the debate still further. While Tory Robert Boothby did not feel this specific breach represented a *casus belli*, he was nevertheless convinced that a clear line would soon have to be drawn, after which force should be considered:

Are we at any stage going to take up a line and say, “We are not going to let this happen”? I am sure that moment will come when the whole of the people in this country unitedly will say to Germany, sooner or later, “You have got to stop”. I agree that the moment has not come now. Nobody feels that we can apply very strong measures against Germany because she has put troops into the Rhineland, but she must know at what point we intend to say “enough”.³

His colleague Harold Macmillan elaborated on this theme in a letter to *The Times* a few days later. He referred to the lessons of the First World War, where, it was popularly held, Britain’s reluctance to state its position clearly beforehand contributed to the eventual outbreak:

It is indeed quite evident that a previous clear commitment would have kept them out: If German statesmen had realised beforehand that a certain line of policy would involve the enmity of so vast a combination, that fatal policy would not have been followed, and there would have been no war. If, that is, it had been clear beforehand that the combatants would do what, at the last, they were obliged to do, they would not have had to do it.⁴

The Rhineland crisis brought the continuing Abyssinian conflict once more to the surface and led some politicians to speculate that the foreign adventures of the Dictators could be averted by the implied threat of conflict. On 6 April James Maxton of the Independent Labour Party stated in the House of Commons that, 'you are not going to get the League of Nations accepted by the Mussolinis or the Hitlers unless you are going to take armed force methods'.⁵ Labour peer Lord Strabolgi, meanwhile, speaking in the House of Lords a few days later, felt that 'we have to be prepared to resist force with force'.⁶ On the same day, Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander joined the small group advocating the strengthening of sanctions on Italy to encompass an oil embargo and forcible blockade of the Suez Canal:

Members will probably say "sanctions means war"... I venture to say that the precise opposite really represents the position. It is the belief that sanctions will *not* be applied or that they will be applied ineffectually or half-heartedly that means war.⁷

In June 1936, Conservative Viscount Wolmer summarised the policy of what was by now a small but growing body of MPs in the wake of the recent crises. Economic sanctions were not enough:

The lesson to be drawn surely is that if the League decides to act against individual nations it must come to an act of war. There must be the employment of the policeman's truncheon against the gangster. Policemen do not deal with gangsters by sitting outside the house and preventing the baker calling. They have to deal with them by more forcible and speedy methods.⁸

While almost nobody in Britain therefore advocated full-blown conflict over the Abyssinian or Rhineland debacles in 1935 and 1936 - though some were prepared to run the significant risk of it - the idea of using the threat of

force as a legitimate tool of diplomacy had been suggested by a few important individuals. While these figures came from across all parties and shades of political opinion, most supported the League of Nations.⁹ The following year or so was relatively quiet. By the time Chamberlain assumed the premiership in May 1937, therefore, only a small minority had considered war as an option to pursue instead of appeasement and most of these had only backed limited conflict under a League banner.

It was the March 1938 *Anschluss* that caused the next consideration of war, or the series of steps possibly leading to war, on any sizeable scale. This event brought the issue of Czechoslovakia to the fore, which eventually led to the imminent threat of war in the summer and the Munich Agreement in late September. Eden had resigned as Foreign Secretary just prior to the *Anschluss*, and had called for Britain, somewhat vaguely, to 'stand firm' against the Dictators, rather than to continue with appeasement.¹⁰ This move prompted a degree of retrospective hand-wringing in Parliament from figures like Archibald Sinclair, Winston Churchill and Robert Boothby over the chances Britain had lost. The first of these noted that, 'the one occasion when the ruthlessness of the Dictatorships was temporarily checked, was when we stood up to them in the Nyon Conference'.¹¹ The latter two, meanwhile, bemoaned the lack of action taken against Hitler over the Rhineland affair, two years earlier, which they now saw as a golden opportunity to check the Nazis which everyone had missed.¹²

These events in March 1938 and the subsequent increased tension of the summer brought a host of criticisms of appeasement, the vast majority of which were on the lines of Eden's demand for Britain to stand firm. Such calls could be heard consistently over coming months. On 14 March 1938, for example, Labour leader Clement Attlee announced in Commons that 'there must come a time when it is necessary to stand firm'.¹³ This was a point directly echoed by his colleague James Ede later in the same debate.¹⁴ As the crisis deepened in the summer, and many became emboldened by the dissipation of the May war scare, Sinclair joined the chorus on 4 July by claiming 'now is the time to stand firm'.¹⁵ His colleague Richard Acland used the same term just minutes later.¹⁶ Labour's Josiah Wedgwood, meanwhile, rounded bitterly on appeasement with a call for Britain, once again, to 'stand firm'.¹⁷

But what did this vague and catch-all term actually mean? War? Resistance to Hitler's likely next move in the form of an ultimatum? A guarantee of Czechoslovakia, which, if broken, would result in conflict? The strategy was rarely fully explained, as if many MPs felt that a tougher line was needed but did not know what precise form it should take or what the results might be; hoping the *Führer* would back down in face of increasing firmness but unsure what to do if he did not. It also seems that many were almost afraid of uttering the word 'war' itself - for almost none did - lest it trigger the unwanted explosion, or see them denounced as warmongers by their political opponents and the general public. Very few had concrete and clearly stated policies in the spring and summer of 1938, though a small number of those mentioned above did talk of a Czech guarantee as the move by which the policy of 'standing firm' could be measured. While not in itself advocating war, this would lay down a marker for conflict to Germany and the wider world. James Ede, for example, coupled his above call to stand firm with a demand for a guarantee and he was joined in this during the same debate by figures like Vyvyan Adams from the Conservatives and the Liberal Geoffrey Mander.¹⁸ Tory firebrand Leo Amery, meanwhile, put it in stark terms:

Let us either make up our minds that we must stand out, and let everybody concerned know it or let us say to France, Czechoslovakia and Germany, in language plain and simple as we can make it, that the first German soldier or aeroplane to cross the Czechoslovakian border will bring the whole might of this country against Germany.¹⁹

A couple of days later Viscount Cecil, often presented by many as a Pacifist, echoed this line in the House of Lords by claiming the only sound policy was to say to Hitler: 'If you insist on breaking the pie then you must find as your opponents the whole force of the British Empire'.²⁰ Churchill famously joined the ranks a week or so later, coupling his rallying cry for a Grand Alliance with calls for an Anglo-French statement of intent to stand by the Czechs if they were attacked.²¹ National Labour's Harold Nicolson, meanwhile, was convinced the Dictators were deliberately taking key strategic points one after another and favoured striking back. 'We should occupy Minorca', he penned in his diary on 29 March, although he did not want to provoke a general

conflagration.²² Along with the many figures in the vague 'stand firm' camp, therefore, this much smaller but growing number of MPs, while not wanting to go to war, advocated clearly drawing the battle lines for all to see.

The Czech crisis culminated in the events of September 1938 when Chamberlain flew to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden, Godesberg, and Munich and the world lurched precariously towards war. As the crisis reached its height and conflict looked increasingly likely, a large number of politicians voiced their concerns and a small portion of these positively contemplated military action. Churchill wrote to Lord Halifax on 31 August, for example, urging limited fleet movements in the Channel to act as a deterrent to Germany.²³ By the end of the following month, when Hitler's territorial demands at the Godesberg meeting made war seemingly inevitable, this had evolved into the notion of a full naval blockade. It had the support of small band of MPs who gathered at Churchill's flat on 26 September. According to Harold Nicolson, a member of this group, the ranks included Sinclair, Macmillan, Boothby, Cecil and Amery, among other Tory rebels, all pressing for 'the immediate application of war measures'.²⁴

Despite the immediate and widespread relief that war had been averted following the Munich Agreement, there were many who were unhappy with the outcome. Josiah Wedgwood wrote to Duff Cooper just after the latter's resignation, for example, congratulating him on his principled stand. He added, 'I do dislike belonging to a race of clucking old hens and damned cowards'.²⁵ But the size of the opposition to the settlement - the final Parliamentary vote on Munich was 366 in favour and 144 against - could hardly be viewed as national backing for war or the threat of war as an alternative. Many of the fiercest critics instead lapsed into the old, vague 'stand firm' terminology so popular during the spring. Only a handful of speakers openly and clearly favoured conflict instead of appeasement and the majority of these felt that only the *threat* of war would be needed to make Hitler back down - that is, they rarely advocated war itself but rather a line running the risk of it. This is an important distinction, as whether or not they were prepared to make good their threats if Hitler did not blink first was another question entirely.

Duff Cooper's resignation speech was unequivocal, however. On 3 October he opened the debate by claiming that Britain should have opposed Hitler and taken a strong position: 'Our first duty was to make it plain exactly where we

stood and what we would do'. He went on: 'All information pointed to the fact that Germany was preparing for war at the end of September, and all recommendations agreed that the one way in which it could have been prevented was by Great Britain making a firm stand and stating that she would be *in* that war'. After making his comment about 'the mailed fist' which opens this chapter he concluded that, unlike his former colleagues, 'I can still walk about the world with my head erect'.²⁶ Churchill also felt that effectively threatening war in the form of a Czech guarantee would have saved peace and honour, although he admitted he could not be certain of this. 'Between submission and immediate war there was this third alternative', he stated on 5 October and then claimed that the Czechs would have been able to make better terms with Germany alone, in battle, than they got at Munich.²⁷ Harold Nicolson boomed, 'we ought to have resisted. We still ought to resist' on the same day, and yet then undermined his case by claiming: 'I should have almost been prepared to go to the point of war to demonstrate, I hope, that it was not possible for one country in Europe to crush another'.²⁸ How he could resist Hitler by *almost* going to war is unclear, although one presumes he must have felt the German Chancellor would have backed down first. A day earlier Wedgwood hinted that he may have fought had he been in Chamberlain's position: 'To my mind the freedom of this country, the democracy of the world, is something that is worth fighting for'.²⁹

On the first day of the debate in the House of Lords, Viscount Cecil echoed one of Duff Cooper's main points, claiming that it was 'utterly unthinkable' that Hitler would have gone to war over the Sudetenland in face of an Anglo-French resistance.³⁰ Lord Strabolgi, meanwhile, agreed with Churchill's broad assessment that a war before the Munich Agreement might well have been won by the Czechs - although they would have needed assistance in the long-term: 'I believe the best military opinion maintains that the Czechs could have held out on those magnificent fortifications which they are now surrendering as part of this "peace with honour" for about four months'.³¹

Despite widespread ignorance about the true state of Britain's military preparedness, a small group within the anti-Munich camp felt that resisting Germany would have been the right policy. They would fight if they had to, but most were convinced Hitler would have backed down at the last moment. It is interesting to note that many within this group only abstained from the

Parliamentary division on Munich (Duff Cooper and Churchill, most strikingly) and did not vote against the Government's policy. On the face of it this would suggest that while they could not bring themselves to support appeasement they did not oppose the settlement either - clearly at odds with their public pronouncements. Party loyalties no doubt played an important role here as many of the abstainers were Conservatives and could not easily criticise Chamberlain. Harold Nicolson, however, claimed in his diary on 6 October 1938 that dissatisfaction and regret within Tory ranks was much higher than was popularly voiced: 'The House breaks up with the Tories yelling to keep their spirits up. But they know that Chamberlain has put us in a ghastly position and that we ought to have been prepared to go to war and smash Hitler'.³²

Wider Advocates: Other Groups, Press and Public Opinion

This section will briefly summarise what other groups, the principal newspapers and the British public had to say in favour of going to war in the late 1930s. The League of Nations Union has already been addressed briefly and provides something of a dichotomy, in enthusiastically backing military sanctions against Italy in 1936 and yet also being, for the most part, what Ceadel might term a 'Pacifist' movement (see Chapter One). It also favoured a hard line over the Czech crisis, as Cecil's above quote has shown. His colleague in the front ranks, Gilbert Murray, agreed and felt that the threat of war would have been enough to pacify the situation without recourse to a humiliating settlement. On 7 October 1938 he penned, 'I believe that if we had told Hitler months ago not "that we very likely would be drawn in", but that we certainly would fight together with France and Russia, he would have drawn back'.³³ Surprisingly, some Pacifists also took a similar line. The International Peace Campaign produced a leaflet in September 1938, for example, at the height of the crisis, vowing that war could be avoided by the clear *threat* of war: 'The tragedy of the Great War of 1914 was that if those who went to war with Germany had been able to say beforehand that they would resist her, the war might have been avoided'.³⁴ That these groups, with such a clear loathing for conflict, could advocate such a risky

strategy suggests that they were very confident Hitler was bluffing. Chamberlain did not share this view, as we shall see.

The main national press was, it is no surprise, hostile to war for the vast majority of the decade, although some of those most critical of appeasement did advocate increasing firmness in view of the Fascist march. While examples of papers adopting the vague 'stand firm' language so popular in the wake of the *Anschluss* and Munich settlement are legion, less common are those clearly advocating war or the threat of war at this time. The *News Chronicle* was one of the most militant British papers and on 14 March 1938 advocated a Czech guarantee and collective security as its response to the *Anschluss*: 'Only one thing will make Hitler pause - his own weapon, the threat of force... What should Britain do? Declare solemnly, and now, before all the world, that if Czechoslovakia is invaded, and France goes to her aid, Britain will be found by their side'.³⁵ In response to the Munich Agreement the *Chronicle* backed the principled stand of the recently departed First Lord of the Admiralty:

We believe Mr Duff Cooper was right. We have ourselves been urging for months past that British policy should be stated in unmistakable language. Had that been done earlier, Czechoslovakia would have been saved, Britain would have been spared the gnawing anxiety of these last days, and war would still have been averted.³⁶

The Czech crisis also led to increasing concerns in private from influential press figures. For example, while the *Observer* was generally pro-appeasement and warmly welcomed Chamberlain's success at Munich, its editor J. L. Garvin nevertheless wrote to Amery on 27 September that, while loathing war, he was 'a "thus far..." man in everything'. Recommending a massive arms drive he concluded, 'when fighting must be (as it may have to be a little later if not now) I like not only a war for honour but a war to win'.³⁷

The March 1939 Prague Coup caused much wider condemnation of Nazi Germany and expressions of greater firmness on behalf of many papers. The *Daily Telegraph*, for example, opined that 'only the threat of a counter-offensive... can deter a Dictator with the will towards aggression' on 17 March 1939.³⁸ A day earlier, even the pro-appeasement *Times* was moved to state 'there is nothing left for moral debate in this crude and brutal act of oppression

and suppression'.³⁹ However, it favoured the introduction of war measures in Britain, such as vast rearmament and the pursuit of alliances, rather than a declaration of war itself.

Some of the general public also felt that war or the threat of war was required when tensions were at their height. To give just a couple of examples from one paper on one day, 'J. E. J.' from Richmond wrote to the *Daily Herald* just after the *Anschluss* to state that, 'British statesmanship is bankrupt if it cannot say now to Hitler, "So far and no further" '. Meanwhile, Paul Ingham from Birmingham wrote, 'it is just August 1914 all over again... For heaven's sake let's tell Hitler where we stand now, instead of leaving it till it is too late'.⁴⁰

The Czech crisis and resulting Munich Agreement also, of course, brought many instances of the public seriously contemplating war. Mass Observation records numerous colourful examples of such statements from interviewees in the London borough of 'Metrop' as tensions reached their peak in late September. On 26 September, when Hitler threatened force within days unless his demands for the Sudetenland were met, the majority of responses were understandably bellicose:

(Man of 30) Yes I am prepared to go and fight. Hitler has gone too bloody far this time. He needs teaching a lesson...

(Man of 24) I don't want to fight but I will go... Hitler is a big braggart... We can still call his bluff. All my pals are war-minded.⁴¹

Gallup Poll data, however, seems to suggest that the general public only really considered war to any great extent after the Munich settlement. For example, in October 1938, 78% of those questioned claimed they would rather fight than hand over colonies to Germany.⁴² A slightly smaller but still very sizeable portion of 76% felt that Britain should stand by its guarantee to Poland in July of the following year (with only 13% against), although the Prague Coup had occurred by this point and the Russian negotiations were well underway.⁴³ There was also greater faith in the country's defences. It is not surprising that the country became more militant as war loomed nearer and, indeed, many leading politicians now followed suit.

Late Political Advocates: Parliament, Parties and Key Individuals

The Prague Coup seemed to give rise to a general feeling in Britain that war was on its way. In the House of Commons on 15 March 1939, for example, Labour's Hugh Dalton asked the Government whether 'a barrier will be drawn', whether 'it shall be said to the totalitarian states, "Thus far, but no further"?'⁴⁴ In the House of Lords a few days later, the Liberal Marquess of Crewe, a former ambassador, raged against Hitler's betrayal and demanded that Britain be joined with those countries prepared to resist Germany, 'if necessary to any forcible extent'.⁴⁵ Even the Archbishop of Canterbury, who claimed that war was 'indescribably odious', went on to say that, 'we are convinced that there are some things that are more sacred even than peace, and that these things must be defended'.⁴⁶

Buoyed by the Prime Minister's tougher policy as represented by the Polish Guarantee at the end of this month, politicians increasingly talked of strategies to prepare for and win a future conflict, rather than how to prevent it. Again, this transcended party lines. Tory peers Lord Lothian and Viscount Astor both gave very similar speeches on 13 April 1939, advocating 'superior power' as the only answer to the Nazi menace.⁴⁷ National Labour's Harold Nicolson, meanwhile, noted privately in his diary at the end of the month: 'I can now see no alternative between early war upon a false issue or the abandonment of the whole of Europe to Nazi domination'.⁴⁸

By the summer of 1939 almost every politician backed the Government's Peace Front policy and hoped that the prospect of a two front war with Britain and France to the West and Russia to the East would deter Hitler from any new step, or defeat him if he took it. Europe was not the only recommended sphere of conflict, however. Viscount Cecil, for example, called for Britain to join the Chinese struggle against Japan in June: 'We ought to do everything to assist China to drive back the Japanese invasion from her shores'.⁴⁹ By late July the mood in Parliament was positively bellicose. 'We cannot afford any more appeasement', declared Josiah Wedgwood, 'we are determined to stand firm, whatever comes of it'.⁵⁰

That Parliament was overwhelmingly in favour of war when it eventually came is without doubt. Indeed, it was the furious mood of the House of Commons at the repeated delays in enacting the Anglo-Polish Alliance on 2 September 1939 that dictated the timing of the final declaration - although wider factors had caused the initial hold-up. This outburst in the chamber left Chamberlain, according to one witness, 'as white as a sheet', and convinced him that his Government would fall unless he announced war the next morning.⁵¹

(3) HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historical debate on the viability of war as an alternative to appeasement has been substantial and long-running. Many historians who have written about the origins of the Second World War or, more specifically, the Munich Agreement, have made at least some passing reference to what might have been had Chamberlain taken the other path. This section will therefore look at only the most important works in this field to identify how the debate now stands, a necessary prerequisite before any new assessment of viability can be made.

Those in the orthodox historical camp, who of course lived through the events they later discussed, were determined to find out whether or not war might have been avoided, or won at a lesser cost, if fought on an earlier occasion and on different terms. Churchill, whose *The Gathering Storm* dominated the post-war literature, was convinced that the Abyssinian and Rhineland crises were opportunities lost to put the Dictators in their place early on and thereby divert the course of history: 'If ever there was an opportunity of striking a decisive blow in a generous course with the minimum of risk, it was here and now' he wrote of events in Africa in October 1935.⁵² It was the Czech crisis, however, which offered Churchill the most ammunition with which to attack his predecessor. Albeit with a hindsight that Chamberlain could never enjoy, he wrote of the Munich Agreement, 'there is no merit in putting off a war for a year if, when it comes, it is a far worse war or one much harder to win'.⁵³ He then devoted large sections of his work to the question of whether a war would have been better for Britain had it been fought in September 1938 rather than in September 1939. The cold-shouldering of the Soviets at Munich was, for Churchill, a fatal error which alienated an ally that would have swung the balance decisively in the Allied favour during a September 1938 war.⁵⁴ Churchill believed that the year 'saved' by the Agreement was no such thing, an irrelevance because Germany also rearmed during this period and maintained its predominance over Britain. While acknowledging the leaps and bounds made by Chamberlain in the aircraft position during this year's grace, the Allies lost the assistance of the Czech army, the huge Skoda munitions works, a large portion of some 3.5 million potential Sudeten soldiers and workers, and freed up

substantial German forces through the Munich settlement.⁵⁵ All in all, for Churchill, Britain entered the war worse off in 1939 than it would have been had it fought alongside the Czechs one year earlier.

A host of likeminded contemporaries rallied to Churchill's flag and aligned themselves with the great man. While admitting that 'there was not one man in a thousand in the country at that time prepared to take physical action with France against a German reoccupation of the Rhineland', Eden, now Earl of Avon, felt in retrospect that Britain and France should have called Hitler to order at this time.⁵⁶ Duff Cooper agreed: 'In the light of after-events, a light that is always denied to us, this was undoubtedly the moment when Great Britain and France should have taken a firm line and insisted upon withdrawal... Germany was not ready for war and had no allies'.⁵⁷ Duff Cooper was also keen to justify his own resignation at the time of the Munich Agreement, claiming that a stand on this issue would have led to Allied victory in 1938 or rebellion in the Nazi camp:

I thought I was right then. I know it now. Every fact of which we were ignorant at the time and that has come to light since, such as the inadequacy of German preparations and the deep discontent and even conspiracy of the German Generals against Hitler, has confirmed the view that I took.⁵⁸

Harold Macmillan and Robert Boothby held similar views to Churchill with regards to the Rhineland affair, the latter of whom claimed to have felt that war was the best response at the time itself and that France was only let down by a hesitant Britain.⁵⁹ Macmillan, meanwhile, thought the main reluctance was on the French part, but that both they and the British should have considered a counter-occupation of the Saar as a possible response in order to convince Germany to leave without the need for conflict.⁶⁰ In a long and detailed analysis, Macmillan conceded that the Chiefs of Staff had no confidence in the military position at any stage during 1938 and that France was weak and Russia an uncertain quantity. However, for Macmillan, a war in 1938 with the Czechs as British allies would have been a two-front war for Germany against a well-armed and determined foe, all of which would have significantly hampered Hitler's capability to attack Britain from the air, which he found so easy to do in the summer of 1940.⁶¹ He concluded: 'At the time... I thought we ought to have

fought at Munich. Since then, after study of much that has been written on both sides, I see no reason to change this view'.⁶²

The 'both sides' Macmillan referred to was created by the stoic defence of Chamberlain's strategy launched by some of his contemporaries who maintained that appeasement was the best option. Lord Halifax and Sir John Simon both still agreed with the action taken at the time of the Munich settlement, although they felt in hindsight that the Rhineland affair was a missed opportunity.⁶³ Of September 1938, Halifax observed the British people were not ready for war either, whereas they certainly were one year later:

When war did come a year later it found a country and Commonwealth wholly united within itself, convinced to the foundations of soul and conscience that every conceivable effort had been made to find the way of sparing the ordeal of war, and that no alternative remained. That was the big thing that Chamberlain did.⁶⁴

Simon, meanwhile, rounded on the folly of those who would have gambled with peace at the time of Munich when it was well known that the country was weak:

There are critics who, after the event, are disposed to say that Britain should at that moment have "called Hitler's bluff". However attractive in retrospect, this is not a wise course to adopt unless you are sure that you are really dealing with a mere bluffer, or that, if he persists, there is ready, there and then, an adequate, united force which will go to all lengths to deal with him.⁶⁵

He maintained that the year gained by Munich was preferable to a war at this time as it allowed Britain the space to repair the air force, which was to be so essential, despite the fact that Germany was also rearming. He concluded that the cause as well as the military position was far from certain in 1938:

Then what could Chamberlain do, other than what Chamberlain did? Threaten to declare war forthwith, when the *casus belli* arose out of a claim to adjust a boundary which had worked injustice and to rescue people of German race who were suffering under an alien jurisdiction? There is no ground whatever for imagining that this would either have rescued Czechoslovakia or led to a united front.⁶⁶

A few other contemporaries also took a sympathetic view of Chamberlain's policy in 1938, while admitting that the Rhineland affair was an opportunity missed to have fought and defeated Hitler early on.⁶⁷ Viscount Templewood observed that there was nothing Britain could do to stop Czechoslovakia being defeated by Germany in 1938, not just because of the arms position but by simple fact of geography, defence priorities and chronic British overstretch.⁶⁸ Perhaps more interesting, however, are his observations on the Abyssinian debacle. Keen to legitimise the important role he took during events themselves, he asserted that it was the wiser course *not* to fight a war with Italy at this time. The Government was not to know then that the Stresa Front could never be revived and having Italy as a potential ally against Germany would far outweigh the benefits of fighting a costly war against Mussolini, when few other League members were also keen.⁶⁹ Lord Vansittart concurred. Rarely a defender of appeasement himself, he nevertheless rounded on the overly simplistic Churchillian version of history with regards to the missed opportunities of 1935 and 1936:

He said that "we could have fought Italy with a minimum of risk". Yes, if one could exclude the German war, and he could not. Failure to fight, he wrote, "played a part in leading to an infinitely more terrible war". And if a few easy targets had been torpedoed at Alexandria we should have lost it. I still think Winston was mistaken. Germany *might* have been deterred if every valid member of the League had attacked Italy. Of such action there was never the least prospect... If we had attacked alone and suffered loss, Germany would not have been deterred but incited.⁷⁰

Lord Balfour, who was second in command at the Air Ministry during these years, announced boldly 'thank God for Munich' in his memoirs and rounded on Churchill's claims that a 1938 war would have been better for the Allies. Chamberlain's successor would have been 'the bravest hero of a defeated country' according to Balfour.⁷¹ Finally, for the orthodox period, Lord Strang gave a detailed analysis of the decision not to go to war in September 1938 in his memoirs *Home and Abroad*. Notwithstanding his scepticism about the intention of the Soviets to stand by the Czechs in September 1938 (or, for that matter, their military capabilities) he nevertheless admitted that they should not have been cold-shouldered at Munich. Whereas it was on the side of Germany in

September 1939, there was still a chance Russia may have fought for the Allies one year earlier. Against this, however, he asserted that the will of the British people was undoubtedly for war in 1939 whereas it was greatly divided a year earlier.⁷² Acknowledging the vast difficulties in speculating about what might have been, Strang concluded that whereas Allied victory in the Second World War was certain, it could never be so in any hypothetical 1938 conflict: 'In the war that followed the aggressor was indeed destroyed... It is still difficult to assert with any confidence, nor equally can it be disproved, that these results would have been achieved if we had gone to war in 1938'.⁷³

Many professional historians have carried on these arguments through the intervening years, right up to the present day. The period between the late 1960s to the mid-1980s was dominated by pro-Chamberlain revisionist interpretations of the interwar period. These tended to support the policy he adopted, given the circumstances of the day and the absence of contemporary hindsight, rather than presenting war as a realistic alternative in 1938. There is, however, a general, though usually unspoken, consensus that the Rhineland affair represented the last, missed opportunity to have stopped Hitler in his tracks, although all agree that this policy had no support at the time.

Keith Robbins' influential work *Munich 1938*, published to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Agreement, tended to support the assertion that Chamberlain sanctioned little more than a tragic necessity. Noting the widespread belief at the time that Czechoslovakia would fall quickly in any war of 1938, as well as the fact that self-determination was clearly being denied to many Sudetendeutsch prior to the settlement, Robbins pointed out that the majority opinion among the Chiefs of Staff was firmly for appeasement during that time. He also attacked the hypocrisy of those like Churchill who could so blithely advocate war, or the real risk of war, in 1938 and yet at the same time talk most loudly of all about the weak state of Britain's armed forces.⁷⁴ He concluded:

Munich was the necessary purgatory through which Englishmen had to pass before the nation could emerge united in 1939... In September 1939 there were few conscientious objectors. Britain went to war in September 1939 rather than 1938, not merely because there was greater confidence in the armaments position but because it was agreed that enough was enough.⁷⁵

Arnold Offner, writing across the Atlantic at the same time, concurred that Chamberlain's decision not to try and call Hitler's bluff in 1938 could only be understood properly in light of the mood of the era:

The disillusioning aftermath of the First World War... the effect of the Great Depression, the popular desire to resolve difficulties peacefully... the widespread legitimate revulsion in the face of warfare's horrors, and belief that at least some of Germany's grievances were real and demands just.⁷⁶

But it was not all plain sailing. Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, for example, produced a book in 1972 which brushed aside many of these claims and instead breathed new life into the old Churchillian line. Despite conceding that Britain was not ready for war in 1938, they pointed out that neither was Germany. Moreover, the small but efficient Czech army, fighting for its very survival, would have given a good account of itself if it was supported and not betrayed by Britain and France. Earning a year's peace for Britain, they continued, Munich lost the war for Europe. They concluded with the observation that many of the tanks and weapons which lay waste to France in 1940 were Czech built, in the lands transferred to the Reich as part of the settlement.⁷⁷

Brian Bond agreed with this general line. In his 1980 *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* he asserted that if only the Prime Minister had committed himself to sending an Expeditionary Force to Europe in the late 1930s the whole balance of power on the Continent would have shifted in the Allied favour.⁷⁸ The Czech crisis may have never occurred. Furthermore, the failure of France to stand by the Czechs at Munich 'tilted the strategic balance decisively against her' in terms of the pace of rearmament, morale and manpower: 'France lost the support of some 34 Czech divisions much of whose equipment, including tanks would soon be taken over by Germany'.⁷⁹

Robert Kee's 1988 *Munich: The Eleventh Hour* was far more balanced and seemed to imply that Chamberlain had probably made the correct decision fifty years earlier. Putting aside the wider question of his responsibility to protect Czechoslovakia and France, Kee noted that the majority of the Spitfires and Hurricanes which won the Battle of Britain were built in the year he secured at Munich. Moreover, the fact that Hitler broke the terms of the Agreement less

than six months later demonstrated to the world where the real blame for war lay. Long-term American neutrality was certain in any war of 1938, whereas Britain had Roosevelt's sympathy in the conflict that erupted a year later.⁸⁰

Kee's work perhaps marked the end of the revisionist flurry as a succession of hard-hitting books published over the next decade restated some of the older arguments and brought the balance back in favour of the anti-Chamberlain camp. One year later, for example, in 1989, Richard Lamb claimed:

The archives reveal Munich was a disaster, because Hitler completely bluffed Chamberlain over Germany's military potential. If the British and the French had declared war on Germany in October 1938 Russia would have joined them and the result would have been an ignominious defeat for Germany.⁸¹

Williamson Murray's various recent works on the military balance of power in Europe during the 1930s, written over several years, have provided a compelling case that Britain should have fought in 1938 rather than 1939. Building on the speculations of his 1984 *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-39: The Path to Ruin*, which claimed that a stand at Munich, 'would have led to the eventual collapse of the Nazi regime at considerably less cost than the war that broke out the following September', Murray devoted an entire article to this specific question in 2002.⁸² In this detailed counterfactual exploration of how such a war might have developed, Murray asserted that Germany was substantially weaker in all areas in 1938 than 1939 and that the losses it would have taken in defeating the Czechs would have significantly hampered it in any ensuing struggle against France and, possibly, Poland (and perhaps also Russia, Yugoslavia and Romania).

Moreover, the economic effects on Germany of a war in 1938, with no Russian ally to provide it with supplies as it had done in 1939 and 1940, would have seriously undermined the whole Nazi war effort. As a result, Murray predicts that Germany would have fought itself to a virtual standstill against the French - akin to the stalemate in the Great War - after taking heavy losses against Czechoslovakia in late 1938. It would therefore have been in a diminished position to attack Britain from the air. All in all, he concludes, there would have been no Battle of Britain and even the Holocaust itself might have

been prevented.⁸³ To his credit, however, Murray recognises the obvious doubts over the certainty of such speculative conjecture.

The conclusions of a few other very recent works on this question suggest that the debate over war as an alternative to appeasement will continue into the future. Roy Denman, for example, concedes that Britain missed its chance to stop Hitler during the 1936 Rhineland affair, as later admitted by the *Führer* himself (see below), but contends that Hitler was not bluffing during the Czech crisis two years later. Nor, he insists, would eventual Allied victory in a 1938 war against a state that had just absorbed the vast resources of Austria have been certain. Similarly, he claims that the German generals were in no position to launch a serious coup attempt against Hitler in 1938, about which Duff Cooper speculated, all of which made Chamberlain's decision for peace at Munich a sound and sensible policy.⁸⁴ David Dutton observes that the time secured by the settlement - 'in all circumstances of September 1938, the best outcome that Chamberlain or anyone else could have hoped for' - resulted in British fighter command being almost ten times stronger by the outbreak of war.⁸⁵ Moreover, he suggests that even had Churchill been in charge during the Czech crisis, he would probably have sanctioned a Munich-style Agreement himself, as evidenced by the cynical way he bought off Stalin with Poland and other spheres of influence at Yalta in 1945.⁸⁶

The recent, although tentative, work of Hugh Ragsdale - building upon that of historians like Igor Lukes - suggests that Stalin would never have sanctioned a war to defend Czechoslovakia in 1938 and that, even if he did, the prospects of reasonable support were 'not very bright'. The weakness of the Red Army, Soviet transport and infrastructure chaos, as well as Polish and Romanian reluctance to allow Russian troops across their soil all would have contributed.⁸⁷ Finally, just last year in 2006, appeasement expert James Levy suggested that a September 1938 war 'may well have unfolded the same way September 1939 did', given that Hungary was effectively on Germany's side at the time of Munich and Poland was reluctant to join either camp, to say nothing of Russian weakness and the lack of enthusiasm for war in Britain and France.⁸⁸ Doubtless the argument will take more twists and a final consensus may never be reached.

(4) VIABILITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO APPEASEMENT

The Extent to which the Government Considered the Alternative as Viable

This section will examine the extent to which Chamberlain considered war as a viable alternative to appeasement throughout the late 1930s. It has already been seen that many people, both active in events at the time and writing retrospectively, felt that the Abyssinian and Rhineland affairs were missed opportunities to have stopped the Fascists in their tracks. Some important individuals within the Government, however, thought a chance had been missed to strangle the Nazis at birth, even before these crises took place. As Foreign Secretary in January 1935 Sir John Simon wrote privately that a war to stop German rearmament now was 'impossible and too late', suggesting that he felt any move against Hitler should have come earlier on.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, others felt that the Dictators could be checked in their adventures with allies and a steady resolve. When Mussolini amassed troops on the Abyssinian border in the summer of 1935, Chamberlain himself speculated about a possible solution:

If we and France together determined that we could take any measures necessary to stop him, we could do so, and quite easily. We could, for example, stop the passage of his supplies through the Suez Canal if the French would play their part.⁹⁰

Chamberlain's initial response to the invasion suggests that he could be one of the most bellicose figures within the Government, if and when he felt it was required. On 29 November 1935, for example, he recorded the course of that day's Cabinet discussions in his diary: 'I replied that if anyone else would give the lead, well and good, but in the last resort, if necessary, we ought to give the lead ourselves... We should press Laval to tell Mussolini that, if he attacked us, France would at once come to our assistance'.⁹¹

The remilitarisation of the Rhineland was not felt by the Government to be a *casus belli*. While Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons that 'this is a time when people should keep cool heads', the Ambassador in Berlin at the time, Sir Eric Phipps, told the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that the zone

represented the sort of post-war animosity he was keen to get away from in resettling continental affairs:⁹²

Though Germany might be defeated in a fresh resort to arms today, the position in Europe would be no better. There would be no guarantee that the French would prove more reasonable at a fresh Peace Conference than they were at Versailles... The seeds of fresh wars would be planted in a new peace treaty. Proof of this is the fact that France twenty years after the war is still clamouring for a one-sided demilitarised zone.⁹³

Despite Eden's warnings in the House of Commons that the integrity of France and Belgium were of vital importance to Britain on 26 March 1936, he gave no lead to his French counterparts with regard to military action during the crisis. Instead, he tended to look for the opportunities that could be gained from the situation for better Anglo-German relations - that is, he broadly favoured moves towards appeasement at this time over those towards conflict.

The Abyssinian hostilities were progressing in Italy's favour by the spring of 1936 and, again, several important figures within the foreign policy making elite contemplated action against Mussolini in lieu of a more robust League response. Vansittart summarised the debate within the Foreign Office in April:

I do not think it is of any use at this stage to write of closing the Suez Canal. It is highly improbable that the Government would consider it, and a very serious situation would certainly be created for the Government in the country, particularly if the war (for of course it would lead to war) did not go well in the opening stages. There would have been a great deal to be said for closing the Canal at the very beginning of this unhappy affair. But we were not in a position to do so and even now it would mean taking great risks.⁹⁴

The Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, meanwhile, seemed to indicate on 26 July 1936 that Britain would not be involved in *any* conflict in the near future when he let slip to a delegation of senior Tories, 'if there is any fighting in Europe to be done I should like to see the Bolsheviks and Nazis doing it'.⁹⁵ Britain remained committed to non-intervention during the Spanish Civil War which had just begun and served as an additional complication. This position illustrates the Government view on conflict at this time. In his review of foreign policy at

the end of 1936, Vansittart indicated that the broad aim was to avoid war for the next two years at least, while rearmament and the defensive position improved:

It may be generally said that the year 1939 is the first in which we shall be able to breathe with even comparative relief, although much will yet remain to be taken in hand... Germany is admittedly not yet ready for war on a considerable scale, either militarily, economically or politically... To the Foreign Office therefore falls the task of holding the situation at least till 1939.⁹⁶

When Chamberlain assumed the premiership in May 1937, therefore, his Government had briefly considered, but rejected, the idea of war on several occasions. The new vigour with which he approached foreign policy, in contrast to that of his predecessor, led some within the Foreign Office to openly call for a tougher line with regards to the Dictators. Following conversations with his Austrian counterpart, Eden penned a memo on 15 May, for example, suggesting that ‘a word of warning as to our interests in Central Europe expressed in general terms would suffice to hold German ambitions in check’.⁹⁷

Echoing Vansittart’s earlier reference to ‘holding the situation until 1939’, the Military Attaché to the British Embassy in Berlin, General Hotblack, stated in September 1937 that only by 1940 would German soldiers ‘be in a position to carry out offensive action outside their frontiers’, and again only then, ‘provided they are not faced with the prospect of a long war’.⁹⁸ This gave many within the Government the impression that all-out war would not need to be contemplated, as a worst case scenario, for a good while yet. The Ten Year Rule was still in effect at this time. Nevertheless, the success of the Nyon Conference later that month seemed to convince Eden that appeasement should give way to firmness in any future dealings with the Fascists. In a Foreign Office memo produced shortly after the convention, he elaborated on his ever more militant line:

There are those who say that at all costs we must avoid being brought into opposition with Germany, Japan and Italy. This is certainly true, but it is not true that the best way to avoid such a state of affairs is continually to retreat before all three of them. To do so is to invite them to converge upon us. In any retreat there must on occasion be a counter attack and the correct method of counter attack is to do so against the weaker member of the three in overwhelming force. That is the lesson of Nyon.⁹⁹

Oliver Harvey even suggested in his diary that Eden was contemplating a temporary occupation of Minorca at this time, as a way to bring Mussolini to heel, before any measures of appeasement should be considered.¹⁰⁰

In November 1937, Laurence Collier, head of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, agreed that it was impossible to 'fight all three robbers at once... (though that is what is likely to come if the aggressors think we will always give way to them)', but instead advocated 'a state of armed truce based upon a balance of power'.¹⁰¹ He did not favour any 'counter attack' or occupations. This policy won out over the Eden line by the turn of the year. More cautious voices within the Foreign Office like Vansittart's successor Alexander Cadogan urged restraint upon the Prime Minister. He noted in his diary on 20 November, for example, that it was 'no good blustering unless we are sure we can carry out our threats'.¹⁰²

A key Chiefs of Staff report of 8 December 1937 announced, 'we cannot foresee the time when our defence forces will be strong enough to safeguard our territory, trade and vital interests against Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously' and this serves as one of the most concise statements of why appeasement was favoured over war for the majority of Chamberlain's rule.¹⁰³ The report clearly had a deep effect in Government. Eden, for example, adopted a much more cautious tone in the House of Commons just before Christmas when asked whether he favoured placing military sanctions on Japan in view of its occupation of China: 'I say deliberately that nobody could contemplate any action of that kind in the Far East unless they are convinced that they have overwhelming force to back their policy'.¹⁰⁴ The cold facts of the day weighed heavily here. Britain was too vulnerable and its commitments too numerous to be sending an armada on dangerous adventures away from home waters.

The events following the *Anschluss* in March 1938, which culminated in the Munich Agreement in September, led to perhaps the most serious contemplation of war by the Government until the final declaration itself. Initial responses to Hitler's latest coup were firm. Days before the German troops marched into Austria, Vansittart warned that 'we are incurring an enormous responsibility in not speaking to Hitler a great deal more firmly and explicitly that we have yet done in this matter... If he is not checked... he may carry himself and everyone else into disaster'.¹⁰⁵ Vansittart's influence had admittedly declined since being

replaced by Cadogan as head of the Foreign Office. Just a few days after the *Anschluss*, figures like Oliver Harvey joined him in calling for a guarantee of Czechoslovakia as the best means to flag the point when Britain would go to war.¹⁰⁶ Chamberlain himself, meanwhile, conceded in a letter to his sister, ‘it is perfectly evident, surely, now that force is the only argument Germany understands’.¹⁰⁷ However, even more militant figures like Vansittart did not think the *Anschluss* itself was a reason to declare war on Germany. Cadogan recalled in his diary on 11 March, for example:

Van has been like a cat on hot bricks, but H[alifax] doesn’t care. I had it out with Van. I said, “It’s easy to be brave in speech: Will you fight?” He said, “No”. I said, “Then what’s it all about? To me it seems a most cowardly thing to do to urge a small man to fight a big man if you won’t help the former”.¹⁰⁸

Halifax himself announced in the House of Lords on 16 March 1938 that ‘nothing short of war can put back the clock, and statesmen of the League are not prepared to go to war on this issue’, which seemingly ruled out military action in response to events.¹⁰⁹ The Foreign Policy Committee met over several days in the middle of the month to discuss future policy and ruled out a guarantee of Czechoslovakia at this time. On 18 March Chamberlain observed, ‘that the more one studied the map of Central Europe the more hopeless was the idea that any effective help could be swiftly brought to Czechoslovakia in an emergency... We are in no position from the armament point of view to enter such a war’.¹¹⁰ In a detailed memo circulated at this meeting, Halifax pointed out that any new military commitment made to Czechoslovakia or France would ‘involve considerable risk in that there would be an element of bluff on our side’. Moreover, while such a move ‘might considerably reduce the chances of war, in that it might prove to be an effective deterrent to German action’, it could, instead, ‘increase our chance of being involved in war earlier rather than later, since... it might encourage France to take action in defence of Czechoslovakia... as a direct challenge to Herr Hitler’.¹¹¹

A detailed Chiefs of Staff report produced on 21 March 1938 only reinforced the Committee’s decision. It concluded: ‘We can do nothing to prevent the dog getting the bone, and we have no means of making him give it

up'.¹¹² Accordingly, Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons on 24 March and ruled out a guarantee, although the severity of events caused him to add an ominous general warning:

There are certain vital interests of this country for which...we should fight - for the defence of British territories and the communications which are vital to our national existence.... for our liberty and the right to live our lives according to the standards which our national character have prescribed for us... Where peace and war are concerned, legal obligations are not alone involved, and, if war broke out, it would be unlikely to be confined to those who have assumed such obligations. It would be quite impossible to say where it would end and what Governments would become involved.¹¹³

Despite ruling out a military guarantee, Chamberlain had nevertheless made a clear statement about which interests Britain considered worth fighting a war over and hinted that any coming conflict would also involve his country. This marked an important development in his foreign policy.

Tensions increased during that summer. Harvey speculated in a letter to Halifax that possible British involvement against Italian forces fighting in the Spanish Civil War might cause Mussolini to 'behave as he did over Nyon... by effectively withdrawing'. On the other hand, however, he admitted that it might just cause him to 'go off the deep end'.¹¹⁴ Accordingly, Britain kept out. The primary focus at this time remained on the future of Czechoslovakia. Halifax conceded to Neville Henderson on 5 August 1938 that, 'I have always felt that to fight a war for one, two or three years to protect or recreate something that you know you could not directly protect, and probably could never recreate, did not make sense'.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, Vansittart warned just a few days later that one of his intelligence contacts in Germany had told him that *only* standing firm and threatening war would deter Hitler from taking all of Czechoslovakia in the next few weeks.¹¹⁶ Assailed on both sides by such contradictory reports, Chamberlain contemplated what action to take. Seemingly moving towards a firm stand, he told his Cabinet on 30 August that 'many people in this country and in Germany took the view that if we made it clear now that, if Germany used force, we should come in on the side of Czechoslovakia, there would be no war'.¹¹⁷

The Chiefs of Staff and other military experts continued to supply the Cabinet with information as the crisis deepened. While Basil Liddell-Hart wrote

in an article in early September that 'it is doubtful whether the Germans are capable of conquering Czechoslovakia as a whole unless they were free to concentrate the bulk of their forces against her - which would hardly be practicable unless the French were neutralised', this was clearly a minority opinion, as has been shown.¹¹⁸ Prominent airmen were also convinced of Germany's predominance. Sir Eric Phipps, now based in Paris, wrote to the Foreign Office on 13 September 1938, for example, with an account of how Colonel Lindbergh had returned from a tour of German bases, 'horrified at the overwhelming strength of Germany in the air and the terrible weakness of all other powers'.¹¹⁹ This sort of information weighed heavily upon Chamberlain's mind in early September and, with a remarkable degree of foresight as to the historical debate about his reputation, he elaborated on his thoughts in a letter to his sister. British military weakness proved to be the crux of the matter - as evidenced, perhaps, by the last line:

I fully realise that if eventually things go wrong, and the aggression takes place, there will be many, including Winston, who will say that the British Government must bare its responsibility and that if only they had had the courage to tell Hitler now that if he used force we should at once declare war, that would have stopped him... But I am satisfied that we should be wrong to allow the most vital decision as to peace or war, pass out of our own hands into those of the leader of another country and a lunatic at that... You should never menace unless you are in the position to carry out your threats.¹²⁰

Space does not permit a full discussion of the details of the protracted and complex events of late September 1938, but Britain essentially came so close to war because of Hitler's about turn represented by the infamous 'Godesberg Memorandum', presented to Chamberlain during the latter's second visit to Germany on 23 September. After the Prime Minister's dramatic first flight to see Hitler at Berchtesgaden on 15 September, the Cabinet, including Duff Cooper, had agreed to the principle of ceding areas of the Sudetenland to Germany in order to avoid war and grant self-determination for the Sudetendeutsch. Following meetings with the French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier and Bonnet, an Anglo-French proposal to this effect was delivered to the Czechs on 19 September and reluctantly accepted two days later, after Britain and France made it clear they would not help resist a German attack.

Chamberlain then met Hitler at Godesberg intending to announce Czech consent to the territorial transfers - the timescale of which he proposed to be decided by an international commission - only for the *Führer* to announce that delay was no longer possible and a solution must be found either by agreement or by force before 1 October. After several days digesting this dramatic new turn, the majority of the Cabinet, led by Halifax, overrode Chamberlain's decision to accept the Godesberg terms on 25 September 1938. Duff Cooper, Hore-Belisha and Oliver Stanley were among the chief dissenters. Horace Wilson, Chamberlain's special adviser, was accordingly deputed to meet Hitler and deliver news of the British rejection. A day later the German Chancellor announced to him that their countries would be at war within days unless the transfer took place immediately. This was only averted at the eleventh hour by Hitler's acceptance, under pressure from Mussolini, of Chamberlain's final plea for a new meeting to avert war. This was held at Munich. In the days before the conference took place trenches were dug in British parks and gardens, gas masks were issued and the fleet was mobilised. Chamberlain, though horrified, accepted that war would be imminent unless he could secure a late reprieve.

There is little doubt that Hitler's unreasonable new demands at Godesberg, when agreement to his terms from the Berchtesgaden meeting had been conceded, was the vital deciding factor in causing large numbers of the Cabinet to settle on war as an alternative to appeasement, in defiance of their Prime Minister's wishes. On 30 August 1938, for example, Hore-Belisha wrote in his diary, 'I was against any threat being made that we would declare war if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia' and he voted with his Cabinet colleagues to accept the Sudetenland transfer on 17 September.¹²¹ By 24 September, however, despite conceding that war now would be 'like a man attacking a tiger before he has loaded his gun', he wrote, 'it is quite clear Hitler only understands one argument... Why should we not display the might we possess? Why should we not mobilise the fleet?'¹²² The Godesberg Memorandum had been delivered in the interim. The Government's reluctant decision for war in late September - perhaps 'acceptance' might be a better term - was a 'bottom up' process too, with Chamberlain pressured to reject the Memorandum by Halifax and the Cabinet, and Halifax in turn being stiffened by Cadogan in the Foreign Office.

Ardently pro-appeasement since assuming his post, as has been demonstrated, Cadogan nevertheless recorded in his diary on 24 September 1938:

I was completely horrified - he [Chamberlain] was quite calmly for total surrender... Ye Gods!... Pray God there will be a revolt... Drove Halifax home and gave him a bit of my mind... I know we and they are in no condition to fight: but I'd rather be beat than dishonoured.¹²³

Halifax chided Cadogan the next morning for giving him 'a sleepless night' in convincing him that war was preferable to shame and humiliation.¹²⁴

The National Government therefore accepted that war was necessary during the last days of September 1938, but it was Chamberlain's determination that appeasement should win through which averted hostilities so late in the day. At Munich, Britain and France pledged to guarantee the new Czech borders, a move heavily criticised by Chamberlain's opponents and later swept under the carpet by the Prime Minister himself. Despite being part of the peace settlement, this can be seen as marking another step towards war - given his earlier comments about not wanting the final decision to pass out of his hands into those of another country. Duff Cooper, of course, resigned in protest at the Agreement, claiming that the final settlement differed little in character or content from the Godesberg terms.

Reviewing foreign policy after the Munich Agreement, Cadogan noted that, while he did not advocate fighting Germany in the near future, a tougher line was clearly needed. In his diary on 7 November 1938 he stated that 'the only alternatives are (A) Fight Germany (B) Continue to do nothing. The former, I suspect, would lead to disaster, the latter has proved to lead nowhere else'.¹²⁵ The Nazi orchestrated Berlin pogrom of *Kristallnacht* a few days later dented the new mood of optimism in Anglo-German relations gripping many after the Munich Agreement. Discussing potential responses in the Foreign Policy Committee on 14 November 1938, Halifax speculated that 'it was possible that a resolute attitude on our part, backed by a display of strength, might discourage the extremists in Germany and encourage the moderates'. Thomas Inskip, however spoke for everyone present when he stated that 'the one thing that clearly we could not do was go to war on this issue'.¹²⁶

In December Chamberlain addressed the Foreign Press Association and explained the decisions he took at Munich:

It seemed to me that only two alternatives were open to us. One was to make up our minds that war was inevitable and to throw the whole energies of the country into preparation for it. The other was to make a prolonged and determined effort to eradicate the possible causes of war and to try out the methods of personal contact and discussion... There are some who sincerely believe that the first course was the one we should have taken. I believe that in this country they are a small minority... We should rather remember what was the alternative which the Munich Agreement averted.¹²⁷

He went on to give a valuable insight into some of his personal motives for pursuing appeasement. The death of his favourite cousin Norman during the First World War had devastated him and his next point gave some flavour of his deep loathing for conflict:

War today differs fundamentally from all the wars of the past inasmuch as its first and most numerous victims are not the professional fighters, but the civilian population, the workman and the clerk, the housewife and, most horrible of all, the children... It leaves behind a trail of loss and suffering... Such consequences ought never to be incurred unless we can be satisfied and our people are satisfied that every honourable alternative has been tried and found impossible.¹²⁸

The January 1939 war scare was again to test this resolve when rumours came in from several intelligence sources that Germany was about to launch an imminent assault on the Low Countries. On 17 January Cadogan claimed in a memo that it was 'vital that we should do what we can to resist a German invasion of Holland', something Lord Strang had also mooted a day earlier.¹²⁹ The Foreign Policy Committee met on 23 January and decided upon immediate military conversations with France, Holland and Belgium, while also agreeing to share the information with America. Chamberlain was initially keen to remind his colleagues of the weakness of the British Expeditionary Force as a result of pursuing the limited liability defensive formula over recent years: 'Whatever might eventually transpire, it must be clear that at the outset there could be, in fact, no possibility of Britain landing a large army on the Continent'.

However, Halifax suggested making a statement about the integrity of the Low Countries and the Dominions Secretary Malcolm MacDonald felt that, 'even if there was very little that we could do in a military sense to save Holland from invasion, he thought we should have to intervene'.¹³⁰

Accordingly, when the Committee met on 26 January 1939, and despite the warnings of the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Cyril Newall, that 'we could do little or nothing to prevent Holland being overrun', all present decided that Britain must fight if Holland was invaded. Halifax announced that 'failure on our part to intervene would undermine our position in the world and would only mean that at some later stage we should have to face the same struggle with Germany with fewer friends and in far worse circumstances'. The minutes record that 'the Prime Minister said that this was also his position'.¹³¹ Once again this intelligence turned out to be flawed and no invasion attempt was launched until well over a year later during the war itself. However, the Government had resolved for war had an offensive by Germany been launched at this time.

It is clear that events over the last few months had woken the Chamberlain Government to the necessity for a real consideration of full-scale war against Germany on several occasions. Halifax had certainly taken a much firmer position in wake of the Munich Agreement, described by him much later as a 'horrible and wretched business, but the lesser of two evils'.¹³² Oliver Harvey recorded in his diary on 17 February 1939, for example:

He is almost unrecognisable from the Halifax of a year ago. He says bluntly "no more Munich for me" and I am sure he is convinced that now we are stronger we must stand firm. He felt in September that we were not strong enough to risk fighting unless it was absolutely vital to us - and that the Czech issue was not vital.¹³³

Indeed, this seems to be one of the biggest differences between Chamberlain and his senior colleagues in the last six months of peace. Many of the latter came to view war as unavoidable, whereas the Prime Minister himself refused to do so. Just after the Prague Coup he penned to his sister: 'As always, I want to gain time, for I never accept the view that war is inevitable'.¹³⁴

This event, in March 1939, marked another decisive shift in Chamberlain's foreign policy - moving closer towards war than appeasement - in that he now

pursued alliances and rearmament with vigour and all but abandoned the idea of concessions to the Fascists. On 20 March 1939 Cadogan wrote in his diary, 'I am afraid that we have reached the crossroads'. He continued, 'I always said that... if Hitler proceeded to gobble up other nationalities, that would be the time to call "halt!" That time has come... But of course we are not ready (nor ever shall be)'.¹³⁵ On 27 March Halifax told the Foreign Policy Committee that, while there was no way in which France and Britain could prevent Poland from being overrun, he favoured going to war over doing nothing.¹³⁶ The Polish Guarantee emerged as a compromise from these discussions and was announced on 31 March 1939. Criticised by opponents at the time for making little military sense, especially without Soviet assistance, Cadogan later described it as Chamberlain's attempt to make 'a signpost for himself', the real value of which lay less in the quality of aid Britain and France could render and more in the deterrence factor it might give.¹³⁷ In contrast to the guarantee of Czechoslovakia made at Munich, which Britain evaded on the technicality that that country had broken up from within, Chamberlain intended the Polish Guarantee to remove his own hesitance from the picture and make the final decision for war a matter of course, in the event of further Nazi action.

In April Greece and Romania were offered guarantees and tentative conversations towards an alliance with the Soviets began shortly after. As has been shown in Chapter Four, one of the main reasons the Soviet alliance was never concluded was because the British feared it would only provoke Hitler into war. Halifax's statement in the Foreign Policy Committee on 5 May 1939, which occasioned Chamberlain's agreement, demonstrates that he had not yet given up complete hope that conflict could be avoided: 'If war was certain he would not care who helped him: But if there were a five percent chance of peace, he did not wish to jeopardise it by associating with a country in whom he had no confidence'.¹³⁸

Halifax had announced in the House of Lords a few weeks earlier that the idea of a 'preventative war' would never find a place in British policy: 'Not only would it be the extreme of folly, not only would it lack any colour of morality, but it would be entirely foreign to the whole trend of British thought'.¹³⁹ Indeed, the Foreign Secretary now made a series of pronouncements on foreign affairs over the coming months which demonstrated the increasingly bellicose nature of

the Government's Peace Front deterrence strategy. However, there was often a carrot dangled for Hitler as well as a stick waved. On 8 June 1939, for example, Halifax announced in the House of Lords that 'people are apt to say these days that war is unavoidable. I do not share that view'. He went on, however: 'There must be no misunderstanding. If the issue were ever to be joined, I have no doubt at all about the ultimate outcome, whatever might be the varying fortunes of war or the duration of the struggle'.¹⁴⁰ At the end of this month, he addressed the Royal Institute of International Affairs in a speech at Chatham House. Here, he coupled seemingly pro-appeasement statements about examining 'the colonial problem, the question of raw materials, trade barriers, the issue of *Lebensraum*', if Hitler would just mend his ways, with more firm declarations like: 'We know that if international law and order is to be preserved we must be prepared to fight in its defence'. He continued: 'In the event of further aggression, we are resolved to use at once the whole of our strength in fulfilment of our pledges to resist it'.¹⁴¹ Such a double line represented the Government's position from now until the outbreak of war. To paraphrase Chamberlain in the wake of the Munich Agreement, his Government hoped for the best but prepared for the worst - although the former increasingly forlornly and in ever-dwindling numbers. It was resolved to fight if need be but was ever wishful that a war postponed might be a war avoided altogether.

The delays in ratifying the Polish Alliance in the final few days before war were interpreted by some appeasement critics as an attempt by Chamberlain to wriggle out of fighting at the last minute by way of some Polish Munich.¹⁴² In truth, the Prime Minister suffered little more than an unfortunate moment's pause in which a coordinated simultaneous declaration with the French was his overriding desire and a late invitation by Mussolini for peace talks complicated matters further. In the final instance Britain and its leader were resolved for war.

Wider Judgements on the Viability of the Alternative

A comprehensive analysis of everybody in Britain who thought that war was a bad idea in the late 1930s is clearly impossible. This brief section will therefore

confine itself merely to making a few pertinent observations about some of the wider critics of war expressing their views during this period.

As war was in many ways the ultimate alternative to appeasement, critics of Chamberlain's policy are prone to being economical with the truth on this issue - far more so than in respect of any other strategy. Sir John Simon, for example, records in his memoirs that many of those who later criticised the Munich Agreement for having saved Hitler from a war he would have fully deserved, actually crossed the House of Commons floor in tears and shook Chamberlain's hand when news of his invite to Munich was announced.¹⁴³ Reading the memoirs of figures like Churchill, one would be surprised to learn that he in fact stated, 'I do not disassociate myself from the general course which the Government took' with regards to the Rhineland crisis on 26 March 1936.¹⁴⁴ He even spoke broadly in Germany's favour during April.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Robert Boothby, who claimed in his memoirs to have been pro-war at the time of the affair actually stated clearly that it was *not* a *casus belli* on 26 March 1936, as has been shown.¹⁴⁶ In fact, there can be little doubt that the overwhelming opinion in the country was against war for the Rhineland in the spring of 1936, most believing that Hitler was merely reoccupying his own territory.¹⁴⁷

As with the ongoing Abyssinian conflict at this time, the League of Nations - of which Britain and France were key members of course - never agreed on military sanctions with regards to the Rhineland and the two Western powers would have had to act alone to force the Dictators to heel. Indeed, many in Britain actually feared that France might drag them into a war over the Rhineland or Abyssinian crises. Liberal Lord Noel-Buxton, for example, was not the first to warn of the dangers of giving a 'blank cheque to France' over the Rhineland on 16 March 1936.¹⁴⁸ Old isolationist tendencies, therefore, tended to re-emerge at this time over such issues. Of the African conflict, for example, Leo Amery announced in October 1935, 'I am not prepared to send a single Birmingham lad to his death for the sake of Abyssinia'.¹⁴⁹

Political opposition to war and support for appeasement at the time of the Munich crisis was vast and easily outweighed any calls for conflict - or even those vague demands to 'stand firm' and such like. To give just a handful of examples which illustrate certain key points, Conservative MP Commander Archibald Southby could not 'see how we could save the peace of the world by

going to war about it' in the first place, on 3 October 1938.¹⁵⁰ A day later his colleague Sir Thomas Moore rounded on the vague words of many of appeasement detractors at this time:

The critics in this House... have rather disappointed me... One phrase has been repeated over and over again, the phrase of "taking a stand" or of "standing up to"; but those who have used it have not developed, indeed they have endeavoured to avoid developing, that bellicose declaration to its logical conclusion. They know, though fearful of acknowledging it, that "standing up to" or "taking a stand" means fighting.¹⁵¹

In the House of Lords the Archbishop of Canterbury asked on the first day of the debate, 'what would the State of Czechoslovakia conceivably have gained by war?... It would certainly have been paralysed almost beyond recovery'.¹⁵² Tory peer Lord Newton concurred on 5 October 1938 and undertook a spot of counterfactual speculation himself as to the likely outcome of any war on this issue. He was convinced that Czechoslovakia would have fallen, that France would have retreated and hid behind the Maginot Line, that Russia would have remained aloof from hostilities, and that the best Britain could have done was blockade Germany at the cost of many ships and potential allies - whilst also leaving itself extremely vulnerable to attack in the Far East.¹⁵³ One day earlier, in a rare address to the House of Lords, Chamberlain's predecessor Lord Baldwin paid tribute to his successor and even asserted that *only* the Prime Minister could have averted war at the eleventh hour: 'I do not believe there is another man in this country who could have brought about what he has, because of his remarkable gifts of tenacity of will and purpose, the fertility of his invention and his resources in times of difficult conference'.¹⁵⁴

The Czech crisis was an extremely complex and divisive issue, given the diversity of opinion expressed on both sides, and, indeed, it is probable that many politicians stumbled their way through the summer of 1938 struggling to conceive of a clear and coherent policy. With such a close-run issue as Munich the heart often pulled for war though the head resolved for peace, and *vice versa*, and it was possible even for ardent appeasement critics to express relief that Chamberlain had saved the day. The usually resolute Leo Amery, for example, followed his fairly militant statements in the House of Commons of 14

March 1938 (covered above) with a private admission a few days later that ‘the more I have thought about it since, the more doubtful I have become, partly because we shall not get Dominion or home public opinion sufficiently united’.¹⁵⁵ He admitted in a letter to Jan Smuts at the time: ‘As to which of these two policies is right I am not yet completely clear in my own mind’.¹⁵⁶ Amery finally joined the Churchill group in September and condemned the Munich Agreement, although even these were divided over whether or not to vote against the Government or merely abstain in the Parliamentary division.

A detailed analysis of public and press opposition to war in the late 1930s is not appropriate here, although a few pertinent observations can be made. It is no surprise that the most pro-appeasement newspapers were usually the most anti-war. The editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson, admitted to a former employee on 5 October 1938 for example:

I do not myself believe that the Nazi system will last forever. But in any case I am convinced that the best way to consolidate and perpetuate it would be by staging a world wide war on an issue that would be profoundly misinterpreted, not only in this country and in Germany, but in the Dominions and the United States.¹⁵⁷

However, even in pro-appeasement papers like these there was internal dissent. Dawson’s letter was in reply to the resignation of correspondent Anthony Winn, who felt obliged to leave the paper after its strong praise for the Munich settlement. Other papers more critical of appeasement, however, also spoke out against war on certain occasions. To give just one of many possible examples, the *Daily Express* favoured keeping well out of conflict during the Rhineland affair in 1936: ‘There will be no war. And if there were, we should not be involved’.¹⁵⁸ *The Express* then welcomed the 1938 Munich Agreement for similar reasons - ‘this is not our business’ - and even opposed further commitments in Europe in wake of the Prague Coup.¹⁵⁹ While this paper had its own particular pro-isolation agenda to promote, it was by no means alone in opposing war during these years.

There is no doubt that the general public feared war for the majority of Chamberlain’s premiership, only deciding to resist Hitler in the last few months of peace following the Prague Coup and invasion of Poland. While Gallup Poll

data does not cover the Rhineland crisis period, there are countless examples of MPs claiming to speak for popular opinion at the time. While Eden's memoir reckoned that 'there was not one man in a thousand' who supported war over this issue, as has been shown, Harold Nicolson noted in his diary on 12 March 1936, 'the people in this country absolutely refuse to have a war'.¹⁶⁰

Asked in January 1938, 'If there is another serious incident with the Japanese in China, would you be in favour of war against Japan?' only 19% replied in the affirmative, with 40% directly opposed.¹⁶¹ In March, only 33% of those asked favoured pledging to assist Czechoslovakia if it was attacked by Germany, with 43% against.¹⁶² The massive scenes of public celebration and the thousands of gifts which poured into Downing Street for Chamberlain following the Munich Agreement are testament to the public's feelings on war being averted in late 1938. There are countless examples of letters from the public to newspapers which reinforce such claims. To give but one or two, Violet Forster of London wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* after the *Anschluss* on 15 March 1938 to state that, 'as an average Englishwoman I feel with the mass of my fellow countrymen that we should not plunge into a war for the sake of concerns that are not immediately ours'.¹⁶³ Victor Silvester, also of London, wrote a day later to the *Express*:

It would be interesting to know how many *Daily Express* readers would be prepared to fight for Czechoslovakia if Hitler attempted to annex that portion of the country which is entirely populated by the German minority of over three million. Here's one who wouldn't, though I was a soldier in the last war before and I was wounded.¹⁶⁴

Finally, G. A. M. Wynne of King's Lynn looked back on the Munich crisis in a letter to the *Telegraph* of March 1939, fiercely critical of the other choices Chamberlain had at the time:

Is it too much to ask what alternative to the Munich Agreement Mr Attlee... and Mr Churchill had to offer? I and a great many others are getting rather tired of their empty criticism and airs of superiority. Will they tell us what they would have done, or what there was that Mr Chamberlain could have done? In all that they have said they have never given us a hint of any positive action which they would have adopted.¹⁶⁵

(5) CONCLUSION

The idea of going to war against the Fascists in the late 1930s appealed to a great many people in Britain at the time and was variously considered on numerous occasions, both within Government and outside of it. However, in the vast majority of instances where conflict was discussed, the ultimate alternative to appeasement was rarely seriously contemplated until Nazi Germany forced the British hand. It is no surprise, in a country suffering under the great Depression, with recent memories and the scars still fresh from the War to end all wars, that opinion was overwhelmingly critical of even the most limited of conflicts for the larger portion of the decade.

Open advocates of war as an alternative to appeasement were rare indeed and the majority of these preferred to talk in vague terms about 'standing firm' or 'drawing a line', without following this through to its obvious conclusion. The use of the word 'war' was actually very limited, even among the most militant of anti-appeasers urging a tougher policy on the Government. Few were those who openly and clearly stated 'we should declare war on Germany now', or similar, at any time during the Chamberlain period, even when tensions were at their height in the days before Munich. It is as if many people feared that speaking the word might trigger the event, or that, even when they felt war was the obvious answer, they still could not face up to the fateful choice.

Nevertheless, one or two individuals did make their feelings on this issue plain on occasion, most notably Alfred Duff Cooper who resigned from the Government because his country would not sanction a war for the Sudetenland. While the Rhineland crisis and continuing Abyssinian affair of 1936 offered the first real opportunity to consider war, or at least military sanctions, it was the year 1938 that was most critical. The six month period between the *Anschluss* and the Munich Agreement was dominated by the Czech crisis, where war was most considered and only averted by a hair's breadth at the last moment. It is no surprise that the peak of British peace-time militancy was in late September 1938 when war, in fact, seemed imminent.

Belligerence increased as time went on and war actually loomed closer. It was only really after the March 1939 Prague Coup - late September 1938 aside -

that the press and general public voiced their rising anger in any magnitude. Again, however, most people lapsed into the vague language of 'standing firm' at this time and it is perhaps more accurate to talk of people favouring war *measures* - arms and allies - more so than war itself. The previous two chapters offer firm evidence of this. It can also be observed that there were degrees or gradations on the scale towards war. Many people initially backed merely a clear statement of what Britain considered its vital interests to be or where the Government might draw a line. This then obviously led some to favour guarantees - as with the Czechs in 1938 - or threatening war as a means to deter Hitler from action. Indeed, many people such as Churchill were convinced that only this *threat* of war was needed to ensure peace, although this was a risky strategy based on out-bluffing the chief bluffer. Ultimatums were the next obvious step, before a final declaration of war itself.

Chamberlain seriously contemplated a war over the Abyssinian affair and many within the National Government, specifically within the Foreign Office, discussed the issue in 1935 and 1936. The Rhineland crisis on the other hand was deemed a *casus belli* by virtually no one. After Chamberlain became Prime Minister he had to perform a delicate balancing act between those figures within the Foreign Office like Eden and Vansittart (who were convinced the Fascists would back down if faced with a stiff line) and his own more cautious tendencies, perhaps embodied in someone like Cadogan, who favoured appeasement over threats. The Chiefs of Staff and other military experts obviously played a prominent role in all considerations of war in the 1930s and Britain's military weakness was probably the central factor for appeasement above all else. 1938 was also the most crucial year for the consideration of war within the Government. After the *Anschluss*, the Foreign Policy Committee considered all options and ruled out both war and a guarantee of Czechoslovakia, for the simple reason that conflict over a malformed state which Britain could not, in fact, do anything to save would have been abhorrent to the vast majority of the general public. Yet Chamberlain *did* make a firm statement at this time underlining for which vital interests Britain would be prepared to fight - a clear marker so far not yet given by his Government.

Tensions reached boiling point in September 1938 when, despite Chamberlain's protestations and the best advice of the Chiefs of Staff, the

Cabinet, led by Halifax, decided for war rather than accepting the humiliation of Czechoslovakia as embodied by the Godesberg Memorandum. Chamberlain's persistence for peace won out with Hitler before it did with most of his senior colleagues and the Munich Agreement averted war at the final minute of the eleventh hour. The Prime Minister seemed most determined never to risk war over a bluff at this time. While Duff Cooper resigned on the issue, the Government guaranteed the new borders of rump Czechoslovakia, an important step given Chamberlain's concern about retaining the final decision for war.

Following the Munich Agreement (and accelerated after the Prague Coup) the Government increased its firmness, with even previously pro-appeasement Civil Servants like Cadogan favouring a tougher line. Halifax seemed more inclined towards resistance than appeasement for much of 1939, something rarely appreciated by his critics. The January 1939 war scare was also crucial in that the Foreign Policy Committee, including Chamberlain, agreed on a war if Holland was invaded. This did not come to pass, but strongly suggests that he firmly intended to keep to the March 1939 Polish Guarantee, as indeed he did. In the final months before war the Government prepared doggedly for it - although Chamberlain in particular never gave up hopes for peace - and rearmament and alliances were pursued with vigour. Increasingly, public proclamations on foreign policy had an element of stick as well as carrot about them, as testified by Halifax's bellicose statements during that summer.

That war was never sanctioned until September 1939 boils down essentially to the widespread revulsion for it, so acutely felt by this most persistent of Prime Ministers, and the fact that Britain was not strong enough to fight. Appeasement, therefore, was designed to avert a war from ever happening. The Government did, of course, have an Empire to consider, the nightmare scenario of three simultaneous opponents - Germany, Italy and Japan - as well as a war weary populace to protect. Of all the alternatives to appeasement Chamberlain might have sanctioned, war was clearly his least favoured option. Drawing little distinction between war itself and the *threat* thereof, it is clear that the Government never seriously contemplated fighting until well after the Prague Coup, except when the issue was seemingly thrust unavoidably upon them, as in September 1938 or January 1939.

Was Chamberlain correct to view war as an unviable alternative to appeasement until so late in the day? Retrospective accounts of these years, as detailed in the vast, divisive and ever-expanding historiography, are prone to a degree of selective recollection. *Everyone* thought that Hitler should have been fought during the Rhineland crisis in hindsight, though nobody said so at the time. Of course, the benefit of later years and events which we can enjoy was never available to Chamberlain himself. Most counterfactual speculations about the merits of, say, a war in 1938 as opposed to 1939 seem, therefore, to miss an important point. The fact that we now know that Germany was not ready for war at the time of Munich does less damage to Chamberlain's historical reputation than his many critics would like. Hitler's later admission that Germany would have had to retreat from the Rhineland if opposed by Britain and France in 1936,¹⁶⁶ or Field Marshall von Manstein's claim at Nuremberg that a German assault against the Czechs in late 1938 would have stalled, did not help the British Cabinet in the heat of the moment during events themselves.¹⁶⁷ The question of the truth of such statements is an obvious one anyway.

The Prime Minister could only go with the expert information he was given at the time, regardless of what is now known about much of its accuracy - an enduring problem for war-time leaders. The fact that he is regularly criticised during his premiership in general for not doing so, or for being an autocratic leader, should cause his opponents to recognise the dilemma he faced in September 1938 with more charity than they do. Churchill, who was for so long the champion of the 'war for the Sudetenland' camp, was hardly immune to military blunders and misjudgements himself. The leading roles he had in the Gallipoli and Norwegian campaigns, during the First and Second World Wars respectfully, are testament to this. As was his constant, misplaced faith in the strength of the French Army for much of the late 1930s.

That said, doubtless some at the time felt that Hitler's retreat from attempting an *Anschluss* in 1934 (during the famed Dollfuss affair when he backed down in face of Italian troop movements) or Mussolini's collapse at Nyon in September 1937 were evidence that a firm hand with the Dictators would yield results. Might Hitler have retreated from the Rhineland with his tail between his legs if Britain and France had stood firm? Quite possibly, although the idea that his troops would sheepishly leave immediately, with minimal

resistance, is almost laughable. More probable would have been a fighting retreat at the cost of many lives, over an issue widely believed to be unfair on Germany (at least outside of France, anyway) and which had no support from the British people. Either way, even if we accept that the Rhineland crisis *was* a missed opportunity, as history seems to have done, it is only with hindsight unavailable at the time that we know this. Chamberlain's personal culpability for missing the boat, given that he was not even Prime Minister at this time, and he was only one of many millions who did not want war, must be slight.

Would Hitler have backed down at the last minute in face of a firm Anglo-French front at the time of Munich? It is doubtful, but the resulting war might have been better for the Allies than the actual war as it came in September 1939. On a purely military basis, the odds of successfully defending Poland, with Russia alongside the Nazis, were less than successfully defending Czechoslovakia a year earlier with Russia pledged to assist if France also did so. But would Russia have ever fought in late 1938? Would France, for that matter? After all, Britain would have been drawn into any conflict out of its loyalty to France, which was allied to Czechoslovakia, more so than because of any empathy towards the Czechs - to which Britain had no direct commitments. The question of whether France would have fought is therefore very important. We know from the conversations just before Munich that Daladier and Bonnet were extremely reluctant for war on this issue and it remains probable that France could have only fought a very limited and defensive struggle in 1938, with little substantial help for Czechoslovakia ever possible. Moreover, it is likely that France would only have fought if Britain gave assurances that it would also help, and Britain was loathe to do so unless France itself was attacked - something out of the question, at least in the short term, in 1938.

The Soviets may well have used any of the above opportunities to renege on their part of the deal with France and Czechoslovakia, as Ragsdale has suggested. Soviet troop movements in late September 1938 do not necessarily mean that they would have fought at the last minute, given Stalin's legendary caution and the condition of his army after the purges. The quality of assistance Russia could have rendered in this offensive war is also very questionable, and the extreme reluctance of the Poles to allow Soviet troops across their borders must never be discounted. Would Hitler have been deterred in this case?

The much-vaunted fact that Germany rearmed at a quicker pace than Britain in the year between Munich and war is also less important than the critical truth that Britain made good its most *vital* deficiencies in that period. Europe aside, this was the difference between victory and defeat in the Battle of Britain. Admittedly, the German capacity to wage an air attack in any hypothetical 1938 war may have been severely reduced, but London may still have been blitzed once areas of France had fallen, which is certain. The Churchill 'war for the Sudetenland' thesis is, in places, very compelling, although it is far from sure and definitely open to serious questions, especially once the counter-factual speculation continues beyond immediate events. Doubtless the balance of power in central Europe shifted in Germany's favour after gaining the land, men and munitions it did from Czechoslovakia at Munich. A war against Britain and France without these gains would probably have been harder for Hitler to win and the fall of France as occurred in the war itself might have been delayed. On the other hand, the extreme reluctance to go to war of the British people and the Empire in September 1938 (to say nothing of France and wider opinion in America, which was ultimately to prove so crucial) may have hindered the eventual war effort much more so than was ever the case in 1939, when Britain and much of the wider world were certain that the time was now right to resist. The cause was far from certain in 1938 over the issue of the Sudetendeutsch, whereas in 1939, over the invasion of non-German Poland, and after appeasement had been tried and rejected by Hitler, it was clear. It is interesting to speculate what historians might have made over the question of blame or guilt for a war in 1938, as opposed to the overwhelming consensus of Nazi culpability for the actual war which exists today.

The truth is we shall never know how such a conflict over the Sudetenland would have developed, whereas what is certain is that the Allies eventually won the war beginning in 1939. Moreover, substituting one hypothetical war for another actual conflict in no way averts the catastrophe itself and millions of lives would have been lost either way. The whole point of appeasement was to avert such a disaster and Chamberlain was attempting, in vain, to do just that.

1. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Commons*, vol.339, col.34, 3 Oct. 1938.
2. Bernays to L. Brereton, 23 Aug. 1935, Nick Smart (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays, 1932-39: An Insider's Account of the House of Commons* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p.220.
3. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1498, 26 March 1936.
4. *The Times*, 28 March 1936.
5. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.2495, 6 April 1936.
6. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Lords*, vol.100, col.577, 8 April 1936.
7. HC Deb 5s, vol.311, col.106, 8 April 1936 (my emphasis).
8. HC Deb 5s, vol.313, cols 1242-3, 18 June 1936.
9. Indeed, many were struggling to breathe new life into the organisation by way of reforms designed to sharpen its claws.
10. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, col.47, 21 Feb. 1938.
11. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, col.79, 21 Feb. 1938.
12. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, cols 246-50, 22 Feb. 1938.
13. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.55, 14 March 1938.
14. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, col.133, 14 March 1938.
15. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, col.2960, 4 July 1938.
16. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, col.2991, 4 July 1938.
17. HC Deb 5s, vol.338, col.3005, 4 July 1938.
18. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 107-51, 14 March 1938.
19. HC Deb 5s, vol.332, col.86, 14 March 1938.
20. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, col.152, 16 March 1938.
21. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, col.1446, 24 March 1938.
22. N. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters, 1930-39* (London: Collins, 1966), p.332.
23. Quoted, W. S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1948), pp.262-3.
24. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson*, pp.366-7. Amery himself wrote to a friend on this date, urging that the Godesberg terms be rejected and that Britain threaten war: 'Even the other day if Chamberlain had the nerve to refuse to transmit Hitler's last proposal and told him that that proposal meant war with us and France as well as the Czechs, it might have saved things'. Amery to Billy Hughes, friend, 26 Sept. 1938. Quoted, Leo Amery, *My Political Life, vol.3, The Unforgiving Years* (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p.275.
25. Josiah Wedgwood, Labour MP, to Duff Cooper, former First Lord of the Admiralty, 2 Oct. 1938, DUFC 2/14, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Alfred Duff Cooper (DUFC) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
26. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 31-40, 3 Oct. 1938 (my emphasis).
27. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 361-4, 5 Oct. 1938.
28. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, cols 430-1, 5 Oct. 1938.
29. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.212, 4 Oct. 1938.
30. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1334, 3 Oct. 1938. This, of course, assumed that Hitler was rational.
31. HL Deb 5s, col 1369-71, 4 Oct. 1938.
32. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson*, p.376.

33. Murray to Christopher (?), unnamed League of Nations Union colleague, 7 Oct. 1938, Gilbert Murray papers, MS Gilbert Murray 233, fol. 156, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Gilbert Murray papers (MS Gilbert Murray) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
34. International Peace Campaign to Macmillan, Sept. 1938, Quoted, Harold Macmillan papers, MS Macmillan 123, fol. 289, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University (my emphasis). Harold Macmillan papers (MS Macmillan) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
35. *News Chronicle*, 14 March 1938.
36. *News Chronicle*, 4 Oct. 1938.
37. Garvin to Amery, 28 Sept. 1938, AMEL 2/1/28, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Leo Amery (AMEL) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
38. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 17 March 1939. The *Daily Express*, one day earlier, claimed 'it is an act of war', but only advocated a Grand Alliance as its strategy - not an ultimatum. *Daily Express*, 16 March 1939.
39. *The Times*, 16 March 1939.
40. *Daily Herald*, 16 March 1938. 'R. M. B.', meanwhile from Sittingbourne felt that 'surely strong representations from the British and French Governments would stop such a challenge'.
41. Charles Madge and Tom Harrison (eds.), *Britain: By Mass Observation* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1939), p.87.
42. George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain, 1937-75*, vol.1 (New York: Random House, 1976), p.16.
43. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.21.
44. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.545, 15 March 1939.
45. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.307, 20 March 1939.
46. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.321, 20 March 1939.
47. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, cols 617-25, 13 April 1939.
48. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson*, 29 April 1939, p.401.
49. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, col.403, 12 June 1939.
50. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, cols 2071-2, 31 July 1939. Communist MP William Gallagher concurred and seemed to call for a new war to end all wars: 'When a stand is made against aggression, we shall be finished with aggression for good and for all, and there will be an opportunity of laying a new and sure foundation for peace'. HC Deb 5s, vol.350, col.2086, 31 July 1939.
51. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson*, 2 Sept. 1939, p.421.
52. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.159. His feelings about collective security and the missed chances of the Rhineland affair have already been covered.
53. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.288.
54. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, pp.274-5.
55. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, pp.301-4.
56. See Earl of Avon, *Facing the Dictators: The Eden Memoirs* (London: Cassell, 1962), p.338 and pp.365-6.
57. A. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), p.196.
58. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, p.244.
59. Robert Boothby, *I Fight to Live* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947), pp.136-7. The claim that Boothby was for war at the time of the Rhineland crisis is contradicted by his statement in Commons in March 1936, as shown above.

60. Harold Macmillan, *The Winds of Change, 1914-39* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p.462. Both also concurred with Churchill's general view on Munich, Boothby placing particular emphasis on the weakness and reluctance of the *Wehrmacht* for war in 1938 as the decisive factor why Britain should have fought earlier on. Boothby, *I fight to Live*, p.177.
61. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, pp.575-9.
62. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change*, p.579.
63. Halifax described it as the 'last effective chance of securing peace', for example. Earl of Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, 2nd edn (London: Collins, 1957), p.197. Nor did Simon dissent, although he pointed out that an impartial historian would have to admit that virtually no one at the time thought it provided a *casus belli*. Viscount Simon, *Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Viscount Simon* (London: Hutchinson, 1952), p.214.
64. Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, p.198.
65. Simon, *Retrospect*, pp.242-3.
66. Simon, *Retrospect*, p.253.
67. As well as those covered here see, for example, Lord Home, *The Way the Wind Blows* (London: Collins, 1976), or, much earlier, N. Henderson, *Failure of a Mission: Berlin 1937-39* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940).
68. Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), p.289.
69. Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, pp.191-2.
70. Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p.545.
71. Lord Balfour, *Wings over Westminster* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p.110.
72. Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1956), pp.149-55.
73. Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p.155.
74. Keith Robbins, *Munich 1938* (London: Cassell, 1968), pp.329-55.
75. Robbins, *Munich 1938*, p.355.
76. Arnold A. Offner, *American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), p.276.
77. Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint (eds.), *Total War: Causes and Courses of the Second World War* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), pp.92-6. The general line of this work is supported and developed, for example, by R. H. Haigh and P. W. Turner, *The Military and Diplomatic Effects of the Munich Agreement* (Sheffield: Sheffield City Polytechnic Department of Political Studies, 1978).
78. Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.337.
79. Bond, *British Military Policy*, p.288.
80. Robert Kee, *Munich: The Eleventh Hour* (London: Hamilton, 1988), pp.210-11.
81. Richard Lamb, *The Drift to War, 1922-1939* (London: W. H. Allen and Company, 1989), p.269. Soviet historian Oleg Rzhesheshevsky, writing in the same year on the subject of the inevitability of the Second World War, entirely agreed. He claimed an Anglo-Franco-Czecho-Soviet alliance at the time of Munich would have either discouraged Hitler from attacking the Czechs, or defeated him if he did so. Oleg Rzhesheshevsky, *Europe 1939: Was War Inevitable?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), p.79.
82. Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-39: The Path to Ruin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p.263.

83. Williamson Murray, 'The War of 1938: Chamberlain Fails to Sway Hitler at Munich', in Robert Cowley (ed.) *More What If? Eminent Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (London: Macmillan, 2003), pp.255-78.
84. Roy Denman, *Missed Chances: Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp.101-10.
85. David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Arnold, 2001), pp.208-16.
86. Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain*, p.137.
87. Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis, and the Coming of World War Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.157-66. See also I. Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler: The Diplomacy of Edvard Benes in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
88. James P. Levy, *Appeasement and Rearmament, 1936-1939* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Inc, 2006), p.159.
89. Diary, 13 Jan. 1935. Quoted, John Simon papers, MS Simon 7, fol. 14, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. John Simon papers (MS Simon) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
90. Diary, 5 July 1935. Quoted, Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1946), p.265.
91. Quoted, Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, p.272.
92. HC Deb 5s, vol.308, col.2081, 10 March 1936.
93. Phipps to Eden, 13 March 1936, PHPP 1/16/41, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Sir Eric Phipps (PHPP) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University.
94. Cabinet Minutes, 25 April 1936. Quoted, VNST 1/2/35(3), Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. The papers of Sir Robert Vansittart (VNST) are located at the Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge University. In June Chamberlain wrote to a constituent that the moment was no longer ripe for unilateral British action in this respect. Chamberlain to P. A. Turnley, constituent, 22 June 1936, Conservative Research Department papers, CRD 1/24, fol. 2, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Conservative Research Department papers (CRD) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
95. Quoted, Denman, *Missed Chances*, p.149. This was doubtless a popular sentiment amongst many Britons at the time.
96. *The World Situation and British Rearmament*, 31 Dec. 1936, VNST. 1/1/19. It should also be remembered, of course, that the Ten Year Rule had only been revoked in 1932.
97. FO371/21119/R3302, 15 May 1937, The National Archives (TNA). Foreign Office (FO) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London. In July his Private Secretary Oliver Harvey empathised with the challenge Eden faced in getting the tougher approach they both favoured adopted as policy: He observed: 'I am quite sure the country... is in no fighting mood'. However, 'if we let the Dictators get away with too much and too easily, they will end by going one too far and we shall have a war even so. I'm afraid it is a very difficult and delicate course for you to steer'. Harvey to Eden, 25 July 1937. Quoted, J. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-40* (London: Collins, 1970), pp.414-5.
98. FO371/20731/C6212, 1 Sept. 1937.

99. Quoted, Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p.470. It has to be noted that many people now feel that anti-appeasement figures like Eden and Churchill regularly overplayed the significance and successes of Nyon.
100. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, 15 Oct. 1937, p.51.
101. FO371/20704/C8961, 10 Nov. 1937.
102. D. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45* (London: Cassell, 1971), p.15.
103. Quoted, FO371/20702/C8477, 8 Dec. 1937.
104. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1883, 21 Dec. 1937.
105. Vansittart to Eden, 4 March 1938, VNST 1/2/35.
106. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, 15 March 1938, p.117.
107. Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 13 March 1938, NC18/1/1041, Special Collections Department, University of Birmingham (BU).
108. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.60.
109. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, cols 179-80, 16 March 1938.
110. Foreign Policy Committee Proceedings, 18 March 1938, CAB 27/623/FP(36)/26, The National Archives (TNA), p.15. Cabinet (CAB) papers are located at the National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
111. CAB 27/623/FP(36)/26, 18 March 1938, Appendix 1, pp.5-12.
112. Foreign Policy Committee Memoranda, 21 March 1939, CAB 27/627/FP(36)/56, The National Archives (TNA), p.9.
113. HC Deb 5s, vol.333, cols 1399-1405, 24 March 1939.
114. Oliver Harvey, Halifax's Private Secretary, to Halifax, 30 June 1936. Quoted, Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, pp.426-7.
115. FO800/314, H/XV/60, Central Europe 26, 5 Aug. 1938. Halifax was referring here to the difficulties in recreating Czechoslovakia again along the same lines given the huge ethnic and nationality problems that state endured and Hitler so played upon.
116. SIS to Vansittart, 10 Aug. 1938, VNST 2/2/18.
117. Quoted, R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp.156-7.
118. Quoted, R. H. Haigh and P. W. Turner, *The Tilted Scales: The Military Balance of Power at the time of the Munich Crisis, Autumn 1938* (Sheffield: Sheffield City Polytechnic Department of Political Studies, 1978), p.7.
119. Furthermore, the French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet had told him 'that French and British towns would be wiped out and little or no retaliation would be possible' in the first waves of German attacks during any war. FO371/21737/C9704, 13 Sept. 1938.
120. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 11 Sept. 1938, NC18/1/1068.
121. R. J. Minney (ed.), *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), p.138.
122. Minney (ed.), *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha*, p.146.
123. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, pp.103-4.
124. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.105.
125. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.123. A day later, in a Foreign Office memo, he wrote 'we ought to have reacted against the occupation of the Rhineland when we could have done so'. FO371/21659/C14471, 8 Nov. 1938.
126. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/32, 14 Nov. 1938, p.9.

127. Chamberlain speech at Foreign Press Association, 13 Dec. 1938. Quoted, MS CRD 1/24, fol. 3.
128. Chamberlain speech at Foreign Press Association, 13 Dec. 1938. Quoted, MS CRD 1/24, fol. 3.
129. See CAB 27/627/FP(36)/74, 17 Jan. 1939, pp.3-31.
130. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/35, 23 Jan. 1939, pp.10-15.
131. CAB 27/624/FP(36)/36, 26 Jan. 1939, pp.2-4.
132. Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, p.198.
133. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, p.256.
134. Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 19 March 1939, NC18/1/1090.
135. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.161.
136. CAB 27/624/(FP)36/38, 27 March 1939, p.15.
137. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.167. After all, Chamberlain coupled the Polish Guarantee with the statement that war, 'wins nothing, cures nothing, ends nothing'. HC Deb 5s, vol.345, col.2486, 3 April 1939.
138. CAB 27/624/(FP)36/45, 5 May 1939, p.13. Halifax was paraphrasing the Romanian Foreign Minister Grigore Gafencu at this time.
139. HL Deb 5s, vol.112, col.691, 19 April 1939.
140. HL Deb 5s, vol.113, col.363, 8 June 1939.
141. Quoted, *The Times*, 30 June 1939.
142. See, for example, Amery, *My Political Life*, p.324.
143. Simon, *Retrospect*, p.247.
144. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1525, 26 March 1936.
145. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.2489, 6 April 1939. Churchill stated here that Germany's grievances should be redressed in the near future.
146. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1498, 26 March 1936.
147. While criticising Government foreign policy in general, for example, Hugh Dalton was keen to explain to Parliament that Labour would certainly oppose fighting for this cause. HC Deb 5s, vol.310, col.1454, 26 March 1936.
148. HL Deb 5s, vol.108, col.162, 16 March 1936.
149. Quoted, John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, vol.5, 1929-45* (1988), 8 Oct. 1935, p.334.
150. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.117, 3 Oct. 1938. His colleague David Maxwell Fyfe attacked the critics of Munich one day later. He saw 'no distinction between the threat of war and actually going to war'. He continued, 'I ask those who have talked so glibly about war or the threat of war, would they have been prepared to go to war on the question of the cession of these territories'? HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.246, 4 Oct. 1938.
151. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.260, 4 Oct. 1938.
152. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1322, 3 Oct. 1938.
153. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, col.1478, 5 Oct. 1938
154. HL Deb 5s, vol.110, cols 1390-1, 4 Oct. 1938.
155. Barnes and Nicholson (eds.), *The Empire at Bay*, 20 March 1938, p.298.
156. Amery to Smuts, 18 March 1938, AMEL 2/1/28.
157. Dawson to Anthony Winn, former *Times* correspondent, 5 Oct. 1938, MS Dawson 80, fols. 79-81, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Geoffrey Dawson papers (MS Dawson) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
158. *Daily Express*, 9 March 1936.

159. *Daily Express*, 8 Oct. 1938.
160. Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson*, p.250.
161. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.7.
162. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p.8.
163. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 15 March 1938.
164. *Daily Express*, 16 March 1938.
165. *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 19 March 1939.
166. Quoted, Denman, *Missed Chances*, p.83.
167. Quoted, Haigh and Turner, *The Tilted Scales*, p.14.

CONCLUSION

Original Contributions to Knowledge and Work Still Needed

This thesis set out to chart the origins and development of the principal alternatives to appeasement, survey the main literature produced on these rival strategies, and assess how viable the other choices were perceived to be by the National Government. The issue of whether or not Chamberlain had any other realistic options to the one he pursued has been central. In tackling these questions, this work makes a valuable new contribution to appeasement literature. It takes a unique approach and offers fresh conclusions on the nature of foreign policy in this period. Few other works on Chamberlain and the events surrounding the Second World War have taken such a broad scope and it is the first piece of its kind to attempt a comprehensive synthesis of all the alternatives the Prime Minister had available to him.

A few works already exist which analyse certain alternatives in isolation, although rarely with the question of viability as the central concern. Parker's chapter on alternatives to appeasement did sketch in some of the various options Chamberlain's critics suggested, but was unable to address any of them in depth and severely downplayed a few, whilst overlooking others entirely. In focussing so closely on advocates of the League and the Churchillian Grand Alliance, he neglects to give sufficient attention to those calling for radical colonial and economic appeasement, or intensive rearmament and disarmament as appeasement alternatives, to give just a couple of examples. It is also the author's contention that Parker's chapter, groundbreaking and influential as it was - and indeed much of appeasement literature in general - focuses too closely on the official lines of the main political parties and the key individuals active in foreign policy at this time. In doing so, an overly simplistic conception of the alternatives often exists which neglects, for example, the many divisions, debates and rival conceptions of policy that existed within the ranks of the anti-appeasement body. A whole host of relatively minor players who nevertheless had much to say of great importance are often overlooked.

This study also uniquely charts the origins and development of the alternatives to appeasement and tracks their evolution as strategies over time and as circumstances changed in the years before war. The few existing works which address alternatives rarely examine how these policies developed and held different meanings to different people and groups. Focussing heavily on Parliamentary debates - a much neglected source in the recent historiography - this thesis also illuminates the debate about alternatives to appeasement in a way rarely matched by other works in this field. It offers a new understanding of many of the main advocates of such rival policies - the motives and concerns of important individuals and groups in politics and society - as well as describing the many subtle nuances, complexities and ambiguities of each alternative, so far largely unrecognised. The conclusion sections of each chapter have covered these in detail. Appeasement and alternatives to appeasement have for too long been seen in overly simplistic, black and white terms, when the reality was much more complex. This study has attempted to demonstrate this.

In terms of Government consideration of alternatives, this thesis has shown that Chamberlain did in fact explore each one as part of his wider appeasement strategy and, indeed, his foreign policy often contained aspects *of* the various rival options. This is something rarely accounted for when appeasement is traditionally presented in the crude way it often is. As a policy it was neither uniform nor consistent and had many facets and characteristics to it. It is also often presumed that Chamberlain dismissed the alternatives out of hand in his dogged pursuit of appeasement and this work has shown that this was not entirely the case. The Prime Minister contemplated each alternative on at least one occasion and was assailed from all sides by other Government figures promoting one or other rival course at various times in significant volume. This is to say nothing of the views of wider political and social groups, the press and general public, again areas where more work is needed. This study makes at least a contribution here. A more nuanced understanding of why exactly Chamberlain rejected the alternatives he had in favour of appeasement also emerges, as well as the author's own bold assessment of the viability of his various options, given the conditions of the day.

In summarising the most important historiography produced on each alternative, this thesis has illuminated the fact that much more work still needs

to be done. The justification for a study of this kind, though as a precursor to more detailed work in the field, should now be apparent. The vast literature on Chamberlain and appeasement does not include an in-depth survey of all the various alternatives the Prime Minister had, or rigorous analysis of how viable they were. As has been shown, many of the accusations against Chamberlain, often laid down in the emotionally charged aftermath of the Second World War, by people who were active in events at the time, have usually been voiced by writers more interested in what Chamberlain actually did and the success and failure of his policy in general. Yet no complete understanding of a man's motives can ever be reached unless the full range of choices he had available to him are also understood.

Of course, in a work taking such a broad, sweeping approach, with such a wide range of topics, concentrating on a period of such tumultuous events, in areas where so much evidence is readily available, there is a danger of spreading one's butter too thinly. Yet much detailed work has been done and an overarching examination was needed. It was explained from the outset that more detailed studies on each alternative in specific would still be required afterwards. The historiographical reviews in each chapter - again, necessarily brief here - contain, among others, examples of the most recent works in each field. This demonstrates a broad consensus that more focussed analysis on alternatives is still needed and they will surely follow. It is hoped that this work at least points forward to future areas needing more research.

Critics of Appeasement and Support for Alternatives: Main Findings

It should now be apparent that if it was easy to criticise Chamberlain from the sidelines it was much more difficult to suggest a constructive, coherent alternative that he could have pursued. No doubt influenced by the confusion of the times in which they lived and the unparalleled events with which they had to grapple, this work has shown that critics of appeasement were divided amongst themselves, if united in their general condemnation of Chamberlain's policy. Of the years before war, for example, Lord Vansittart recalled in his memoirs, 'we were all in a muddle and it is hard to keep track of opinion when the owners are

not sure of them'.¹ Even those who advocated one alternative passionately to the detriment of all others usually bickered among themselves over the precise nature of what it meant and how it should be carried out. This is a factor largely neglected in the existing appeasement literature. Furthermore, it was perfectly possible to favour more than one alternative to appeasement, again no doubt evidence of the confusion of the era and the sense that people were grasping desperately to avoid war and deal with an unprecedented Fascist threat. It did not play by the rules and constantly sprung new surprises. Leo Amery, for example, has featured in every chapter and at one time or another advocated isolation (despite, much later, backing European Union as a means to peace), measures of colonial appeasement (despite being a committed defender of the Empire), several kinds of alliances, variously constituted and at different times, a vast rearmament programme *and* the threat of war all as ways to deal with the threat. Is this evidence of a deep thinker on foreign affairs or someone as confused and uncertain about how best to deal with Hitler as Chamberlain himself was?² It is certainly evidence of how foreign policy opinion changed dramatically over time during this era.

The support for one alternative often led to the support for another, and indeed one alternative often merged with the next, as has been shown with the League of Nations and alliances, or arms and the threat of war. Broadly speaking, as the chapters in this thesis progress, the belligerence of the alternatives increase and the links become clearer. A supporter of alliances, for example, would almost always favour an intensified rearmament programme as well, and perhaps even the threat of war itself as the best way to deter war. Similarly, economic appeasement advocates, who were often on the Left of the political spectrum, also tended to support the League route to peace.

Muddled thinking and hypocrisy were also paramount at this time and have been illuminated in a clear way by this study. Despite often advocating a series of alternatives to appeasement, as discussed above, Chamberlain's critics regularly proclaimed that only *one* solution - the one they were calling for at that particular moment - could stop Hitler or should take precedence over all other strategies. Thus, within Chamberlain's premiership, this work has shown that Attlee claimed economic appeasement was the issue that should be considered 'above all', that the League of Nations route was 'the only way' in which peace

could be maintained, and that universal disarmament was his overriding goal. There are other examples. Aside from the general positions of the main political parties on the central issues of the day - rearmament, the League, alliances, and so on - there was a marked lack of uniformity or consistency to alternative suggestion. Party loyalty regularly evaporated and an individual's own concerns and beliefs were often paramount. Tories could support the League, Labour MPs could back alliances, Liberals could advocate mass rearmament (as well as total *disarmament*) and Pacifists could call for military sanctions. Figures from all parties, meanwhile, could back measures of economic appeasement and yet oppose political appeasement in general. Advocates of one alternative might vehemently oppose another. Most League backers hated alliances, and *vice versa*, despite the two policies effectively merging in the final months of peace. In short, the many critics of appeasement were often as much at loggerheads with one other as they were with appeasement itself. From this thesis, a much more complex and nuanced picture of Government criticism in this era emerges.

The contradictions of those advocating alternatives to appeasement are legion, if usually under appreciated. They serve only to undermine the occasions when criticism of Chamberlain is justified. Most obvious, perhaps, was Labour's increasing calls for firmness with the Dictators, coupled with general opposition to the Government's rearmament effort. This glaringly self-defeating inconsistency was to their discredit and many pointed this out at the time. Chamberlain himself addressed the Tory Party Annual Conference in Margate on 2 October 1936 attacking the diversity of opinion within the ranks on the question of defence:

They seem to be divided between anxiety to vote against the Government and a sort of shamefaced recognition that a disarmed nation can neither restrain an armed nation from war nor defend its own freedom... The only point on which the Opposition have been thoroughly consistent is in voting against every proposal we have had to make adequate preparations for defence.³

Similarly, vehemently backing an alliance with the Soviet Union, as most of the Opposition did, could not sit easily with committed League of Nations support and the collective security ideal. There are other examples of more general inconsistencies. Leo Amery was an isolation supporter and then moved

on to favouring alliances with indecent haste. Many critics of appeasement and Chamberlain's conversations with the Dictators then went on to advocate further international conferences to discuss disarmament initiatives and so on. If they were furious at Chamberlain for his dishonour at Munich then it did not make much sense for Labour to call for a new conference soon afterwards to discuss trade and colonies with Hitler and Mussolini. All the appeasement detractors who so abused the morality of a deal with Hitler and then blithely advocated an alliance with Stalin - Churchill is an obvious example here - seem to be missing an important point.

All of this just goes to reiterate the uncertainty gripping Europe in the 1930s, the overwhelming sense of crisis prevalent in the country, and the vagueness of many of the criticisms of appeasement. Sufficient weight is rarely given to the fact that most opponents were at least as muddled as the Government itself, and this thesis goes some way to redress this imbalance. British foreign policy debate in the late 1930s was a complex mishmash of numerous shades of grey. The confident black and white clarity with which the solutions to the Fascist menace were presented by those who were wise after the event, writing to clear their names or build reputations in the aftermath of war, was clearly misplaced, and swept many of the complex realities of the day under the carpet. Instead, the popular understanding of Chamberlain and appeasement is shrouded in myth and lazy stereotypes.

Of course, all of these divisions and inconsistencies were reflected in the press and public opinion of the day as well as the main parties and pressure groups. Press and public opinion shifted quickly with each dramatic new event in the years before war. The general public were overwhelmingly pro-League of Nations and anti-rearmament in 1936 and 1937, for example, yet demanded alliances and a huge rearmament effort by 1939. Asked, 'Do you favour Mr Chamberlain's foreign policy?' in the middle of March 1938, only 24% replied in the affirmative, with 56% against. Yet satisfaction ratings for Chamberlain himself remained relatively constant all throughout his peace-time premiership (fluctuating between 55% and 59%) and there was unquestionably extremely high support for his achievements at Munich in the winter of 1938. Asked which way they would vote if a General Election were immediately called in February 1939, for example, 54% replied Government, with only 30% for the

Opposition.⁴ The public was as divided and prone to changing its mind on foreign affairs as any politician was.

Government Considerations and Foreign Policy Mechanics: Main Findings

This thesis demonstrates that there is a clear timescale with regards to the suggestion of alternatives to appeasement, both within the Government and outside of it. Each big event in the decline towards war sparked new consideration of rival strategies as the best way to maintain peace. The *Anschluss* was a clear watershed and the months between March 1938 and the Munich Agreement in September were perhaps the most feverish period for alternatives being suggested and considered. Munich and then, perhaps even more so, Prague gave another new impetus to the discussion of rival policies.

Chamberlain considered just about everything in the few weeks and months after the *Anschluss* and early 1938 in general seems to be the point when he contemplated his various options most of all, before settling on appeasement as his favoured policy. It is in this period that many of the most crucial decisions were made on each alternative by him. It was in early 1938 that the Prime Minister wrote the letter to his American cousin emphatically rejecting isolation (covered in Chapter One); launched his colonial appeasement scheme to repartition central Africa and witnessed its collapse; announced the death of collective security and the League of Nations in Parliament; considered and rejected a Grand Alliance (and fighting a war) over Czechoslovakia; as *well* as pouring cold water on the Roosevelt Peace Initiative. It was also the period when Inskip's crucial *Defence Expenditures in Future Years* paper was first implemented. Of course as well as the *Anschluss*, Hitler's first real foreign adventure of Chamberlain's premiership, early 1938 was also the period when Eden resigned and Halifax replaced him. This allowed the Prime Minister a freer hand to consider his various options. In the seeming absence of a viable alternative, therefore, Chamberlain reaffirmed appeasement as his favoured line. In a Foreign Policy Committee meeting on 15 March 1938, for example, he stated 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 that policy was the right one and he only regretted that it had not been adopted earlier'.⁵ The period of 'classic' Chamberlainite appeasement hence followed and reached its zenith with the Munich Agreement in September 1938.

Chamberlain turned to alliances and rearmament after the Prague Coup in early 1939 - although some Opposition figures falsely attempted to present the Peace Front negotiations as his conversion to their collective security policy - and appeasement was only really carried out in words, rather than in solid concessions, hereafter. While he would never abandon hopes for peace, Chamberlain increasingly prepared for war in the months after Prague. Broadly speaking, appeasement critics advocated the League option, disarmament, Pacifism and varying degrees of isolation in the mid to late 1930s and then turned to alliances and massive rearmament through 1938 and 1939. After the Prague Coup, opponents overwhelmingly favoured the more belligerent, 'stand firm' policies like arms, alliances and the threat of war. The press and general public broadly followed suit. Colonial and economic appeasement, meanwhile, remained a policy advocated by much of the Left all throughout the Chamberlain period, but died away somewhat in 1939 as Hitler's true character became more widely known. It also had a vaguely aggressive double edge to it now whenever it was recommended. A new understanding of which alternative was most popular at any given time emerges as a product of this work and a clear policy time-line, of sorts, can now be plotted.

It has also been demonstrated that there were many appeasement critics *within* the Government who either advocated its replacement by another policy or else its subtle alteration to encompass new facets to it which Chamberlain himself rarely wished to impart. Even appeasement advocates like Halifax, for example, came to disagree with Chamberlain's precise conception of the policy and wanted a much firmer line than the Prime Minister after Prague to send a strong message to the Dictators. For each alternative to appeasement suggested, there was usually at least one Cabinet Minister and usually more than one senior Foreign Office official who at one time or another strongly recommended taking that path. Lord Vansittart, for example - who often criticised appeasement, certainly in his memoirs anyway - backed alliances, intensive rearmament *and* the threat of war, as well as briefly considering colonial initiatives, in the late

1930s. That Eden disagreed with much of Chamberlain's foreign policy is well known and he was not the only Cabinet Minister to resign or voice protest at appeasement and suggest another strategy as the best way forward. Ministers and Foreign Office officials reflected their own department's overriding aims and concerns most of all. Thus it has been shown, for example, that Simon, as Chancellor, was resistant to massively increased arms spending for most of Chamberlain's premiership, whereas the Defence Ministers pushed for greater resources in preparing the army, navy and air force for war. The Foreign Office and Treasury were also often at loggerheads, as has been shown.

The genesis of this thesis owes much to the absence of any set of minutes from a Cabinet or Foreign Policy Committee meeting where Chamberlain and his senior colleagues sat down and discussed the various possible alternatives one by one. Though each chapter of this work focuses on the Government records and high level discussions most appropriate to the alternative addressed therein, it seems that there was never any formal brainstorming session where all the policy options Chamberlain had available to him were considered and ruled in or out. This would seem to indicate that many of the key decisions in foreign policy making took place in informal groups or off the record. There are countless examples of diary entries or letters from key Cabinet figures or Foreign Office personal which begin along the lines of, 'had a useful chat with Van about...', or 'Simon tells me that he thinks...' and so on. The informal nature of much of this discussion doubtless accompanied and perhaps even superseded Cabinet conversations. This would suggest that the criticisms, both contemporary and later, of Chamberlain having an inner circle of trusted lieutenants like Halifax, Simon and Hoare are broadly true. Perhaps the full range of alternatives were never systematically considered, at least on the record, because it was generally assumed that they each had very obvious flaws or weaknesses to them that had already been discussed elsewhere in one-on-one meetings or smaller groups. It seems likely that Chamberlain's inner circle decided foreign policy and then used the Cabinet or Foreign Policy Committee to rubber-stamp a pre-determined line. Ruggiero has stated, for example, 'what Chamberlain sought was approval for his policies not participation', and this thesis would suggest there is a good deal of truth in this.⁶ Cadogan recalls in his diary on 29 March 1939, 'Cabinet in the morning, to which Halifax exposed our

policy in regard to Poland and Romania. They seemed to take it alright'.⁷ Again, this would support the assertion that Chamberlain was autocratic and dictatorial, deciding policy with a select few and then informing, rather than seeking the consent of the rest.⁸ He once wrote in his diary: 'I fear Baldwin asks too many opinions. They contradict one another and then he is left in the air'.⁹ The lessons of his predecessor's era were not to be lost on Chamberlain.

This work also shows that the Prime Minister's opinion in Cabinet or Foreign Policy Committee on the strengths or weaknesses of an alternative to appeasement was usually final and decisive, although this is perhaps also indicative of broad consent for his policy, especially after Eden's resignation.¹⁰ When one looks closely at the Foreign Policy Committee minutes, there are usually more people in agreement with Chamberlain's line than oppose it, although the Prime Minister would have had the final say over who attended such meetings. While Chamberlain was undoubtedly the dominant figure driving appeasement forwards - and he clearly had his favourites within the Cabinet - it cannot, however, be said that he presided over a group of mere toadies or weaklings, as has sometimes been suggested. Eden and Duff Cooper both stood up to Chamberlain and then resigned, Halifax took a firm stand over the Godesberg Memorandum and the subsequent Cabinet revolt forced Chamberlain to reject Hitler's demands in favour of the threat of war. The reluctant Prime Minister was driven into the 1939 Soviet alliance negotiations by weight of Cabinet opinion.¹¹

Critics have accused Chamberlain of not listening to his expert advisers within the Foreign Office sufficiently, but this misses an obvious point that the Foreign Office was not one body with a unified and settled consensus on any policy. Again, this is not always explained in the traditional literature. It can be seen in each chapter that opinions were as divided within the Foreign Office as to the best way to deal with Hitler as they were outside. Cadogan argued with Vansittart over the best course to take as much as Chamberlain did with Eden, Churchill or Attlee. If Chamberlain ignored or sidelined one Foreign Office official, he agreed with or took the advice of another in so doing. Similarly, the military experts and the Chiefs of Staff often differed in opinion and also regularly changed their minds as new information became available. Lloyd George regularly sidelined the Foreign Office during his premiership and

Churchill frequently ignored military advisers in his conduct of the war. Neither receives as much criticism as Chamberlain does for doing so.

It should now be apparent that intelligence was weak and contradictory reports about Hitler's intentions constantly bombarded the Cabinet. To an extent influenced by the nature of the state with which they were dealing, the idea that 'moderates' could depose or pacify Hitler was clearly flawed, the January 1939 war scare almost completely mistaken. Even the widespread belief in Britain that Germany was on the verge of economic collapse has been proven to be inaccurate. This all complicated the picture further and made it difficult to come to decisions. The works on British intelligence in the 1930s by Wesley Wark and Christopher Andrew, among others, broadly confirm this impression of poorly coordinated intelligence and lack of central provision for its assessment.¹²

Chamberlain's Policy and Motives: Criticisms and Vindications

With hindsight far removed from the conditions of the day it is easy to accuse Chamberlain of being excessively cautious or timid in the late 1930s. Such thinking is often born from knowledge of how subsequent events panned out, which nobody had at the time, and an unspoken assumption that the Second World War was inevitable. Could the Government not have prepared for it much better, critics ask? Chamberlain, of course, knew no such thing and perhaps hung on to the hope that war could be avoided longer than anyone else within his Government. If this made him the best man to pursue peace it probably made him unsuited to prepare for war in the way that a more bellicose figure like Churchill would have done. But, again, nobody was to know that war was certain and events show that Chamberlain contributed just about enough to allow the country to survive.

The perceived weaknesses of the alternatives to appeasement partly explain why Chamberlain took the path he did. He famously wrote to his cousin in January 1938: 'In the absence of any powerful ally and until our arms are completed, we must adjust our foreign policy to the circumstances, and even bare with patience and good humour actions which we should like to treat in a

very different fashion'.¹³ However, the policy also had its own separate impulses based upon international law and order, the inherent value of diplomacy, the concept of self-determination, a moral sense of what was right, and a widespread desire to revise the harsh, post-war Versailles settlement. When Chamberlain assumed the premiership declining British power in face of an Empire to protect against three simultaneous potential enemies - growing in strength and menace in as many different spheres - acted as a sobering accelerant. It was to Chamberlain's huge disadvantage that he inherited a vast Empire under such threat, with declining resources to protect it. Without Hitler and the Nazis appeasement may well have been the right policy to pursue and even with Hitler and the Nazis the ideal itself had great support in the earlier period, often from many of its later critics.

It seems an obvious point, but this thesis shows that fear of provoking Hitler and thereby provoking war was a constantly recurring feature in Chamberlain's calculations and in the Government's dismissal of the various alternatives. Even in the general language he used elsewhere, the Prime Minister was mindful of the possible provocative effects. In June 1937, for example, he concluded a speech in Parliament with 'an earnest appeal to those who hold responsible positions both in this country and abroad - and I am including the press and the members of this House - to weigh their words very carefully before they utter them'. He continued, 'I have read that in high mountains there are sometimes conditions to be found when an incautious move or even a sudden loud exclamation may start an avalanche'.¹⁴

Isolation and Pacifism were rejected in part because of the fear that they would just provoke Hitler to attack Britain's rich and vulnerable Empire, extreme colonial and economic appeasement for much the same reasons. Support for the ailing League of Nations, hated and deserted by the Fascists, might just provoke Hitler and Mussolini into more smash and grab raids in Europe. Alliances, it was felt, would just trigger some Mad Dog act or lead to opposing blocs on the Continent and the inevitability of war. Massive rearmament and the threat of war, it was feared, might just cause Hitler to take a similar line and escalate tensions further. Chamberlain believed that all the alternatives might just bring war closer than appeasement itself, which aimed at

systematically removing the *causes* of hostility. He therefore treated the *Führer's* fragile temperament with kid gloves for most of his period in office.

Chamberlain did not want war and so avoided war-like actions for as long as possible and often did the minimum required to prepare Britain for conflict, usually at the last possible moment, and only then when Hitler's actions seemingly made such actions unavoidable. His general attitude to rearmament and defences, or even to allies for that matter, are good examples of this tendency to do just enough to protect the country if his policy failed and yet seeking not to provoke an outburst from the volatile German Chancellor. Even when Chamberlain took his firmer line after the Prague Coup, he often coupled harsh actions or words with pacific gestures designed to convey the impression that his new strategy was at all times purely defensive. His policy of alliances was deliberately labelled a 'Peace Front', for example. Indeed, in hoping to avoid hostilities right up until the last moment, it could even be argued that Chamberlain subconsciously undermined many of the preparations for war so obviously needed in the final few months of peace. Perhaps this was the Prime Minister's greatest failing - not that he tried so hard for peace, which was utterly commendable, but that he continued to delude himself that it was still possible when all about him sought intensified preparations for war. Even when making comments to the effect that Hitler was a madman or that force was the only language he understood, Chamberlain still believed that his own efforts could pacify the Nazi leader. Many have said that Chamberlain misjudged Hitler but few at the time knew the real nature of the beast and if Chamberlain failed to understand him, then so to did anyone else who thought that the racial, eugenic elements of Nazi ideology could be soothed by colonies or dispelled by the crumbling League of Nations. The Prime Minister was under no illusions as to the character of the man he had to face, but perhaps *was* deluded about his own abilities to deter him from war. Doubtless Chamberlain's famous arrogance and belief in his own abilities greatly influenced this. He once wrote to his sister, for example, 'I do not trouble over criticism which does not affect my judgement of what is right. Like Chatham, "I know that I can save my country and I do not believe that anyone else can"'.¹⁵

There are other inconsistencies in Chamberlain's character and policy that appear somewhat striking and yet are rarely afforded attention in the existing

literature. The fact that he would often go out of his way to pick a quarrel with the Opposition at home, or alienate the Vansittarts and Edens within the Government machine who resisted appeasement, does not sit easily alongside the timid and deferential way in which he dealt with Hitler. While this is evidence, to some extent, that Chamberlain was never the simple weakling or coward that he has often been presented as, his critics would no doubt counter that similar firmness should have been applied internationally as it was at home. He was, of course, playing for much higher stakes on the global scene.

Chamberlain, by his own admission, based his rejection of the policy of alliances on the lessons of history - the causes of World War One - and placed so little faith in the USA or Russia because of his dealings with them in the past and their foreign policy during the inter-war period. It seems curious, therefore, that the lessons of history with regards to the nature of Hitler's promises and Nazi Germany's previous conduct should have taken so long to sink in. If he believed that his own abilities could charm Hitler into peace, then it is strange that Chamberlain never felt he could deal in a similar way with Roosevelt and persuade the President to try to induce his people to take a much more proactive interest in European affairs. The President was, after all, a more amenable man than Hitler, and his country had greater cultural and historical bonds with Britain than Nazi Germany had. Perhaps this can be explained in part by Chamberlain's oft-abused short-sightedness - his belief in tackling one problem, the central problem, head-on, to the detriment of wider issues and concerns.

In being so committed to appeasement, Chamberlain clearly could have done much more to foster a Plan 'B' or back-up option. Similarly, in trying to reduce the number of enemies facing Britain, he neglected to try hard enough to increase the number of friends the Empire could rely upon. One often wonders whether Chamberlain's obstinacy and petulant hatred of opposition sometimes made him act like a rebellious schoolchild - the fact that his critics repeatedly told him he was wrong only fortified his stubborn will to continue along the path which he felt was right. It is difficult to believe that ego did not play a part in Chamberlain's foreign policy, but then it also did with Churchill a few years later. Indeed, it is only because Chamberlain's appeasement failed, whereas Churchill was the hero of the hour, that the personal qualities of the former

which are so abused - single-mindedness, arrogance, obstinacy, a dictatorial approach - are so celebrated in the latter.

However, there are other examples of Chamberlain's far-sightedness not shared by his contemporaries and seldom acknowledged by historians. His fears about the post-war settlement and Britain's place *vis-à-vis* the two eventual Superpowers seemed little recognised when so many of his critics called for alliances with Russia or the USA. Chamberlain's careful and prescient balance struck by the 'fourth arm of defence' rearmament thesis was disregarded by opponents urging greater arms spending. Similarly, it was Chamberlain who was key to switching the priority in aircraft production from bombers to fighters - criticised by many like Churchill in this period - and this was a move that was to prove remarkably far-sighted and pivotal to the eventual outcome of the war. If he was to be singularly abused for the failed policy of appeasement and the state of the British army during the war, he should at least be given credit for his many successes, not least the strength and composition of the air force by 1939.

Similarly, as has been touched upon above, if Chamberlain was muddled and confused as to how best to deal with Hitler, then so too were almost all of his contemporary critics. The black and white notion that the so called 'anti-appeasers' knew instinctively exactly what sort of beast Hitler was at the time, and that the best way to deal with him was with force, is far too simplistic and, frankly, inaccurate. Nevertheless, it has become ingrained in the popular understanding of appeasement, encouraged by the belief that war spelt the failure of this policy. Few are aware that Churchill and Eden spoke positively about appeasement on numerous occasions before Chamberlain became Prime Minister, or that Lloyd George took tea with the *Führer* in September 1936 and came back singing his praises. The fact that Churchill thought the Nazis could be deterred by the dying League of Nations for much of the decade, or that most of the Labour Party agreed - as *well* as thinking colonies and cash could buy Hitler off - is rarely recognised whenever blame is apportioned. Few complained when Chamberlain postponed war by flying to meet Hitler in September 1938 and the idea that Churchill or Attlee would not have taken similar steps in the circumstances of the time is open to serious doubts. Even Socialist MP Rhys Davies noted in the *Glasgow Forward* on 26 November 1938, for example, 'if Attlee had been Prime Minister at the time and had stopped war at Munich

under exactly similar circumstances, he would have been hailed with sheer delight by our people'.¹⁶ Churchill's wartime dealings with Stalin over the issue of Eastern Europe have echoes of Munich about them.

If Chamberlain was deluded about appeasement or tended to think in an overly-cautious way about how best to maintain peace, then many of his political opponents seem similarly unaware of the realities of Britain's position. The Churchills and Vansittarts who confidently proclaimed that we should have stood firm on almost every occasion (incidentally, these were often the same people who talked most about the lack of arms) seem to have been under the misapprehension that Britain was still at the height of its Victorian powers, capable of easily protecting the far-flung Empire from all comers. Had they been partial to all the information Chamberlain had at his disposal, and faced with the dilemma of having to act upon it, it seems doubtful that they would have been so militant.

Final Observations: Did a Viable Alternative to Appeasement Exist?

That appeasement was a tragic failure cannot be denied; that it had, at times, elements of weakness and shame about it is also true; that Chamberlain was an arrogant man of many faults and misjudgements is beyond doubt. However, when one considers the alternatives he had in the circumstances existing in the 1930s, without the benefit of hindsight available to us today, would anything else other than appeasement - in many ways a traditional British policy - have necessarily been better or more successful? Of this nobody can be certain. In the bleak and chaotic period of history in which Chamberlain had to operate, there was surely an element of risk to whatever policy he could have taken, and any strategy he adopted would have had a large degree of the gamble about it.

Chamberlain had a wide range of alternatives to appeasement available to him, suggested by an array of critics and Government figures alike, all of which he did at least contemplate on one occasion or another as a means to avert war. Each has been addressed to some extent by the general historiography on appeasement, but mostly only in somewhat fragmentary manner. A few leading historians working in specific focus on each area do exist - Ceadel on Pacifism,

Wendt or Crozier on colonial and economic appeasement, Northedge or Beck on the League, Peden or Shay on rearmament, Williamson on war, to give just a few examples - but it is clear that much more work is needed to fully understand the viability of the options available to him and the nature, motives and concerns of their numerous advocates.

Of the alternatives available, Chamberlain eventually chose alliances as the strategy to supersede his 'classic' appeasement in the months after the Prague Coup and it is clear, therefore, in his mind, as well as that of many of his critics at this time, that allies were his next best alternative. He coupled his Peace Front policy in the last months before war with an intensive rearmament drive and then, eventually, war itself. This demonstrates that these two alternatives were deemed next best by Chamberlain, but only ever very reluctantly so. Of course, a degree of economic appeasement was explored as part of his wider policy, but only as a supplement to political appeasement and never in the extended way envisaged by many on the Left. In so openly dismissing the ailing League and collective security it is clear that Chamberlain deemed this as one of the least attractive strategies available. Similarly, in taking it upon himself to meddle so forcibly in European affairs, and then resisting Germany in the end when his meddling failed, isolation and Pacifism were ruled out as unrealistic options. In the popular understanding of how Chamberlain rejected the alternative policies, scant attention has been paid to which he deemed the most and least viable. This study provides new insights on this particular question.

A great deal of speculation about alternatives to appeasement misses the central point that Chamberlain's policy was designed first and foremost to *avoid* war ever happening. He did not know, as we do, that war was definitely coming and therefore always had to balance the risks and effects of any policy on Britain's place in the world with the possibility, and indeed hope, that war would be averted. He did not, therefore, think about a line which might lead to the best war possible for Britain and the Empire - which many with hindsight have done - but rather, primarily, which one might avert the catastrophe altogether. Would any alternative to appeasement have been able to avoid war? Could Hitler have been deterred? Of course, much of this rests upon the nature of Hitler, Germany and Nazi foreign policy - an area where there has been much debate. Some historians like Andreas Hillgruber and Klaus Hildebrand have

claimed that Hitler had an 'intentionalist' long-term plan for world domination, to be carried out in a systematic way, stage by stage, as broadly mapped out in the pages of *Mein Kampf*. In this intentionalist plan, the ideological and racist elements were regarded as 'permanently binding dogmas'.¹⁷ Others like Hans Mommsen, however, have countered that Nazi foreign policy emerged in a more 'structuralist', *ad hoc* way, as a by-product of the confusion and chaos resulting from the demise of centralised government in Germany and the establishment of various departments and ministries working more or less independently of one another.¹⁸ In the intentionalist interpretation, 'Hitler was the master of the Third Reich'.¹⁹ In the structuralist view, meanwhile, Hitler was more a product of the system he had spawned, 'in some respects a weak Dictator'.²⁰

Although this debate originated some time ago, it is far from over just yet. More recently, D. C. Watt has claimed that 'Hitler willed, wanted, craved war'.²¹ Tim Mason, meanwhile, argues that Nazi foreign policy in the late 1930's owed much more to improvisation and confusion than to any masterplan.²² While the truth is probably found somewhere between these two contrasting poles - and the debate in this specific field continues - both intentionalist and structuralist interpretations would suggest that Nazi Germany could not be deterred from war, whether Hitler had a long-term policy to force conflict or whether the country stumbled into it out of the chaos of the Third Reich. For what it is worth, the writer of this thesis leans perhaps slightly more towards the former position than the latter and would generally concur with Watt's bold statement. However, whichever interpretation is most accurate - intentionalist or structuralist - neither a hell-bent madman nor a state spiralling out of control could be reasoned with or deterred by the common sense arguments of appeasement. Once Nazi Germany began to flourish it is probable that war was all but inevitable, whichever policy Chamberlain adopted, and many indeed felt this at the time. A Foreign Office memo by Gladwyn Jebb from 19 January 1939 stated, for example:

Germany is controlled by one man, Herr Hitler, whose will is supreme, and who is a blend of fanatic, madman and clear-visioned realist. His ambition and self-confidence are unbounded, and he regards Germany's supremacy in Europe as a step to world supremacy... At present he is devoting special attention to the Eastward drive... Britain, meanwhile, is Enemy Number One.²³

Nevile Henderson, the Briton who perhaps knew Hitler best and met with him most frequently, claimed in his memoirs written during the war: 'It is probably true to say that whatever attitude we had adopted towards Hitler and the Nazi gangsters, the result today would have been the same'.²⁴ He went on: 'Peace was Hitler's for the asking after Munich and he alone could have ensured it'.²⁵

Given this interpretation of Nazi Germany - to say nothing of Fascist Italy and Japan - it is probable that isolation or Pacifism would have only invited the beast to converge upon Britain and its vital interests once resistance on the Continent had been subdued. It is difficult to believe that Britain could have taken an utterly selfish policy and tried to 'save itself', abandoning Europe to Hitler, with a regime like Nazi Germany and the hungry eyes of both Italy and Japan watching on. With a far flung Empire to protect, it would have been impossible to take the hedgehog approach, to curl up and hope that war could pass Britain by. Hitler, after all, made few exceptions for neutrals or pacific powers in the war that eventually came.

The idea that colonial or economic appeasement would sate the will to war of a regime whose driving impulses were not just economic, but also heavily racial and ideological, is similarly fraught with many doubts. Concessions of this kind would probably have only whet the Nazi appetite for more, and it is doubtful whether bulging coffers would have made Hitler feel significantly less hostile to Jews, Slavs, Communists or Africans.

The League of Nations proved itself incapable of preventing conflict in the inter-war period and these failings probably only encouraged Hitler to chance his arm. Perhaps, had every member acted more ruthlessly to keep peace from the date of its inception - as difficult as this would have been in the hungry 1930s, when the interest of the nation state was paramount over federal impulses - then the decade may have been more peaceful. However, the League did little to deal with the causes of war and, ultimately, would have had to resort to conflict itself, military sanctions, to impose its will upon any violent or rogue state. Germany, Italy and Japan were all non-members by the late 1930s.

A Grand Alliance may well have postponed war or affected the timing of hostilities breaking out. Hitler was clearly insane, but intelligent enough to shore up his Eastern front with the Nazi Soviet Pact before he devoured Poland in 1939. This is surely evidence that he greatly feared an Anglo-Franco-Soviet bloc

standing against him in the weeks before war. However, the fact that Hitler later attacked his former ally (as well as declaring war on America during the conflict itself) demonstrates that he was unafraid of larger, potentially more powerful opponents and suggests his ideological *Drang nach Osten* goals for *Lebensraum* were long-term aims and could not be suppressed. The sizeable Peace Front that Chamberlain built in the last months of peace did not deter Hitler from invading Poland and an alliance with America or Russia would have been able to do little to stop Germany invading, say, France or the Low Countries, as a matter of simple geography. It is more than likely, as Chamberlain feared, that breaking Europe into hostile camps, especially ones so ideologically opposed as Russia, France and Britain against Germany, Italy and Japan, would only have made war certain, or actually provoked an outbreak of hostilities earlier on.

A Britain creaking with a huge arsenal of weapons would doubtless have caused Germany a moment's pause longer than the country which it faced at the outbreak of war. However, this would have been impossible to create in post-Depression Britain without turning the country into a nation very similar to Nazi Germany itself. Preparing for war in a colossal manner would surely have just made a colossal war more likely to occur and, again, the ultimate resources and economic capacity for arms production of the USA and Russia did not deter Hitler from declaring war on either power during the conflict. The *Führer*, of course, favoured the strategy of short, sharp *Blitzkrieg* wars designed to negate long-term economic disadvantage. Britain did rearm substantially in the last year or so of peace and Hitler still invaded Poland. It seems unlikely that mass rearmament would have averted war therefore.

The threat of a long war at one time or another might have caused Hitler to back down and pick his opportunity at a more favourable moment. This essentially happened at Munich, although Chamberlain's feverish pursuit of peace accompanied Anglo-French mobilisation in the last days of September 1938. However, ultimately, it was perhaps impossible to out-bluff the 'greatest bluffer of modern times', as Gilbert Murray called him, the man determined to play his cards no matter what the outcome.²⁶ Hitler waved aside the ultimatum given by Chamberlain shortly before Britain joined the conflict at Poland's side.

It is almost laughable to think that taking Churchill or Eden back into the Cabinet in 1939 would have brought Hitler to the table begging for peace.

Indeed, it may have only convinced him that Chamberlain had abandoned all hope for it and settled finally on war. Critics like Leo Amery suggested such a move on numerous occasions throughout the 1930s, as well as large-scale reforms akin to establishing a peace-time War Cabinet system.²⁷ After Munich and the Prague Coup, figures like Halifax, Hoare and Harvey, joined by appeasement critics and sections of the press and general public, called on Chamberlain to do the same.²⁸ However, despite carrying out several reshuffles in late 1938 and early 1939, Chamberlain resisted such calls because of his belief that it would only provoke Hitler into rage and frustrate his own efforts at appeasement. Personality issues also played a role here of course.²⁹

The idea of Britain joining the Nazi quest to dominate the world would have been abhorrent to the National Government and the vast majority of British people. Despite widespread pro-German sympathy and mutual fear of the Soviet Union, outright pro-Nazism in Britain was reserved for the minority few - the so-called Fellow Travellers within the BUF and anti-Semitic groups like The Link.³⁰ Aside from the occasional throw-away comment within the Foreign Office about the possibility, the Government never seriously considered any sort of alliance with Germany after 1936 or thereabouts, when the true nature of the regime became apparent.³¹ Chamberlain was fast discovering the drawbacks to protecting an Empire as it was, to say nothing of building a new one based upon the repugnant racial and eugenic doctrines enshrined in Nazism. This option was clearly least viable of all.

If Hitler could not be deterred from war by any of the alternatives discussed above, then the obvious ploy - or so it seems in hindsight - would have been to remove him from the picture.³² However, as predominant a deciding factor for war as Hitler was, the wider Nazi regime also played its part and Germany's grievances with Versailles existed long before the Third Reich ever did. The assassination of Hitler or an internal German coup may very well have improved things for Britain, but then again it may not. One or two Government figures occasionally speculated along these lines at the time. However, neither sponsoring a coup, nor attempting to kill Hitler were seriously considered by Chamberlain in the late 1930s, as Roger Moorhouse has pointed out in his recent book on the subject.³³ When the British Military attaché to Berlin, Colonel Noel Mason-Macfarlane, offered to shoot Hitler in April 1939, Halifax responded,

‘we have not reached that stage... where we have to use assassination as a substitute for diplomacy’.³⁴ Mason-Macfarlane was relocated shortly afterwards.

The question of whether there would have been a Second World War without Hitler is tempting to ask, though it is difficult to imagine that Britain’s drive to appease that country’s grievances (to say nothing of the concerns of other nations in Europe during the interwar period) would have been as strong without him, or that German complaints would have died down in the absence of this one man. Adding the Great Depression into the mix and conditions might well have just created another Hitler in Germany or made Italian or Japanese militancy the chief danger instead. Events in Spain during this period, which served only to complicate the picture further from Chamberlain’s point of view, demonstrate that global tensions between Left and Right were bigger than one country and one man. Even without Hitler it may have been that a Second World War was unavoidable, albeit it would have been a very different war.

Once the Third Reich had established itself, the assassination of Hitler might well have brought someone even worse from the Allied perspective, as difficult as this is to imagine. It is a chilling thought, for example, but the Nazi war effort might have only benefited from the removal of Hitler’s later influence, when he was so often acting against the advice of his Generals. Might the Second World War have only been averted if the peace settlement from the First had been radically different? Even appeasement critic and Labour MP James Griffiths stated in the wake of Munich, for example: ‘I say that if in 1918 we had held out a helping hand, the hand of fellowship, to that new Germany, there would have been no Hitler in Germany now, and you would not now be discussing this settlement made last week’.³⁵ Perhaps the *Führer’s* death as a child or a stray bullet in his direction during the First World War was the only answer? What if Hitler had made it as a professional artist? It is clear that such counterfactual speculation could be continued to a ludicrous extent and one would be wise, therefore, not to venture too far into these waters.

Given that it is the author’s strong contention that Hitler could not have been deterred from war, all the alternatives to appeasement were as doomed to fail or essentially as ‘bad’ as appeasement itself. It was not just Chamberlain who felt this, but most of his Cabinet and many wider appeasement sympathisers in the Tory Party and beyond. It was common for appeasement

supporters to attack the lack of credible alternatives suggested by critics during the late 1930s, as we have seen.

With hindsight unavailable to Chamberlain at the time, therefore, we can now ask would any of the alternatives have led to a 'better' war for Britain? It is in counterfactual speculation like this that certain rival policies to appeasement become more attractive and viable than others, although we are again ignoring the crucial point that nobody at the time could say war was certain (and that appeasement was designed to avoid it ever happening). There is much that is attractive about the view that a Grand Alliance, followed by a war for the Sudetenland in late 1938, with a Britain more heavily armed than it was at the time, may have turned out better for Britain and the Allies, but of course we only know this because of the path the war actually took. Blaming Chamberlain for not preparing Britain sufficiently to fight an imaginary war in a better way than it was able to fight a future war of which nobody could be certain, and which evolved in a way nobody could foretell, is clearly absurd. However, it seems as if many of Chamberlain's critics want to do just that. All of this also ignores the obvious fact that it is extremely tenuous to speculate about the path of a hypothetical 'other' war fought out on an earlier occasion, on a different battleground, for a different cause, with different participants, to any great degree of accuracy. It is, of course, entirely possible that it may have turned out worse, especially when one considers public opinion unity in September 1938.

One can speculate on such complex issues *ad infinitum* but a great deal of the historian's craft is to base his or her conclusions on solid evidence and fact. Britain, with allies, won the war that eventually came, which was prepared for by Chamberlain and his Government, although he strove so manfully to avoid it. The 'finest hour' of the war, victory in the Battle of Britain, owed a great deal to the farsightedness of Chamberlain's rearmament programme, something so often ignored by his many detractors.³⁶

The author of this thesis did not set out to write an apology for Chamberlain and his Government and it is hoped this work is more balanced than that. However, in writing this thesis, it becomes apparent that much of what has been written about him is grossly unfair, ignores or downplays many of the realities of the period, is steeped in emotional, overly simplistic mythology deeply ingrained by the Churchillian version of history, and rooted in hindsight of

events which we are able to enjoy and he was not. Despite the efforts of a host of revisionist historians, much of this still needs challenging if we are to get a clearer picture of the truth. Perhaps it is a losing battle, so entrenched are the 'Guilty Men' assumptions about Chamberlain and appeasement. The alternatives he had available all seemed deeply unattractive to him and the majority of his Government, not to mention wider opinion. Indeed, it is likely that some of the rival options would have only brought war nearer, whereas appeasement seemed sensible and just to most people's minds. As David Dutton has stated, 'it is possible that there was no good or correct policy available in the circumstances of the 1930s'.³⁷

Any alternative the Prime Minister pursued would have been dogged by risks and great dangers. Even Anthony Eden, a so-called anti-appeaser, admitted in Parliament on 19 May 1939: 'There is no perfect course to follow, least of all with world conditions as they are today'.³⁸ While Alistair Parker has confidently claimed that Churchill could have avoided the Second World War, the author finds David Dilks' conclusion more compelling. He states: 'It is hardly possible to conceive of a British Government which could have confronted the continuous crises of those years without blunders and misapprehensions'.³⁹

That appeasement failed did not make it wrong to try. In many ways it was a sort of necessary evil - although it is worth reminding ourselves that for the majority of the decade and beyond it was not seen as evil at all, but the obvious policy to settle a continent's woes. As Paul Schroeder has commented, 'any other policy in 1938 would have been an astounding, almost inexplicable divergence from the norm' and there is a large degree of truth in this, certainly when considering the 1930s as a whole.⁴⁰ Only by pursuing a compassionate and pacific policy based upon reasonably addressing Germany's legitimate grievances could it be established once and for all that it was *right* to stand firm against the Nazi march. Only in trying and failing to pacify Hitler could his true nature be revealed to the world and it be asserted with confidence that a Second World War was justified. A war over the issue of keeping over three million Germans out of Germany in September 1938, for example, would have been widely unpopular and fought on far more shaky ground than resisting Hitler's attempt to crush the Poles one year later. The year's grace between these two points not only established the guilt of and justification for the war but also

allowed Britain the time to rearm and prepare sufficiently to ensure at least the survival of the mainland from invasion, as narrow as this eventual victory was. Chamberlain did not intend to buy a year's peace in order to fight a better war at a later date (although there are many examples of him referring to the need to play for time) but, rather, to postpone a war in the hope that the threat would never again return - 'peace for our time'. In his ultimate failure, he deserves at least some credit for his achievements.

Did Chamberlain have a viable other option to pursue? It is difficult to believe that the Nazis could ever be deterred and war, therefore, against this brutal regime with its sinister aims of world domination was the only choice left. In losing his quest to maintain peace, Chamberlain was victorious at least in illuminating clearly where the blame for the ensuing struggle lay. History should credit him for this.

1. Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p.544.
2. Amery's particular role with regards to alternatives to appeasement has been recently examined in detail by Richard Grayson in his article, 'Leo Amery's Imperialist Alternative to Appeasement in the 1930s', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.17 (4), 2006, pp.489-515.
3. Chamberlain speech to Party Conference, 2 Oct. 1936, Conservative Research Department papers, CRD 1/24/2, fol. 3, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Conservative Research Department papers (CRD) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
4. George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain, 1937-75*, vol.1 (New York: Random House, 1976), pp.8-21.
5. Foreign Policy Committee Proceedings, 15 March 1938, CAB 27/623/FP(36)/25, The National Archives (TNA). Cabinet (CAB) papers are located at the National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.
6. John Ruggiero, *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament: Pride, Prejudice, and Politics* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), p.2.
7. D. Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45* (London: Cassell, 1971), p.164.
8. Chamberlain himself admitted in a letter to his sister on 27 March 1938 that the Foreign Policy Committee 'alone had discussed the situation' with regards to the *Anschluss* Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, NC18/1/1043, Special Collections Department, University of Birmingham (BU) (my emphasis).
9. Quoted, Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1946), 1 March 1936, p.278.
10. Samuel Hoare's memoirs give many useful insights into the nature of Chamberlain's leadership style and some of the finer intricacies of the foreign policy making process. See Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), pp.260-91.
11. Other examples of such opposition exist, not least to the delays in aiding Poland in the final days before declaring war.
12. Intelligence, according to the latter, constituted little more than 'a mass of only partly digested detail' at this time. Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London: Heinemann, 1985), p.387. See also Wesley Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany* (New York: Ithaca, 1985).
13. Quoted, Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, p.322.
14. *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates. Official Reports. 5th Series, House of Commons*, vol.325, col.1545, 25 June 1937. Just a few months later in December 1937 he expressed regret that British politicians should even discuss foreign policy so frequently and openly in public, where their words might be misinterpreted abroad: 'It is so difficult to say anything that can do good, and so easy to say much that might do harm'. HC Deb 5s, vol.330, col.1803, 21 Dec. 1938. Chamberlain and Neville Henderson were also frequently critical of negative British press coverage of Nazi Germany.
15. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 12 March 1939, NC18/1/1089. Chamberlain was paraphrasing Pitt's famous quote upon returning to Government as Leader of the House of Commons in 1756.
16. *Glasgow Forward*, 26 Nov. 1938. Quoted, CRD 1/78/1, fol. 104.

17. Klaus Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, trans. by Batsford, B. T. (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1973), p.139.
18. See, for example, Hans Mommsen, 'Hitler's Stellung im Nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem' in Hirschfeld, G. and Kettenacker, L. (eds.) *'Der Führerstaat': Mythos und Realität* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), pp.43-72.
19. Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974), p.11.
20. Mommsen, 'Hitler's Stellung', col.702.
21. D. C. Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-39* (London: Heinemann, 1989), p.623.
22. See Tim Mason, 'Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism', in Hirschfeld and Kettenacker, *'Der Führerstaat'* (eds.), pp.23-42.
23. Foreign Policy Committee Memoranda, 19 Jan. 1939, CAB 27/627/FP(36)/74, The National Archives (TNA).
24. N. Henderson, *Failure of a Mission: Berlin 1937-39* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), p.35. To be fair, others in the Government were less convinced of Hitler's insatiable appetite for war. For example, Lord Halifax commented shortly after the *Anschluss* that he believed Hitler 'did not entertain a lust for conquest on a Napoleonic scale'. Quoted, CAB 27/623/FP(36)/26, 18 March 1938. This only reemphasises the confusion of the period.
25. Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, p.196.
26. Murray to N. de Garis Davies, 22 Sept. 1938, Gilbert Murray papers, MS Gilbert Murray 233, fol. 141, Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University. Gilbert Murray papers (MS Gilbert Murray) are located at the Bodleian Library (BL), Oxford University.
27. In a letter to *The Sunday Times* on 10 April 1938, he stated: 'I believe there is no measure that Mr Chamberlain... could undertake that would more facilitate his own almost superhuman task, and make the nation feel that its problems were being faced in a really bold and big spirit, than the application... of that principle of Cabinet reform which Mr Lloyd George introduced during the war'.
28. It was hoped such a move might send a strong message to the Dictators, improve national unity, and better facilitate the arms drive. Opposition MPs regularly advocated the inclusion of Lloyd George, Attlee and Greenwood in the Cabinet during these years, many convinced that that Tory-dominated 'National' Government was only nominally so. Incidentally, Halifax went on to say in his memoirs, 'I have often wondered how the course of history might have been changed if he had acted in the sense that I suggested'. Earl of Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, 2nd edn (London: Collins, 1957), p.200.

29. Chamberlain wrote to his sister on 15 October 1938 that he was not prepared 'for the sake of sham unity', to take as partners, men who would sooner or later wreck his plans. 'What I want is more support for my policy, not a strengthening of those who don't believe in it, or at any rate, are harassed by constant doubts'. Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 15 Oct. 1938, NC18/1/1072. In February 1939, meanwhile, he wrote: 'I much fear that if Anthony were in the Cabinet it would be like it was before and I should have him objecting to every proposal to get a better understanding with the Dictators. Indeed the mere announcement that he had been taken back would be enough to convince them, that we had changed policy and might even tempt them to break out now before the democracies had further strengthened their position'. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 26 Feb. 1939, NC18/1/1087. Even Hoare, who was calling for such Cabinet reforms, would later admit that Churchill represented 'the very embodiment of a policy of war' in this era. Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), p.368.
30. For example, National Labour MP Sir Ernest Bennett wrote in *The Times* on 20 March 1937 that Hitler should be welcomed as 'the defender against Communism'. Press baron Lord Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail*, and figures like Lord Londonderry have also, on occasion, been described as pro-Nazi - however, pro-German would be a fairer assessment. Similarly, the alleged sinister influence of groups like the 'Cliveden Set', has been convincingly refuted in recent years. See N. Rose, *The Cliveden Set: Portrait of an Exclusive Fraternity* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000).
31. For example, Cabinet secretary Maurice Hankey, penned a Foreign Office memo in August 1936 speculating that 'before long it may pay us to throw our lot in with Germany and Italy'. See FO371/20475/W11340, 24 Aug. 1936, The National Archives (TNA). Foreign Office (FO) papers are located at The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London. Strang made similar comments in 1938. See, for example, FO371/21674/C1866, 17 March 1938. That Hitler was attracted to the idea of a British alliance is well known from the pages of *Mein Kampf*.
32. Harold Macmillan asserted in his memoirs, for example, that a firm stand by Britain at the time of the Munich Agreement 'might have stimulated the German Generals to make a serious attempt to either force Hitler to draw back or depose him from power'. Harold Macmillan, *The Winds of Change, 1914-39* (London: Macmillan, 1966), pp.579-80. Duff Cooper also referred to this in his memoirs, as Chapter Six shows.
33. Roger Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler: The Plots, the Assassins, and the Dictator who Cheated Death* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006).
34. Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler*, p.191. Moorhouse puts the decision not to try an assassination attempt down to the gentlemanly ethos prevalent in Whitehall and the Secret Service at the time. Despite some contact with figures involved in the German General's plot to overthrow Hitler shortly before Munich, the Government stuck fast to appeasement and offered little more than encouraging words. The chances of success of such provocative and risky initiatives of this type would have been slim anyway, as Chamberlain knew. Hitler survived numerous coup and assassination attempts as it was.
35. HC Deb 5s, vol.339, col.251, 4 Oct. 1938.

36. In retaining the leadership of the Conservative Party when Churchill replaced him as Prime Minister, Chamberlain also contributed in no small way to political unity during the war under his successor, whose appointment was initially greeted with a marked lack of enthusiasm from other Tories.
- 37 David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Arnold, 2001), p.218. Dutton himself was paraphrasing Kennedy here. The full Kennedy quote reads: 'There was no good or "correct" policy. Appeasement had its dangers and disadvantages but so, too, did the opposite course of action'. See Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind British Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1895-1980* (London: Harper Collins, 1985), p.301.
38. HC Deb 5s, vol.347, col.1860, 19 May 1939.
39. D. Dilks, "'We must hope for the best and prepare for the worst': The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937-39", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol.73, 1987, pp.309-52 (p.350).
40. Paul W. Schroeder, 'Munich and the British Tradition', *Historical Journal*, vol.19 (1) 1976, pp.223-43 (p.242).

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