



## New Perspectives on Appeasement: Some Implications for International Relations

J. L. Richardson

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# NEW PERSPECTIVES ON APPEASEMENT: Some Implications for International Relations

By J. L. RICHARDSON\*

**T**HIS article examines two questions: (1) To what extent have historians, taking advantage of the passage of time and access to the British archives on the 1930s, opened up new perspectives on British policy in those years? and (2) to the extent that new perspectives have been attained, what is their wider significance for the study of international relations? Its findings are that the new writing points to the need for a radical revision of the traditional understanding of appeasement, and that this reappraisal has significant implications for the discipline of international relations.

Substantiation of the first of these conclusions requires the examination of an extensive literature. The sheer magnitude of the documentary sources has not been an unmixed boon for historical research. Donald Watt has deplored the emergence of

a new group of professional cream-skimmers, "instant historians," the urgency of whose publishers' deadlines made any collation with other sources, let alone any possibility of serious digestion and rethinking of the *idées reçues*, virtually impossible.<sup>1</sup>

Even more damagingly, Robert Skidelsky suggests that

the release of official papers has led to the writing of some very official history. . . . On any but the most resolute historian, all those memoranda have the same effect that they had on the Ministers for whom they were first produced: to show that nothing different could possibly have been done. A historian who comes, naked, to the corridors of power is almost as likely to *write* conservative history as is the politician who arrives in the same condition to *make* conservative history.<sup>2</sup>

\* A draft of this paper was presented to a seminar in the Department of International Relations, Australian National University, in August 1986. It has benefited from comments by Christopher Andrew, Peter Dennis, Richard Higgott, J.D.B. Miller, and Ursula Vollerthun.

<sup>1</sup> Watt, "The Historiography of Appeasement," in Alan Sked and Chris Cook, eds., *Crisis and Controversy: Essays in Honour of A.J.P. Taylor* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 120-21.

<sup>2</sup> Skidelsky, "Going to War with Germany: Between Revisionism and Orthodoxy," *Encounter* 39 (July 1972), 58.

The following discussion is based on contributions that are more highly regarded by historians: those that derive most insights from the new sources, offer new interpretations, or cover hitherto neglected aspects of the topic. It does not attempt to evaluate the writing on appeasement published before the 1970s, some of which remains indispensable. Research on France, the United States, and other relevant actors is not included: although the sources are less extensive, the perceived issues differed in important ways in each national capital, and thus a thorough discussion of each would be required. On the other hand, recent research on Hitler's foreign policy is taken into account because questions relating to German intentions are central to any reappraisal of appeasement.

The discussion will focus on (1) the persistence of the traditional view of appeasement; (2) the "structural" approach, which offers a new interpretation; (3) studies of the economic, military, and intelligence dimensions of policy, which provide detailed evidence for (2); (4) contemporary reappraisals of Chamberlain and Churchill, in light of the foregoing and of recent research on Hitler; and (5) some implications for the study of international relations, and for structural theory in particular.

### I. THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

The historiography of appeasement published before the 1970s has been well reviewed by a number of authors. Most notable of these is Watt, who in 1965 foreshadowed themes that were soon to become prominent, and in 1976 provided a masterly survey of the views and formative experiences of changing generations of English historians of the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> Two phases may be distinguished in the literature before 1970, the dividing line being the publication, in 1961, of A.J.P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War*.<sup>4</sup> The first phase was dominated by the distinguished critics of appeasement whose views had been formed by the experience of the 1930s—above all L. B. Namier, J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, Alan Bullock, and Winston Churchill himself; their principal works were published between 1948 and 1952.<sup>5</sup> They provided the authoritative statement of the traditional view of appeasement as a policy of shameful weakness before the challenge of the dictators, which was doomed to fail. They did not, however, *create* this image, which had become estab-

<sup>3</sup> Watt (fn. 1), and "Appeasement: The Rise of a Revisionist School," *Political Quarterly* 36 (No. 2, 1965), 191-213.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961).

<sup>5</sup> John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich: Prologue to Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1948); Lewis B. Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude* (London: Macmillan, 1948), and *Europe in Decay* (London: Macmillan, 1950); Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (London: Odhams, 1952); Churchill, *The Second World War*, I: *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1948).

lished in the harsh experience of 1939, when the collapse of Chamberlain's hopes for "peace for our time" appeared to bear out the truth of Churchill's warnings and David Low's cartoons. Churchill drove home the "lesson" that the war could have been prevented by a policy of timely resistance to German aggression: "there never was a war more easy to stop."<sup>6</sup> Historians of the 1950s did not challenge this interpretation; nonetheless, readers of Feiling's biography of Chamberlain or Templewood's defense of appeasement were aware that there was a case to be answered.<sup>7</sup>

It was the traditional image of appeasement that influenced the assumptions of Western foreign policy makers during the cold war and that has more recently provided emotional support for opposition to detente. This image is upheld—unquestioned—in influential texts on international relations, in the 1980s as much as it was four decades ago.

Hans Morgenthau, for example, defines appeasement as

a foreign policy that attempts to meet the threat of imperialism with methods appropriate to a policy of the status quo. . . . One might say that appeasement is a corrupted policy of compromise, made erroneous by mistaking a policy of imperialism for a policy of the status quo.<sup>8</sup>

Frederick Hartmann strikes an even harsher note:

It is precisely when the vital interests are bartered in return for minor concessions, or none at all, that appeasement has taken place. Appeasement may result from weakness or ignorance, either from an inability to fight or a misconception of the effects on vital interests.<sup>9</sup>

Although K. J. Holsti begins by describing appeasement as "a good example of the kinds of conflicting principles and values with which policy-makers have to struggle," his further comments reinforce the traditional image:

Prime Minister Chamberlain was a man of great rectitude. . . . His principles and intentions were above reproach. By surrendering one position after the other through diplomatic negotiations he was able to keep the peace for two years, but in the process he and his colleagues sacrificed the independence of Austria, Danzig and Czechoslovakia. Was two years of "peace" and strict adherence to the League Covenant worth this price? The principles the British observed were commendable, but they did not help to create any effective policies for the Nazi threat.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Feiling, *Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1946); Viscount Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954).

<sup>8</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1967), 61.

<sup>9</sup> Hartmann, *The Relations of Nations*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 96.

<sup>10</sup> Kalevi J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 435. Holsti's details are surprisingly inaccurate: there were no diplo-

That image is endorsed by Kenneth Waltz:

A small-number system can always be disrupted by the actions of a Hitler and the reactions of a Chamberlain. . . . One may lament Churchill's failure to gain control of the British government in the 1930s, for he knew what actions were required to maintain a balance of power.<sup>11</sup>

A recent general text by Steve Chan suggests that an influential theory of war has been constructed on the basis of the traditional reading of British and French policy at Munich:

Their concession—made at the expense of their ally Czechoslovakia—appears only to have whetted Hitler's appetite for additional territory. . . . According to the appeasement theory of war, World War II might have been averted if the democracies had been more resolute in their opposition to Hitler's earlier aggressions. . . . The moral of the lesson of Munich is that appeasement discredits the defenders' willingness to fight, and encourages the aggressor to escalate his demands.<sup>12</sup>

The authors differ in their assessments of the morality of appeasement—Morgenthau, like Holsti, distinguishes between “good motives” and “bad policies”<sup>13</sup>—but they agree in generalizing from a historical stereotype which coincides with that held by the original opponents of Chamberlain's policy.

The first challenge to that stereotype came, appropriately enough, from a historian well known for his iconoclastic views: A.J.P. Taylor. Taylor's account of Hitler as a pure opportunist reacting to the initiatives of others, his ambivalent comments on appeasement, and his parting shot that the outbreak of war was due to Hitler's “launching on 29 August a diplomatic manoeuvre which he ought to have launched on 28 August”<sup>14</sup> revived interest in the complex politics of 1938-39 and in the events preceding the final crisis.<sup>15</sup> There was a new awareness that much evidence was not yet available and that many of the decisions were poorly understood. It was in this context that Watt advanced a number of provocative reinterpretations of particular topics such as the role of Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Treasury and a close adviser

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matic negotiations over Austria, and Danzig was not surrendered to Germany. The League of Nations had ceased to count in policy thinking after 1936.

<sup>11</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 175-76.

<sup>12</sup> Steve Chan, *International Relations in Perspective: The Pursuit of Security, Welfare and Justice* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), 88-89. Britain and Czechoslovakia were not allies.

<sup>13</sup> Morgenthau (fn. 8), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor (fn. 4), 278.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Christopher Thorne, *The Approach of War 1938-9* (London: Macmillan, 1967) and Esmonde M. Robertson, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War: Historical Interpretations* (London: Macmillan, 1971).

to Chamberlain.<sup>16</sup> A short time later, W. N. Medlicott and F. S. Northedge attempted more balanced reconstructions of British foreign policy in the interwar years, taking into account the considerations and constraints perceived by decision makers.<sup>17</sup> Although the Cabinet papers and those of the relevant departments were not yet available, the sources for such studies were already voluminous. Each of these scholars in his own way drew attention to the common ground shared by the appeasers and their critics: Medlicott argued that the policy differences between Chamberlain and the Foreign Office had been greatly exaggerated, while Northedge pointed to flaws in the characteristic British foreign policy style.<sup>18</sup>

## II. THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH

Whereas most of the recent British and American research on appeasement has taken the form of specialized monographs, German scholars such as Reinhard Meyers, Gustav Schmidt, Wolf D. Gruner, and Gottfried Niedhart have adopted a "structural" (or "structuralist") approach that seeks to reconstruct the essential features of the situation as a whole; this approach has been further developed by one prominent British historian, Paul Kennedy. The term "structure" is used in a variety of senses in different disciplines and theoretical traditions. There appears, however, to be a common idea: that, underlying the immediately perceived diversity of human action, it is possible to discern configurations of forces that bring about regularities of behavior and that constrain actions and outcomes, thereby opening up certain options while closing off others. Structural explanations are frequently contrasted with volitional explanations, the latter emphasizing choice, the former the limits to choice. Kennedy refers to "the deeper structures and chief recurrent patterns" underlying British diplomacy, but also to "reconstructing the totality of the decision making process."<sup>19</sup> The distinctive feature of the structural analysis of this school of historians is their investigation of the way in which different structural developments—economic and strategic, do-

<sup>16</sup> Donald C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Longmans, 1965), 100-116.

<sup>17</sup> William Norton Medlicott, *British Foreign Policy since Versailles* (London: Methuen, 1968); Frederick S. Northedge, *The Troubled Giant: Britain among the Great Powers, 1916-1939* (London: Bell, 1966).

<sup>18</sup> William Norton Medlicott, *Britain and Germany: The Search for Agreement, 1930-1937*, Creighton Lecture, 1968 (London: Athlone Press, 1969); reprinted in David Dilks, ed., *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century*, I (London: Macmillan, 1981), 78-101; Northedge (fn. 17), 617-30.

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy, "The Study of Appeasement: Methodological Crossroads or Meeting-Place?" *British Journal of International Studies* 6 (October 1980), 185, 187.

mestic and international—combined to constrain British foreign policy options and to favor some approaches over others, giving rise to well-entrenched attitudes and traditions. From the standpoint of politicians, these amounted to constraints as intractable as the structures themselves. By employing this perspective, the structuralists have sought to distance themselves from the polemical, participant character of the earlier writing on appeasement.<sup>20</sup>

Many of these structural features, such as the decline in Britain's relative power since the mid-19th century, are in themselves familiar. What is significant is the study of their interconnections—for example, the study of conflicting or mutually reinforcing tendencies. Northedge's theme of the discordance between British foreign policy attitudes in the interwar period and the demands of the international situation provides an early example of this kind of analysis.<sup>21</sup> Other structuralist writings draw attention to unfamiliar continuities, providing, in turn, a new context that highlights the significance of particular changes.

The appeasement policies of the 1930s have often been traced back to the early British reaction against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>22</sup> In the 1970s, several authors introduced a new perspective by postulating a tradition of appeasement in British foreign policy since the mid- or even early 19th century. Paul Kennedy has suggested that, after the death of Palmerston, British diplomacy adopted a characteristic approach that may be termed "appeasement" in its pre-1939 sense:

the policy of settling international (or, for that matter, domestic) quarrels by admitting and satisfying grievances through rational negotiation and compromise, thereby avoiding the resort to an armed conflict which would be expensive, bloody and possibly very dangerous.<sup>23</sup>

This tradition became established at the beginning of the long decline in Britain's relative power. It was not merely an expression of liberal optimism concerning man's inherent reasonableness, but was in accord with Britain's strategic, economic, and domestic interests. Although conservative and liberal rhetoric differed, the underlying approach showed continuity from the 1860s to the 1930s. It did not rule out Britain's going to

<sup>20</sup> Theda Skocpol makes a similar point in discussing structural explanations of revolutions: "Any valid explanation of revolution depends upon the analyst's 'rising above' the viewpoints of participants to find important regularities across given historical instances." *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 18.

<sup>21</sup> See Medlicott (fn. 18); also Frederick S. Northedge, *Freedom and Necessity in British Foreign Policy* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966).

<sup>23</sup> Kennedy, "The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1939," *British Journal of International Studies* 2 (October 1976), 195-215, at 195.

war if the stakes were sufficiently high, but ensured that war would be only the last resort. This central tradition was under constant attack from publicists of the Right and Left: on the one side, as dangerously complacent in its neglect of the primacy of power; on the other, as too compromising and not sufficiently principled. For the most part, the pragmatic center, securely in power, was untroubled by either set of critics, even though they often dominated the public debate. Wolf D. Gruner, in a structural analysis similar in its essentials, traces the roots of appeasement even further back, to the Napoleonic era, seeing it as the foreign policy of a rising as well as a declining industrial imperial power.<sup>24</sup>

Paul Schroeder offers an interesting variation on the same theme.<sup>25</sup> He, too, finds continuity between the 1930s and the 19th century—not in the overall British approach to foreign policy, but in the content of British policy toward central Europe. The predominant British reaction to the emergence of German nationalism was positive: German unification under the auspices of Prussia was perceived as quite natural and in accordance with progress. Moreover, it was seen as being good for the balance of power since it strengthened the center of Europe against the main dangers to stability, the ambitions of France and Russia. The British had a rather mechanical view of the central European component of the balance of power, and assumed that the detailed political arrangements in central Europe were of no vital concern. In all these respects, British policy in the 1930s was in line with the 19th-century tradition.

At the turn of the century, according to the structuralist view, Britain was able to adapt to the loss of primacy and to Germany's increasing power in Europe by reaching accommodations with the United States, France, and Russia. The overall international system was still recognizably the 19th-century European balance of power, augmented by the emergence of the United States and Japan as major actors. In the interwar period, Britain's position became immeasurably more difficult.<sup>26</sup> The Treaty of Versailles, as Trotsky observed, had turned Europe into a madhouse, but had failed to provide the inmates with straitjackets. The old

<sup>24</sup> Gruner, "The British Political, Social and Economic System and the Decision for Peace and War: Reflections on Anglo-German Relations, 1800-1939," *British Journal of International Studies* 6 (October 1980), 189-218.

<sup>25</sup> Schroeder, "Munich and the British Tradition," *The Historical Journal* 19 (No. 1, 1976), 223-43.

<sup>26</sup> In addition to the writings of Kennedy, above, see Gottfried Niedhart, "Appeasement: Die britische Antwort auf die Krise des Weltreichs und des internationalen Systems vor dem zweiten Weltkrieg" [Appeasement: The British answer to the crisis of the world empire and the international system before World War II], *Historische Zeitschrift*, 226 (No. 1, 1978), 67-88, and Reinhard Meyers, *Britische Sicherheitspolitik 1934-1938: Studien zum aussen-und sicherheitspolitischen Entscheidungsprozess* [British security policy 1934-1938: Studies of the decision-making process on foreign and security policy] (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1976).

rules of the balance of power were discredited, but the new rules of collective security under the League never won acceptance by the majority of the powers. Britain was not able to reduce the number of its potential adversaries by accommodations such as those it had made before 1914; even if Britain had been more interested in alliances, the United States was not available, and British governments mistrusted France and above all the Soviet Union. With its external assets greatly depleted by World War I, Britain had lost its financial preeminence. Although it was spared the intense ideological conflict of the Continent, the reality of the class conflict was dramatized by the general strike of 1926: Baldwin as leader of the Conservative Party sought to reconcile the opposing class interests, necessitating expenditure on domestic reform and welfare.<sup>27</sup> Following the Great Depression, policy was dominated by attempts to achieve economic recovery and by continued nervousness over class conflict. When, by 1935, the need for rearmament came to be recognized, its scale was limited by the dangers to the economic recovery and to Britain's external financial position. With British power thus drastically curtailed in the face of foreign policy problems that were of far greater magnitude than before 1914, it is not surprising that policy makers continued to follow the earlier appeasement tradition.

In his essay "Strategy versus Finance in Twentieth-century Britain," Kennedy postulates that, in view of these changes, a basic contradiction had developed between the requirements of Britain's economic and strategic interests.<sup>28</sup> The economy lacked the material and financial resources to provide for Britain's security in facing all its potential enemies. There was no good or "proper" solution: the demands of military security and economic security were not merely in competition with one another, but were mutually incompatible. This goes far beyond endorsing the government's claim that the economy was "the fourth arm of defence." Kennedy's contention is that rearmament within the limits which the Treasury quite rightly considered necessary for Britain's peacetime stability, and which were observed up to 1938, was manifestly inadequate to meet the military threats, but that the massive increase in armaments on which Britain embarked in 1939 could not be sustained by the economy, which by 1941 was indeed to become dependent on American assistance.

<sup>27</sup> In 1933, the share of social services in British public expenditure was 46.6%, compared with 33% in 1913; the share of defense was 10.5% and 29.9%, respectively. Payment on the national debt had increased from 6.1% to 21.4%. Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), 240.

<sup>28</sup> In Paul M. Kennedy, *Strategy and Diplomacy 1870-1945* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 87-106.

It was recognized in 1938-39 that Britain could not rearm rapidly enough to defeat Germany in a short war; it was *not* recognized that the economy could not sustain rearmament on the scale necessary to defeat Germany in a long war.

Schroeder draws very much the same conclusion: Britain had no good choices in the 1930s, only a choice of evils and dangers.<sup>29</sup> The Treasury, the appeasers, and the antiappeasers were all correct in their warnings of the negative consequences of the policies to which each was opposed, but they were overoptimistic concerning their own policies. Ultimately, the economic and political consequences of victory were to be almost as damaging to Britain's position as a great power as the consequences of defeat. The German historians Niedhart and Hildebrand even go so far as to suggest that, whereas Churchill's policy of all-out war ensured Britain's rapid decline as a great imperial power, Chamberlain may have glimpsed the one faint possibility of delaying this as long as possible.<sup>30</sup>

Although Northedge goes too far in suggesting that the limitations on British power were not understood at the time, he is correct with regard to the public debate.<sup>31</sup> The perception of limits is very prominent in the archival sources subsequently available, but even so it is clear with the advantage of hindsight that the decision makers did not perceive the full extent of those limitations—hence the remarkable overconfidence that was frequently expressed in 1939. The British could not bring themselves to consider that the situation might be as dire as the structuralists now maintain: they continued to believe that a more measured tempo of rearmament could preserve the fourth arm of defense and place Britain in a position to defeat Germany through blockade in a war of attrition.

To what extent are these interpretations deterministic? Northedge suggests that the margin for choice was extremely narrow: it is *almost* true that British governments could not have acted otherwise.<sup>32</sup> Kennedy and Schroeder suggest that there was indeed a choice, but only between evils. Schroeder notes the cumulative weight of the considerations favoring appeasement up to 1938:

If one begins to tot up all the plausible motivations for appeasement—fear and horror of another war, Britain's state of unpreparedness, fear for the British economy and the Empire, the unprepared state of public opinion, the isolationism of the Dominions and the United States, lack of confidence

<sup>29</sup> Schroeder (fn. 25), 242-43.

<sup>30</sup> Niedhart (fn. 26), 86, 88; Klaus Hildebrand, " 'British Interests' und 'Pax Britannica': Grundfragen englischer Aussenpolitik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert" ["British interests" and "Pax Britannica": Basic questions on English foreign policy in the 19th and 20th century], *Historische Zeitschrift* 221 (No. 3, 1975), 637-38.

<sup>31</sup> Northedge (fn. 17), 628.

<sup>32</sup> Northedge (fn. 21), 3-4.

in France, lack of interest in Central Europe, failure to understand Hitler and Nazism, fear and distrust of the Soviet Union and Communism, the absence of a viable alternative presented either by the Conservative Opposition or Labour, and more—one sees that these are far more than enough to explain it. It was massively overdetermined: any other policy in 1938 would have been an astonishing, almost inexplicable divergence from the norm.<sup>33</sup>

It should be noted that the structural interpretation is not limited to economic and systemic constraints. These would explain why Britain placed so high a value on avoiding war, but they would not explain the particular strategy for doing so: appeasement, rather than, for example, deterrence. It is here that the influence of tradition and the lessons of experience are relevant. The methods of appeasement had been remarkably effective in defusing conflicts with many and varied adversaries since the mid-19th century. On the other hand, however eloquently Churchill might invoke Britain's traditional balance-of-power policy (the policy of organizing a coalition against the potential hegemonial power), his listeners were aware that the balance had invariably been restored through a great war: Philip of Spain, Louis XIV, and Napoleon had not been deterred from their attempts at hegemony by the prospect of war against a hostile coalition. Why should Hitler be?

### III. THE ECONOMY, REARMAMENT AND INTELLIGENCE

#### THE ECONOMY

The constraint on British policy imposed by public reluctance to contemplate involvement in another great war—a reluctance that was shared by most of the decision makers themselves—has always been familiar to students of the 1930s. What the new literature brings out is the extent to which economic constraints further limited British strategic and diplomatic choices. It is true that one author, Robert Paul Shay, Jr., reaffirms the familiar thesis that the financial limits imposed by the Treasury could have been greatly relaxed if Keynes's advice had been heeded: the government declined to place economic stability at risk, but was prepared to take chances with regard to military preparedness.<sup>34</sup> But the view that the Treasury had good reason to insist on the economic limits to rearmament enjoys stronger support.<sup>35</sup> The most compelling of these reasons related

<sup>33</sup> Schroeder (fn. 25), 242.

<sup>34</sup> Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 277-78, 287-88.

<sup>35</sup> Paul M. Kennedy, "'Appeasement' and British Defence Policy in the Inter-war Years," *British Journal of International Studies* 4 (July 1978), 161-77; G. C. Peden, *British Rearmament*

to the balance of payments. Rearmament, even on the modest scale attempted, increased imports (since Britain could not produce all the requisite equipment and components) and decreased exports by diverting factories from the production of export goods. This reflected the overall weaknesses of the British economy with respect to modern technologies and industrial capacity: steel production was considerably below that of Germany, and the production of machine tools was far below. Excessive borrowing would have been inflationary, placing further strain on the balance of payments; the United States threatened to match any devaluation of sterling, ruling out that option for adjustment. It was generally agreed that Britain's financial strength needed to be husbanded to sustain the nation through the war of attrition that was anticipated if appeasement should fail.

The authors do not contend that the Treasury was always correct in its advice, but that the dilemmas which it perceived were genuine. G. C. Peden has pointed out that Keynes, at the time, differed only marginally from the Treasury.<sup>36</sup> He recognized the same inflationary and balance-of-payments dangers, and he was opposed to "undue influence with the normal course of trade" and to proposals that the government secure priority for rearmament by direct controls over industrial production and labor. On this latter point, critics of the rearmament policy move from the economic to the political constraints accepted by the National Government. In principle, the production of aircraft and other key equipment could have been accelerated by the assumption of direct controls; in practice, the government bowed to the pressure of business lobbies, but also acted in accordance with the prevailing sentiment of its own backbenchers, the "establishment," and Cabinet members themselves. Chamberlain was a stronger leader than most 20th-century prime ministers, but his leadership was asserted within the bounds of establishment consensus. He occasionally took a strong line where there was no consensus, but did not challenge a consensus that happened to accord with his own prejudices.

A similar mixture of economic and political considerations affected the level of taxation as a means to finance rearmament. There were legiti-

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*and the Treasury: 1932-1939* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979); R.A.C. Parker, "Economics, Rearmament and Foreign Policy: The United Kingdom before 1939—A Preliminary Study," *Journal of Contemporary History* 10 (October 1975), 637-47, and "British Rearmament 1936-9: Treasury, Trade Unions and Skilled Labour," *English Historical Review* 96 (April 1981), 306-43; J.P.D. Dunbabin, "British Rearmament in the 1930s: A Chronology and Review," *The Historical Journal* 18 (No. 3, 1975), 587-609.

<sup>36</sup> George C. Peden, "Keynes, the Economics of Rearmament and Appeasement," in Wolfgang K. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker, eds., *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 142-56.

mate concerns that sharp increases in taxation would endanger the economic recovery. Nevertheless, when Chamberlain was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he edged the standard rate upward in 1936 and 1937—back to what was regarded as the crisis rate of 1931: 5s. The highest rate in World War I had been 6s; in 1938, the rate rose to 5s 6d, in 1939 to 7s.<sup>37</sup> Senior Treasury officials were not always in agreement over the effects of projected tax increases, even though they preferred taxation to borrowing; but they were by no means mere protagonists of financial orthodoxy. Sir Warren Fisher commented in February 1938 that he had

some difficulty in coming to a conclusion whether we should start up now increasing taxation. Would that discourage the now fortunately favourable prevalent mood in favour of rearmament? Would it affect business psychology and help to bring about a depression? It is anyone's guess . . . the world is a lunatic asylum, and unorthodox measures may be unavoidable for a time.<sup>38</sup>

The new sources not only make available the detailed argumentation with which the Treasury influenced the overall scope of rearmament, but suggest that it played a significant part in the choice of priorities within that program. Indeed, it appears that in the absence of a Ministry of Defence, the Treasury in large measure assumed the task of coordinating the separate and increasingly incompatible proposals of the services.<sup>39</sup> Control of the purse strings enabled it to promote the Cabinet's priority—the expansion of aircraft production—while keeping a tighter rein over the expenditures of the other services. In 1937, it sought with some success to change the priorities in favor of air defense, but in 1938-39 it had difficulty in implementing this new priority against the strong preference of the air staff for heavy bombers.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Peden (fn. 35), 89.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 92. One aspect of appeasement that has not been discussed above, but that also throws light on the complexities of the nexus between economics and politics in the late 1930s, is "economic appeasement"—the attempt to use economic leverage and incentives to induce Germany to move back from its autarchic policies and, by way of particular agreements, move toward liberal trade relations. This topic has been explored in depth by Bernd-Jürgen Wendt. For a summary of his book, *Economic Appeasement: Handel und Finanz in der britischen Deutschland-Politik, 1933-1939* [Economic appeasement: Trade and finance in British policy toward Germany, 1933-1939] (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann, 1971), see Wendt, "Economic Appeasement—A Crisis Strategy," in Mommsen and Kettenacker (fn. 36), 157-72. See also C. A. MacDonald, "Economic Appeasement and the German 'Moderates,' 1937-39," *Past and Present*, No. 56 (1972), 105-35. For a view that draws attention to British reluctance to favor political considerations over market forces, see David E. Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War: Germany, Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>39</sup> Peden (fn. 35), 59 and *passim*; Watt (fn. 16), 103.

<sup>40</sup> Peden (fn. 35), 152-60; Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 210-26.

## REARMAMENT IN CONTEXT

The changing priorities with respect to air power are just one illustration of the magnitude of the problems posed by the rapid changes in the strategic environment. Technological advances such as the development of radar opened up new but uncertain possibilities that ran counter to the hitherto unchallenged assumption of the supremacy of the bomber. The political changes in Europe between 1933 and 1939, and the consequent transformation of the strategic outlook, were unprecedented in times of peace. British policy appeared to be lagging behind events; yet the frequent adjustments of military policy, and the surprisingly good state of preparedness achieved in its areas of priority, explain the more balanced assessments in recent studies of the National Government's rearmament efforts.

The "ten-year rule"—the assumption of no major war for ten years—was in force until 1932; its abandonment coincided with the extreme financial stringency with which Britain responded to the Great Depression. Despite this, the civilian members of the Defence Requirements Committee, established in November 1933 to coordinate Britain's response to the still undefined threats, went beyond the proposals of the services. The Cabinet accepted an expansion of the R.A.F. considerably beyond what was proposed by the air staff, while cutting in half the proposed additional expenditure for the Army.<sup>41</sup> The public commitment to maintain air parity with Germany led to further increases even before the National Government obtained its electoral mandate in December 1935 for its cautious platform on rearmament. From this point, a more familiar pattern began to assert itself, with the services seeking more than the Treasury and Cabinet were prepared to allocate.

Thanks to Britain's new vulnerability to direct attack, priority remained consistently with air power. It has long been recognized that the threat from the air was exaggerated, but it was this perception that explains the scale of the increased expenditure on the R.A.F. In 1934, it had been less than 30 percent of naval expenditure, but it came to exceed the latter in 1938 and 1939.<sup>42</sup> Financial constraints scarcely affected this expansion except in relation to plans for the early 1940s, but production was delayed throughout by shortages of specialized equipment and skilled labor—hence the controversy over direct controls.<sup>43</sup> Major problems also

<sup>41</sup> Dunbabin (fn. 35), 590-91; Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of Two World Wars* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 104-12.

<sup>42</sup> Peden (fn. 35), 205; Shay (fn. 34), 297.

<sup>43</sup> Shay (fn. 34), 92-133, 246-63; Parker (fn. 35, 1981), *passim*; Keith Middlemas, *Politics in*

arose over the commitment to parity with a constantly expanding German Air Force, and over strategic doctrine.<sup>44</sup> The definition of parity in “first line” aircraft was even more problematic than the present confusion over parity in the context of the SALT negotiations. The aim gradually changed from seeking to induce the Germans to enter into agreed limitations to deterring a German air attack. Increasingly, however, it was realized that deterrence might fail, one reason being the greater vulnerability, for geographical reasons, of major British cities and industrial centers. By 1938, except within the R.A.F. (which retained its preference for the offensive), air defense had become the central preoccupation: it was the prime military consideration, the salient British weakness, at the time of the Munich crisis.

Naval rearmament illustrates the problems of a service whose preferred equipment, the fleet of capital ships, had been “frozen” due to financial stringency and arms control agreements; new construction and modernization required a long lead time. Existing agreements precluded the construction of new capital ships until after 1936. The Cabinet subsequently approved an accelerated program that included all the new construction of which the shipyards were capable. In the event, only five of the nine approved capital ships could be completed to take part in the war. But throughout 1937-38, there was heated argument between the Admiralty and the Treasury over the ultimate dimensions of the program—in particular over whether the Navy should adopt a “New Standard” that would permit it to oppose Germany and Japan simultaneously—potentially as open-ended a commitment as air parity with Germany.<sup>45</sup> The Navy was the service most insistent that diplomacy should seek to reduce the number of Britain’s potential enemies. With the collapse of these hopes in 1939, it had no option but to concentrate its forces in European waters, abruptly reversing the imperial and Far Eastern priorities of the previous twenty years. The scarcity of smaller vessels that became evident during the war was more a consequence of the Navy’s priorities than of financial stringency.<sup>46</sup>

The Army, the service at the bottom of the priorities, was the main sufferer from financial limits and changing perceptions of strategic needs.<sup>47</sup> The “limited liability” policy of the mid-1930s, providing for

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*Industrial Society: The Experience of the British System since 1911* (London: Deutsch, 1979), 244-65.

<sup>44</sup> Smith (fn. 40), 140-226; Meyers (fn. 26), 303-32.

<sup>45</sup> Peden (fn. 35), 113-17, 160-167; Norman H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy, I: Rearmament Policy* (London: H.M.S.O., 1976), 323-74.

<sup>46</sup> Peden (fn. 35), 160-67.

<sup>47</sup> Howard (fn. 41), 97-122; Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*

only a token force for Europe, was the logical consequence of the agreed priorities. Less understandable, even allowing for the financial pressures, was the decision in February 1938 to downgrade the European theater even further. Yet, because of the extreme pressure on resources and the need to retain some credibility for imperial defense, this was seen as the lesser evil. Only the perceived emergency of 1939 and the subordination of financial considerations could reverse this decision. With the wisdom of hindsight, it can be argued that, even if more adequate resources had been available, the Army would probably not have adopted the kind of strategy and equipment likely to have made a crucial difference to the campaign in France in 1940.<sup>48</sup>

Consistent priorities were essential; yet, given Britain's overextension, they were impossible to maintain—short of abandoning most of the Empire to its fate. Military policy and foreign policy were often at cross-purposes. A startling illustration from an earlier date, which expresses Britain's strategic dilemma with unusual forthrightness, was the Chiefs of Staff's comment on the Treaty of Locarno:

The size of the forces of the Crown maintained by Great Britain is governed by various conditions peculiar to each service, and is not arrived at by any calculations of the requirements of foreign policy, nor is it possible that they ever should be so calculated. Thus, though the Expeditionary Force, together with a limited number of Air Force Squadrons, constitute the only military instrument available for immediate use in Europe or elsewhere outside Imperial territory in support of foreign policy, they are so available only when the requirements of Imperial Defence so permit.

It follows that so far as commitments on the Continent are concerned, the Services can only take note of them. . . .<sup>49</sup>

The "worst-case" assumption of the Chiefs of Staff in the 1930s—that Britain might have to face war against three hostile powers simultaneously—has been criticized by Williamson Murray.<sup>50</sup> Because that fear became a reality by 1941, however, this would appear to have been one occasion when worst-case analysis was prudent and justified, whatever its weaknesses as a shortcut to intelligence assessments in other contexts.

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(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Peter Dennis, *Decision by Default: Peacetime Conscription and British Defense, 1919-1939* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972).

<sup>48</sup> Bond (fn. 47), 337-38, suggests that there is a case for the contrary view; but he also shows that the senior officers who favored an Expeditionary Force for the Continent held highly conservative opinions on mechanized warfare, while advocates of the latter (such as Liddell Hart) were opposed to creating an Expeditionary Force.

<sup>49</sup> Howard (fn. 41), 95.

<sup>50</sup> Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939: The Path to Ruin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 62-64.

## INTELLIGENCE

Although much of the source material on intelligence has not been released, enough is now available to researchers to enable them to begin to fill in this "missing dimension" in the history of the period.<sup>51</sup> Financial constraints greatly limited the scope of British intelligence efforts, but many of the problems were due to organizational weaknesses and anachronistic attitudes. The startling absence of security provisions in the Rome and Berlin embassies, for example, left British diplomatic communications freely exposed to the Axis governments. Financial stringency affected the quality of intelligence staffs as much as their numbers: the problems of analysis and use of intelligence material were even more serious than those of obtaining it.<sup>52</sup> There was a spectacular lack of co-ordination of intelligence activities and findings. The services operated separately, with little integration among them and even less cooperation with the Foreign Office. Political and military intelligence were supposed to be brought together at Cabinet committee level, but without prior co-ordination this was ineffective. During the crises of 1938-39, a great deal of political and military "intelligence" of uncertain reliability passed across the desks of senior officials, who were keenly aware of the problem of evaluating such information, but too hard-pressed to devise better procedures for doing so. They were also keenly aware that on the crucial question of Hitler's intentions the evidence remained ambiguous.<sup>53</sup>

There were some successes, nonetheless. Intelligence on the size of the German armed forces, for example, which was very unreliable in the early stages of German rearmament under Hitler, became quite accurate by 1938-39; the processes by which this came about are not yet clear. Less was known about the performance of German weapons, and even less about German strategic and tactical thinking. The first of these gaps was caused by the difficulty of obtaining such information. The second, however, reflected the philosophy of the service staffs, which discouraged such inquiries as speculative, and "desired to confine their activities and

<sup>51</sup> See Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London: Sceptre, 1986); Francis Harry Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*, I (London: H.M.S.O., 1979), 3-85; Wesley K. Wark, "British Military and Economic Intelligence: Assessments of Nazi Germany before the Second World War," in Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, eds., *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 78-100, 261-65; Wark, "British Intelligence on the German Air Force and Aircraft Industry, 1933-1939," *The Historical Journal* 25 (No. 3, 1982), 627-48; David Dilks, "Appeasement and 'Intelligence,'" in Dilks (fn. 18), 139-69; Donald C. Watt, "British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe," in Ernest R. May, ed., *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 237-70.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew (fn. 51), 559, 566-73.

<sup>53</sup> Dilks (fn. 51), 146-49.

those of their representatives abroad to purely military matters.”<sup>54</sup> The distorting effects of preconceptions and the failure to ask the right questions were especially prominent at the time of the Munich crisis. In particular, the immediacy of the German air threat was greatly exaggerated. F. H. Hinsley argues that a study of the training of the *Luftwaffe* and of the physical and logistic requirements for the much-dreaded “knockout blow” against London and the Midlands would have shown that the Germans were not capable of this kind of assault.<sup>55</sup> In the absence of such studies, extreme worst-case assumptions prevailed, and misperceptions of major consequence were not corrected. Although the filling in of the missing dimension may not greatly change the overall understanding of the 1930s, it brings out the extent and the limits of the information that was available, and thus offers insight into otherwise puzzling aspects of policy.

#### IV. CHAMBERLAIN, CHURCHILL, AND HITLER

Reinhard Meyers suggests that the weakness of the standard accounts of Munich is that

the actors in the drama appear only as personified images, no longer as real persons. Those men with the stiff collars appear as the embodiment of character-types reflected in a momentous spectacle—the man of Munich, who confronts the armed might of Germany with an umbrella, draws back in terror and gives way, because he lacks courage and determination. . . . The drama has a villain (Hitler) and a sinner (Chamberlain)—what more does one need to explain the outbreak of war in 1939, especially when the supporting roles are played by lesser villains such as Mussolini and Stalin, and lesser sinners like Beck and Daladier?<sup>56</sup>

The picture of Chamberlain that emerges from more recent accounts is quite different from the stereotype. It is true that he was motivated by his intense awareness of the human cost of war, but he was also acutely conscious of the dangers to Britain’s position in the world, and of the need for more adequate military power to provide backing for diplomacy.<sup>57</sup> In its essentials, his policy toward Germany was the same that had been pursued by all British governments since 1919. Far from being deceived as to Hitler’s intentions, he was deeply suspicious: his unfortunate promise of

<sup>54</sup> Hinsley (fn. 51), 76.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79; see also Wark (fn. 51, 1984), 81-82.

<sup>56</sup> Meyers (fn. 26), 19, 23; translation by the present author.

<sup>57</sup> Watt (fn. 16), 164-66; Keith Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-39* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), 44; Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policy, 1933-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 178-79.

“peace for our time” was a momentary aberration after the inhuman stress of the preceding crisis.

Whether or not appeasement was a 19th-century tradition, there is no doubt of the continuity of British policy toward Germany from shortly after 1919; it was a policy of bringing Germany back into the community of nations and negotiating the relaxation of those treaty restrictions that were perceived as untenable. British governments never supported the French policy of enforcing the Treaty of Versailles or the French system of alliances with Eastern Europe. The virtues of appeasement were invoked as early as 1922; as late as 1936, shortly after the remilitarization of the Rhineland, it was Eden who spoke of “the appeasement of Europe as a whole that we have constantly before us.”<sup>58</sup> From the time Hitler came to power, Britain sought military and political agreements with Germany. On two important occasions, proposals that were to include major concessions to Germany were close to formal presentation when Hitler unilaterally preempted the projected concessions by the reintroduction of conscription in March 1935 and the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936.<sup>59</sup>

The change of style under Chamberlain as Prime Minister, his readiness to take the diplomatic initiative, has long been noted. The years 1937-38 were perceived as especially dangerous, since Britain’s rearmament was not expected to reach a level permitting armed resistance to Germany until 1939; thus, later negotiations would proceed from a position of greater strength. Vansittart wrote at the end of 1936:

To the Foreign Office falls therefore the task of holding the situation until at least 1939. There is no certainty of our being able to do so, though we are doing our utmost by negotiating with Germany, and endeavouring to regain lost ground with Italy.<sup>60</sup>

Chamberlain frequently referred to the need for adequate military force in order to resist German “bullying,” but was even more skeptical than other British politicians of the value or reliability of any of the other powers as potential allies. Working within these constraints, he sought to use Britain’s limited freedom of choice to promote solutions to the problems most likely to provoke crises.

Chamberlain does not provide the classic instance of misperception of the adversary’s intentions, as has so often been asserted. His diaries and letters were strewn with references to Hitler as “half mad,” “lunatic,” or untrustworthy, and he believed that British and French firmness had de-

<sup>58</sup> Niedhart (fn. 26), 69; Meyers (fn. 26), 32.

<sup>59</sup> Medlicott (fn. 18), 11-25.

<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.*, 31.

tered Hitler from invading Czechoslovakia in May 1938.<sup>61</sup> He was by no means confident that German aims were limited to the incorporation of German nationals into the *Reich*. Rather, the premise of British policy in 1938 was that Hitler's intentions were uncertain, and that in the light of this uncertainty, the particular issue at stake—the future of the Sudeten Germans—should not constitute the *casus belli*.<sup>62</sup>

During the Sudeten crisis, the Cabinet gradually moved from favoring Sudeten autonomy within Czechoslovakia to acceptance of a transfer of territory. What the recent sources reveal is a greater divergence between Chamberlain and his colleagues over the terms of such a transfer than had been supposed, foreshadowing a divergence between Chamberlain and the Cabinet majority on many of the issues between Munich and the outbreak of war.<sup>63</sup> Chamberlain acted on the logical consequences of the agreed premises of the Cabinet in 1938; many of his colleagues found the logic distasteful, even though they rallied to his support after the apparent triumph of Munich.

If Munich is coming to appear largely as the logical working out of what had gone before, the developments during the following year have come to appear more problematic. In the light of the many interrelated causes of appeasement, the extent of the acceptance of war in 1939 calls for more explanation than it has received. The occupation of Prague was no doubt the catalyst for what A.J.P. Taylor has termed “an underground explosion of public opinion such as the historian cannot trace in precise terms”;<sup>64</sup> but the Hoare-Laval Pact had triggered a similar explosion without altering the fundamental course of British policy. The most committed of the appeasers—Chamberlain and R. A. Butler in England, Bonnet in France—continued their tenacious pursuit of any option that held out even a slim prospect of averting war.<sup>65</sup> The overall military balance was even more unfavorable to Britain and France than it had been in 1938, the Empire in even greater peril, and direct assistance to Poland even less feasible than to Czechoslovakia. Yet, whereas the military had

<sup>61</sup> Feiling (fn. 7), 350, 354, 357, 360.

<sup>62</sup> The assumptions behind British policy in 1938 are discussed in Middlemas (fn. 57), 184-88, and in Telford Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 618-33. Taylor's work offers the fullest account of the Munich crisis. Chamberlain's uncertainty concerning Hitler was expressed frequently. His comment to his private secretary on the Anglo-German declaration signed after the Munich Conference provides a striking example: “If Hitler signed it and kept the bargain, well and good; alternatively, if he broke it, he would demonstrate to all the world that he was totally cynical and untrustworthy” (p. 60).

<sup>63</sup> Cowling (fn. 57), 190-206, 293-352.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor (fn. 4), 203.

<sup>65</sup> For a recent discussion of Butler's views, see Paul Stafford, “Political Autobiography and the Art of the Plausible: R. A. Butler at the Foreign Office, 1938-39,” *The Historical Journal* 28 (No. 4, 1985), 901-22.

tended to "soften" policy toward Germany in 1938, as Dunbabin expresses it, they tended to "harden" it in 1939.<sup>66</sup> The change of attitude of the military and of other key sectors of opinion invites further examination. To what extent, for example, did British decision makers now place their hopes on deterring Germany?<sup>67</sup> The changes in the pattern of influence on decisions, both within the Cabinet and from outside it, have not yet been fully analyzed. Maurice Cowling, among others, offers interesting insights, but his treatment is selective, and his hypotheses are only partially substantiated.<sup>68</sup>

Recent works endorse Medlicott's thesis that, on closer examination, "the lines of distinction between the popular stereotypes, appeasers and resisters, tend to disappear."<sup>69</sup> Neville Thompson, in his study of Conservative opposition to appeasement, presents a number of examples, such as the readiness of Eden and Vansittart in February 1936 to contemplate far-reaching concessions to Germany in the interests of "European tranquillity and economic reconstruction."<sup>70</sup> Similar instances have been noted above. Thompson emphasizes the differences of approach among the Conservative critics of appeasement as well as their inability to work together or to win a substantial party following. A striking example was Eden's failure to consult Churchill after his resignation in February 1938. Instead, he sought the advice of Baldwin (which he appears to have followed), intending to build up his own image as a potential centrist leader, more consensual than either Churchill or Chamberlain, with vaguely worded appeals to idealism, patriotism, and national unity.<sup>71</sup>

The most formidable opponent of the government's policies was of course Churchill; in his series of powerful speeches, he condemned the delays in rearmament and expressed increasing criticism of the whole foreign policy stance. Although recent scholarship does not contest this, the discussion of Churchill in the 1930s has for some time been critical. That is due not so much to Churchill's actual record at the time, but to the influence of his retrospective version of those events in the first volume of his history of the Second World War, *The Gathering Storm*. The polemical tone, selectiveness, and overstatement may enhance the work

<sup>66</sup> John P.D. Dunbabin, "The British Military Establishment and the Policy of Appeasement," in Mommsen and Kettenacker (fn. 36), 186. Wark makes similar observations (fn. 51, 1984), 87-89, 99-100.

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Sidney Aster, 1939: *The Making of the Second World War* (London: André Deutsch, 1973) for the most satisfactory general account of British policy in 1939, which, however, does not fully resolve this question.

<sup>68</sup> Cowling (fn. 57), 257-352.

<sup>69</sup> Medlicott (fn. 18), 32.

<sup>70</sup> Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 43-44.

<sup>71</sup> Cowling (fn. 57), 235-39.

as literature, but many scholars now regard it as a contribution to legend rather than to history: the legend that, if Churchill's clear-sighted advice had been followed, the tragic devastation of World War II could have been avoided.

One historian has commented in a different context that to show that the popular stereotype of Churchill "ignores the complexity of this remarkable man and sets him on an unreal pedestal" is not to belittle his greatness.<sup>72</sup> A reader of *The Gathering Storm* would never suspect that, when in office in the 1920s, Churchill, as Michael Howard rather uncharitably expresses it, "having spent five years at the Admiralty building up the Royal Navy was now spending another five at the Treasury trying with equal zest to cut it down again."<sup>73</sup> Far from having qualms over the ten-year rule, Churchill unsuccessfully sought to persuade the Navy to accept a twenty-year rule: "They should be made to recast all their plans and scales and standards on the basis that no naval war against a first-class Navy is likely to take place in the next twenty years."<sup>74</sup>

In the 1930s, Churchill's speeches on German air power contributed to the growing acceptance of the need for rearmament, but they also contributed to the general exaggeration of the destructiveness of bombing.<sup>75</sup> With respect to Italy's invasion of Abyssinia—the issue over the handling of which the National Government destroyed any possibility of a consensus on foreign policy in the mid-1930s—Churchill maintains that, though initially reluctant to alienate Italy, he came to argue against half-measures: "If we thought it right and necessary for the law and welfare of Europe to quarrel mortally with Mussolini's Italy, we must also strike him down."<sup>76</sup> At the time, however, this insight was denied to Churchill as to the other Conservatives. Like them, he sought to straddle the issue, advocating both staunch support for the League of Nations and compromise with Italy, thus provoking Arthur Greenwood's comment: "There are few people in this House who possess his powers of oratory and that highly florid style with which he has succeeded in boxing the compass."<sup>77</sup>

Like many others, Churchill presents the remilitarization of the Rhineland on March 7, 1936 as the last opportunity for preventing World

<sup>72</sup> David Reynolds, "Churchill and the British 'Decision' to Fight On in 1940: Right Policy, Wrong Reason," in Richard Langhorne, ed., *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War: Essays in Honour of F. H. Hinsley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 166.

<sup>73</sup> Howard (fn. 41), 89.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>75</sup> See, e.g., Robert Rhodes James, *Churchill: A Study in Failure, 1900-1939* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), 230-33.

<sup>76</sup> Churchill (fn. 5), 150. For critical comments on *The Gathering Storm*, see James (fn. 75), 221-22.

<sup>77</sup> See Thompson (fn. 70), 85.

War II, had Britain and France responded to Hitler's treaty violation by using their still overwhelming military superiority against him. At the time, however, he withheld comment in the House of Commons debate that took place two days later and endorsed France's appeal to the League instead of resorting to arms. He delivered his principal speech on the issue on March 26, more than two weeks after any possibility of stronger action had passed.<sup>78</sup> Historians are agreed, however, that such action was not politically feasible in either France or Britain. Eden's cab driver remarked that Jerry could do what he liked in his own back garden. According to Eden, "Academically speaking, there is little dispute that Hitler should have been called to order, if need be forcibly. . . . But nobody was prepared to do it, in this country literally nobody."<sup>79</sup> Even as a back-bench critic, Churchill could not free himself from the confusion and uncertainties of the time. Had he been in government, he would have been subject to all its constraints: he could not have greatly accelerated rearmament, still less have resolved the basic dilemmas of strategy and finance. He might have used Britain's margin of choice differently, but if he had sought to construct a coalition against Hitler, he would have encountered formidable obstacles, not least of which was the need to carry with him a parliament and public deeply averse to any prospect of war.

But would such a policy have been likely to deter Hitler? The foreign policy of the Third Reich has been studied by German historians in the context of extensive research on the ideology, institutions, and internal dynamics of the National Socialist regime. The image of Hitler that emerges is remarkably familiar: the interpretations are fuller, some of the details are new, but the essentials are not surprising.

Hitler did not expect to be able to achieve his goal of *Lebensraum* without a great war. While he did not think Britain would fight in 1939, and sought to reduce the risk to a minimum by entering into the Nazi-Soviet Pact, he was resolved to attack Poland regardless of Britain's reaction. Appeasement had encouraged his faulty expectation, but that was not crucial to his decision. His willingness to risk war, possibly even his desire for war, had increased along with the state of German rearmament—in deed, even ahead of it.

If this reaffirmation of the traditional view of Hitler's values is accepted, it follows that neither appeasement nor deterrence could have succeeded in averting war. The fundamental reason for the failure of appeasement was that Hitler's goals lay far beyond the limits of reasonable

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-10; James (fn. 75), 261-64.

<sup>79</sup> Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators* (London: Cassell, 1962), 346, 366-67.

accommodation that the appeasers were prepared to contemplate. If appeasement encouraged him to increase his demands, it was only in a short-term, tactical sense. Likewise, if a policy of deterrence or firmness had been adopted earlier, it would have changed Hitler's tactical calculations, but there is no reason to suppose that he would have modified his goals.<sup>80</sup>

The main contribution of recent research is that it substantiates the traditional view in greater detail. Those historians who focus on the internal dynamics of the Nazi system rather than on the individual decision maker, Hitler, reaffirm the expansionist tendencies of the system as a whole.<sup>81</sup> Those who seek to explain the specific goals, strategies, and choices of Nazi German foreign policy continue to focus on Hitler. Recent German interpretations have developed the concept of Hitler's foreign policy "program"—meaning something less than a blueprint, but something more than Alan Bullock's thesis that Hitler was both ideologue and opportunist. His opportunism reflected a clear sense of direction, a strategic sense that guided the particular moves.<sup>82</sup>

Hitler's perception of Britain, as it emerges in these interpretations, differed greatly from that postulated in the traditional view of appeasement.<sup>83</sup> Initially, Hitler had hoped to win the support of Britain, the nation that had barred the way to Germany's bid for world power in 1914, for German expansion to the East; but by the time Chamberlain became Prime Minister in 1937 he sought no more than a free hand. Chamberlain's overtures, however, were exasperating to the Nazis rather than reassuring: England was seeking to play the role of governess, demanding assurances of German good behavior, endeavoring to create a new net-

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Ernest R. May: "'Anti-appeasers' had their own illusions which were almost equally distant from reality. They believed that Hitler could be deterred from aggression by the threat of war. Few suspected that Hitler *wanted* war." May (fn. 51), 520.

<sup>81</sup> This school of thought, as well as that which focuses on Hitler's goals and program, is discussed in John Hiden and John Farquharson, *Explaining Hitler's Germany: Historians and the Third Reich* (London: Batsford, 1983), 110-29.

<sup>82</sup> Klaus Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (London: Batsford, 1973; published in German, 1970); also "Hitlers 'Programm' und seine Realisierung 1939-1942" [Hitler's program and its realization, 1939-1942], in Manfred Funke, ed., *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte: Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reichs* [Hitler, Germany and the powers: Materials on the foreign policy of the Third Reich] (Kronberg: Athenäum, 1978), 63-93; Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie: Politik und Kriegführung, 1940-41* [Hitler's strategy: Politics and the conduct of war] (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe, 1965); Bullock, "Hitler and the Origins of the Second World War," in Robertson (fn. 15), 189-224.

<sup>83</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, "England in Hitlers Aussenpolitischer Konzeption" [England in Hitler's foreign policy thinking], *Historische Zeitschrift* 218 (No. 1, 1974), 65-84; Josef Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül, 1935-1939* [England in Hitler's political calculations, 1935-1939] (Boppard: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1973); Henke, "Hitlers England-Konzeption—Formulierung und Realisierungsversuche" [Hitler's conception of England: Formulation and attempts at realization], in Funke (fn. 82), 584-603.

work of agreements to promote European stability. By rebuffing these overtures, Hitler hoped to reduce Britain to passive acquiescence, but he increasingly recognized that this might fail. From this perspective, Munich was not at all a diplomatic triumph but the crisis in which Britain rejected Hitler's Godesberg demands and mobilized the fleet, signaling its refusal to grant Hitler a free hand. The outcome was ambiguous, but future planning had to take more seriously the risk that England would intervene. Thus, while the traditional image of Hitler is upheld, it is revised in important details.

## V. APPEASEMENT AND THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

How is the study of appeasement related to the wider study of international relations? This question may be pursued in two directions: (1) What is the contribution of contemporary theories of international relations and the methods developed within the discipline to the study of appeasement, and (2) what are the implications of the contemporary understanding of appeasement for the study of international relations as a whole?

The answer to the first of these questions is that the contribution of scholars using international relations theories and methods has been disappointingly limited. Only two of the many books on appeasement draw substantially on such theories: Thorne's *The Limits of Foreign Policy* and Meyers's *Britische Sicherheitspolitik 1934-1938*.<sup>84</sup> Thorne's widely acclaimed case study draws on theories of decision making and reviews the case in the light of other major theories.<sup>85</sup> Meyers's work, unfortunately not translated into English, is structured in terms of a more thoroughgoing analysis of theoretical issues concerning national security and decision making.<sup>86</sup> A special issue on appeasement of the *British Journal of International Studies* brings together contributions by historians and social scientists, including a quantitative analysis of British decisions in the 1930s and a decision-making analysis of the Munich crisis. Although these illustrate the potential of such approaches, they also demonstrate the

<sup>84</sup> Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933* (New York: Capricorn, 1973); Meyers (fn. 26).

<sup>85</sup> Thorne's work is discussed more fully by R. J. Barry Jones, "The Study of 'Appeasement' and the Study of International Relations," *British Journal of International Studies* 1 (April 1975), 74-75.

<sup>86</sup> In a recent article, Meyers suggests that Thomas Kuhn's concept of the paradigm might be adapted to throw new light on appeasement by viewing it as illustrating a tradition of international political thought—the "Grotian" tradition discussed by Martin Wight and Hedley Bull. See Reinhard Meyers, "International Paradigms, Concepts of Peace, and the Policy of Appeasement," *War and Society* 1 (May 1983), 43-65.

problems as much as the payoffs of interdisciplinary research. They do not go deeply enough into the historiographical issues to establish their interpretations convincingly; there is little cross-fertilization between the disciplines.<sup>87</sup>

A partial exception is to be found in discussions of deterrence; this issue is so prominent in present-day international relations that considerations of deterrence in the 1930s inevitably reflect contemporary thought. Even so, as Barry Jones laments, many discussions of military policy and diplomacy in that period fail to explore the kinds of issues that suggest themselves to those familiar with contemporary strategic analysis.<sup>88</sup> As one exception, he notes Michael Howard's comments on deterrence; he might have added George Quester's *Deterrence before Hiroshima*, which examined interwar doctrine on airpower in light of contemporary strategic theory.<sup>89</sup> There have been several further discussions: Malcolm Smith offers a fuller treatment of the dilemmas of British air policy,<sup>90</sup> and Alan Alexandroff and Richard Rosecrance provide an interesting analysis of the reasons for Britain's failure to deter Hitler in 1939.<sup>91</sup> Even though they appear to play down the difficulty of deterring a decision maker with Hitler's values, they introduce an important distinction between short-term and long-term deterrence. This distinction is developed along original lines by John Mearsheimer in the context of deterring a major offensive after the outbreak of war.<sup>92</sup>

The reappraisal of appeasement does not create a problem for deterrence theory, only for its application to the particular case. It does create a problem for what Steve Chan terms "the appeasement theory of war," which appears to assume that any war can be deterred; but contemporary deterrence theorists make no such assumption. One of their major concerns is to establish the conditions under which deterrent threats may be expected to succeed. Thus, the finding that Hitler was unlikely to have been deterred from eventually going to war presents no theoretical problem.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>87</sup> The special issue, *British Journal of International Studies* 6 (October 1980), edited by Paul Kennedy and John E. Spence, includes Kennedy (fn. 19), Gruner (fn. 24), and contributions by Stephen G. Walker, Aaron L. Goldman, and Naomi Black.

<sup>88</sup> Jones (fn. 85), 73-74.

<sup>89</sup> Quester, *Deterrence before Hiroshima: The Airpower Background of Modern Strategy* (New York: Wiley, 1966).

<sup>90</sup> Smith (fn. 40), 140-97.

<sup>91</sup> Alan Alexandroff and Richard Rosecrance, "Deterrence in 1939," *World Politics* 29 (April 1977), 404-24.

<sup>92</sup> Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

<sup>93</sup> Chan (fn. 12). For discussions of deterrence along these lines, see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 58-113; Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

Several aspects of appeasement raise questions that invite theoretical analysis and explanation. As suggested earlier, the pattern of decision making in 1939 is still incompletely understood. This is partly a matter of fuller description, but also one of deepening the analysis. British decision making after the occupation of Prague has been described as incrementalist, but the situation was one in which incremental decisions led to fundamental changes in policy. Such a case, theoretical analysis suggests, may expose basic weaknesses in the incremental style of decision making. Some of the changes in perception and policy recommendation between 1938 and 1939 provide striking illustrations of the phenomena of selective perception and the avoidance of value trade-offs; they invite further examination in the light of cognitive theory.

Although the contribution of international relations scholars to the study of appeasement has been limited, the reappraisal of appeasement is rich in implications for the study of international relations. A full exploration of these would be a topic for another study, but two preliminary suggestions may be offered. The first concerns the discipline's view of the origins of World War II if it can no longer be attributed to the errors of the appeasers. The focus should be on the international system rather than on individuals: the starting point could be Trotsky's comment on the Treaty of Versailles, noted earlier, or Eden's comment in 1938, cited approvingly by E. H. Carr: "It is futile to imagine that we are involved in a European crisis which may pass as it has come. . . . Stupendous forces are loose, hurricane forces."<sup>94</sup>

These forces were loose in an international system that was not merely unstable, but close to breakdown. Many sensed that a great war was imminent. Schroeder's comment, cited earlier, that Britain's policy of appeasement was overdetermined is equally valid with respect to the instability of the international system. The original peace settlement did not enjoy sufficient acceptance, and its beneficiaries were neither able nor willing to enforce it. The League of Nations never won acceptance, and *none* of the great powers acted in terms of the balance-of-power norms of the 19th century. The relatively predictable balancing of the five powers in Europe could not suddenly be replicated by the seven powers in the global arena after 1919. The collapse of the international economic order in the Great Depression, and the transnational ideological strife and confusion exacerbated by it, represented further dimensions of the breakdown of international order. Once the larger setting is established, the internal determinants of the policy of each of the powers can be investigated, as was done by the structural historians in the case of Britain.

<sup>94</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1946), 40.

The second implication concerns structural theory. The structural interpretation of British foreign policy appears to be a theory of quite a different type from the best-known structural theory in international relations, Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*.<sup>95</sup> The latter offers a parsimonious explanation of some of the most general features of international politics; the former is presented as a holistic explanation of a single case. The structural-historical theory can be presented more abstractly, however. But first, it is convenient to note that certain structural analyses of foreign policy have been attempted at a much less general level than Waltz's structural realism. Waltz himself has explained differences in the performance and style of British and American policy in terms of the structure of political institutions; and Peter Katzenstein and his collaborators have compared the foreign economic policies of advanced industrialized countries in terms of certain aspects of the domestic structure: the nature of business-state coalitions and policy networks.<sup>96</sup>

Structural-historical theory focuses on change rather than on continuity, explaining foreign policy in terms of the changing power of the state in question; this, in turn, is explicated in terms of the changing pattern of internal and external structural determinants, both economic and political. Power is understood in relative terms—relative, that is, to the other actors in the overall strategic context. In examining a state's foreign policy in a particular period, the structuralist seeks to identify the main elements in the conjuncture of internal and external structures—in this case, Britain's secular decline in power coinciding with an exceptionally unstable international milieu.

Historians normally explain the relative stability or instability of the international system at different periods in terms of a combination of specific circumstances. There is scope for theoretical analysis of these considerations. Schroeder's recent discussion of structural differences between the 18th- and 19th-century systems, which could explain the greater stability of the latter,<sup>97</sup> has considerable *prima facie* relevance to the interwar period: all three of the changes that made for greater stability after 1815 were reversed, indeed negated, after 1919.

One of these was the "fencing off of the European states system from the extra-European world," such that European and imperial conflicts

<sup>95</sup> Waltz (fn. 11).

<sup>96</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics: The American and British Experience* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., "Between Power and Plenty: Foreign Economic Policies of Advanced Industrial States," special issue, *International Organization* 31 (Autumn 1977), 587-920.

<sup>97</sup> Paul W. Schroeder, "The 19th-Century International System: Changes in the Structure," *World Politics* 39 (October 1986), 1-26.

did not interact as they had in the 18th century. After 1919, conflicts outside Europe impinged greatly on the European balance, mainly to Britain's detriment. Second, there was a change in the role of the smaller states, which after 1815 had served as buffers or intermediaries between the great powers. After 1919, the smaller states in Eastern Europe, in particular, enhanced instability, forming part of a brittle French sphere of influence vulnerable to a German takeover; insofar as they formed a *cordon sanitaire* against the Soviet Union, they added to the impediments to the latter's resuming an active role as a great power. The third change—normative rather than structural—was the absence in the interwar period of accepted rules of the game and of a common conception of the rights and duties of the great powers, such as had characterized the 19th-century system. This extrapolation of Schroeder's discussion suggests that structural theory at this level of analysis may have considerable potential for explaining some of the larger changes in international politics, a task that is not attempted by structural realism.

The artificial separation between the disciplines of international history and international relations is costly to both. The separation is fortunately not complete: historical case studies are becoming increasingly prominent in international relations.<sup>98</sup> But the foregoing analysis suggests that there remains much to be gained by closer interchange, not least in the challenge and stimulus to theory which the work of historians can present.

<sup>98</sup> In addition to the authors cited in fn. 93, Glenn H. Snyder and Richard Ned Lebow have made substantial contributions. See, for example, Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), and Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). For a recent overview, see Christopher Hill, "History and International Relations," in Steve Smith, ed., *International Relations: British and American Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 126-45.