

Appeasement policies: britain and france



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The appeasement policy was a policy adopted by Britain and France and it was a major player in the outbreak of the war. Appeasement was first introduced in the mid 1930s by Stanley Baldwin who was then the British Prime Minister. But it was Neville Chamberlain who changed this appeasement policy when he ascended to power in 1937. The British government defines appeasement as the settlement of issues through negotiation and compromise. The British were very committed to this policy and they followed it confidently with the hope that it will reduce the chance of a world war. Britain and France sought to appease Hitler not merely because it was militarily, economically and politically rational to do so, but because of personal judgments made by Chamberlain. It is clearly evident that right from the start, Chamberlain did not clearly understand Hitler's motive and to his best understanding, appeasement would be the best strategy to avert war. He assumed that Hitler's motive was just to amass and maintain power which means possibility for war would be trashed by German people. Sequence of events during pursuance of appeasement policy clearly illustrates that Chamberlain did not understand Hitler's motive at all and his approach to appeasement policy could not work. While appeasement policy was mainly meant to avert war, it did not serve its purpose as Chamberlain failed to understand Hitler and the Nazi motives in general. He did not take quick steps to rearm Britain because he did not see any threat to Britain in particular and to Western Europe in general from the Germans. Therefore Chamberlain felt free to pursue the appeasement policy and disregard a military alliance with France to wage a war against Germany. It is therefore evident that Chamberlain inaccurately thought that appeasement was the only means that would stop the way. He pursued the appeasement from his <https://assignbuster.com/appeasement-policies-britain-and-france/>

own convictions and that is why he went to Germany to meet Hitler without the approval of the cabinet. He trusted Hitler and he thought he would keep his word once his demands were met. He sought this appeasement so as to conciliate with Germany to have a stable Europe[1]. His personal view was that Germany would be satisfied with what he offered and especially the restoration of its former colonies. There are reasons that made Chamberlain seek appeasement with Hitler. One of them is that he represented the British citizens who did not want a war as they were in the process of healing the wounds from World War One. Also, he did not want to go to war with Germany because the fall of Germany would mean the victory of the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. Chamberlain and the British citizens did not want this to happen. So Chamberlain was trying as much as he could to avoid a war with Germany and at the same time the spread of communism. The appeasement policy that Chamberlain campaigned for was merely to avoid war. He took a number of steps to ensure that the war did not happen but they failed at the end. He even traveled to Germany without Cabinet approval to pursue appeasement with Hitler. But it can also be seen as a strategy that he used in order to gain some time in rearming his forces[2]. The perception by Chamberlain of the methods employed by Nazi and the aim of Hitler was inaccurate. This inaccurate perception is what resulted into adoption of appeasement by Britain and France. Instead of preventing world war two, the appeasement policy can be said to be its cause especially after its failure. Chamberlain persisted in use of persuasion towards Germany rather than deterrent in addressing the grievances made by Hitler. In doing this he was convinced that Hitler wanted only to maintain

power and if the grievances and demands that Germany raised were met, the German people would quench the possibility of a war[3].

Chamberlain thought that he could single handedly and as an individual avert the possibility of Second War through his appeasement. That is why he met Hitler on three separate occasions without Cabinet approval and without the presence of British ministers. Though there was a decrease in support from the British people and the foreign office, Chamberlain continued to believe strongly in this policy and he did not see its failure. He failed to address the arguments that were presented by allies who had been angered by the British foreign policy e. g. France. This made France an unwilling follower of Britain foreign policy even though France did not believe in its success.

Chamberlain believed that any strong approach towards Hitler other than appeasement would anger him and possibly provoke him into starting a war. Therefore he did not emphasize on military production. The industries in Britain were freed to produce armaments by the recession of 1938 and the cabinet approved a potential war in February 1936[4].

Chamberlain was so blinded by appeasement policy that he did not assess any possible alternatives. He was confident and optimistic that appeasement policy would succeed[5]. The alternative that was there was an alliance with the Soviet Union to counter Hitler but Chamberlain would not overlook the differences that Britain had with USSR on communism. He believed that in doing this, he would be giving communism a chance to spread. His erroneous judgments can be seen when he did not pursue a

military alliance with France after the Munich conference when he had the chance to check the expansion of Germany. Instead he reasoned that appeasement would stop Hitler from expanding German territories. He therefore did not give any other alternative a chance[6].

The Versailles Pact which had been signed after the First World War with an aim of ending all wars was greatly hated by the Germans[7]. It was argued that the treaty, if it were to stand, would ruin the economic status of Germany. This treaty is seen by some historians as the lead cause of the Second World War.

Chamberlain's misjudgment of Hitler's intention can be seen especially due to his surrender to Hitler's growing demands. This was clearly seen in 1940 when Chamberlain desperately wanted to maintain peace through fulfilling the demands made by Hitler. Chamberlain and Baldwin chose to neglect the armaments of Britain 'to the edge of national annihilation'[8]. This therefore means that there were other possible alternatives but which Chamberlain failed to look at. Winston Churchill who came to power after Chamberlain viewed appeasement as a humiliation to France and Britain and he termed it as "a long series of miscalculations and misjudgments of men and facts" and which led Britain into an endless war with the Nazis[9].

Many Britons saw hope after the signing of the Versailles treaty. They wanted to avoid another war and that is why the British government had to give in to the demands presented by Hitler[10]. Britain felt that Germany had been treated unfairly due to the restriction imposed upon it. Chamberlain felt that if the restriction were lifted, Germany would become happier. This

perception of Germany by the general population gave Hitler confidence and also provided him with an opportunity to acquire more lands without a war.

The British economy was fairing very badly hence Britain was not ready for a war. It was not even in a position to fund and rearm its military force due to the bad economic status. So Chamberlain tried as much as possible to avoid a war with Germany. The way Hitler was progressing meant that there was not even time for Britain to organize war strategies and prepare its force. So Chamberlain had to find a way of avoiding war and/or gaining sometime to rearm the military. The only solution present was appeasement[11]. To the best of Chamberlain's assumptions, Germany would not pursue another war after all the demands presented had been met.

However, it is evident that Chamberlain did not understand Hitler's motive. Chamberlain assumed that Hitler was only interested in maintaining power. Even when it became evident that Hitler was rearming, Chamberlain turned a blind eye and did not take any step to rearm Britain's forces.

However, Hitler's main aim was to make Germany a super power and a united Germany. He also wanted to enlarge the German territory through what he called recapturing of lost territories[12]. Hitler believed that Germany will become strong again only through the use of military aggression and war. He directly challenged the Versailles treaty in 1934 by rearming his armed forces and preparing them for war. This he did through production of tanks, submarines and aircrafts in huge masses. When it was announced that Hitler was rearming his military forces, which was in conflict with the Versailles pact, Britain and France protested to the League of Nations with the hope that it can be stopped[13]. The League of Nations did not try to

stop these aggressive rearmament plans by Hitler on the grounds that there were no military or economic sanctions that had been imposed. It was due to the appeasement which made Hitler more confident. In short France and Britain simply turned a blind eye on this public breach of Versailles treaty. He was confident that France and Britain as the appeasers would not stop him. He did this knowing very well that he was flouting the Versailles treaty.

Britain and France did not stop Hitler from taking over Rhineland because “ he was taking back what belonged to Germany originally”. At this stage, France could have stopped the reoccupation of the Rhine region but she did not want to start a war with Germany due to the lack of support from the British. Hitler did not want negotiations with France. He instead wanted to deal with Britain and Chamberlain especially. This may be because Hitler saw a sign of weakness and poor perception in Chamberlain. This is what forced France to follow Britain in the pursuance of appeasement even though it disputed its success. In supporting Britain, France wanted a strong military alliance with Britain that could maintain a war with Germany once the appeasement policy failed.

Though the pursuance of appeasement by France was manipulated by Britain, France would not back off because it had found an ally in Britain. Because France would not be in a position to fight Germany on its own, having Britain on its side was of great importance[14]. This was because France was undergoing a financial crisis, industrial hold ups and a shortage in skilled labor. Chamberlain thought that France was behind him in his appeasement policy but he failed to see the hidden agenda pursued by France in its support for appeasement. The politics and governance in France

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were different from those in Britain. While Chamberlain as an individual dominated the foreign policy in Britain, France had a rapid turnover of cabinets and governments. The indictments of appeasement in France focused on the whole political players but not on one individual.

Chamberlain thought that by allowing Hitler to take over the region that formally belonged to Germany, he would at least stop there. Hitler invaded Austria in 1938 and he declared Anschluss. In doing this he was breaking the Versailles treaty. The Australian chancellor at the time pleaded with France and Britain to help but these two countries did nothing about it. Chamberlain sent a protest note to Berlin[15]. He addressed the cabinet after Hitler's army crossed the border and he blamed both Germany and Austria. Even though, he condemned strongly the methods used by Hitler to annex Austria[16]. Chamberlain saw Hitler as a man who can be trusted and in his intervention he persuaded the president of the republic of Czech to hand over Sudetenland to the Germans. In doing this, Chamberlain thought that this was the last demand that Hitler would ask for.

The annexation of Austria in 1938 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia as a whole is what opened the eyes of the appeasers and they saw that no matter how much they tried to appease Hitler, war was inevitable. After giving in to all the demands made by Hitler and his continual invasion of Europe, the appeasers realized that the appeasement policy was a failed policy.

Chamberlain did not see Czechoslovakia as an issue that could result to war. He had simply assumed that it was just a conflict between two neighboring countries and that their conflict could not result to a world war. In 1938, Chamberlain is said to have observed:

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“ How horrible. Fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing!”[17].

This quote suggests that the reason why Chamberlain pursued appeasement was to keep Britain safe while allowing Germany to control other nations. As long as Hitler did not interfere with Britain's interest, Chamberlain was committed in pursuing appeasement. He believed that Hitler would be only interested in Eastern Europe and would not care to head Western Europe. That is why Britain and France did not take any military action when Germany started its rearming, the remilitarization of Rhine land and the Anschluss with Austria. The reason why the British policy of appeasement was vague in the 1930s was because the British politicians were unable to accurately the greatest threat to Britain and therefore come up with appropriate means and strategies to deal with them. Therefore Britain did not make any attempt to unite with America, USSR or France[18].

Though the British people were at first excited by Chamberlain's avoidance of another war, the public opinion changed in 1938-8 after Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia. The public mood in France and Britain changed and Chamberlain chose to ignore this and instead continue with appeasement secretly. He had ordered that the word appeasement be used as little as possible in his speeches[19].

The famous peace in our time speech that was delivered by Chamberlain on September 30, 1938 showed that Hitler was a man who could not be trusted.

It also showed that appeasement policy had failed as a means to prevent war.

The main reason why Britain and France embraced the appeasement policy was because they did not want the whole of Europe to be dragged into a world war by Hitler. It was a policy being pursued due to the lessons learnt from World War One.

Appeasement policy can be seen as a bad policy that was aimed at achieving world peace while sacrificing some countries like the way Britain and France did to try and appease Hitler at the mercies of Czechoslovakia.

Though the appeasement policy led to the strengthening of Germany, and the breakout of war, there are other reasons why France and Britain adopted this policy. These two countries were faced with economic problems in the 1930s. The British economy was severely weakened by the Wall Street crash of 1929 which made the government put the rearming of its armed forces on hold. Chamberlain wanted as much as possible to avoid war. That is why he adopted the appeasement policy. On the other hand, France was not in a position to maintain a war. It needed the support of Britain. It is because of this that it followed Britain in seeking the appeasement. This was because he wanted peace and stability that would allow economic growth for the whole of Europe. The Britons had a positive attitude towards the appeasement in the hope that it would reduce the chances of a war outbreak. Thus it can be concluded that appeasement was a British government policy that was fully supported by the citizens.

Britain did not want a war between it and Germany. This was because it was threatened by communist USSR and not because it feared Germany. In case Germany fell, there was a possibility of spread of communism and Britain did not want this to happen. That is why it was in the favor of appeasement policy. Another fear that embraced Britain was forming a coalition with USSR which was its bitter rival. That is why Chamberlain desperately sought for appeasement at the mercies of other countries just to make sure that they did not join hands with USSR in a war against Germany[20]. The signing of the Munich agreement is viewed by many as a betrayal especially by Britain. What Chamberlain was doing is to buy some time to rearm British forces. Hitler on the other hand thought it as a weakness and a sign of fear of the appeasers[21]. This was a great mistake as all that the appeasers wanted was to preserve the world peace. This is what made him bold and gain confidence and a sense of security.

. Hitler had managed to convince the appeasers that he had no any intentions of aggression through his peace propaganda. This had in a way fooled Britain and France who were not in favor of a war but wanted world peaceful coexistence. The appeasers continued to adopt the appeasement policy and this assured Hitler that they would do anything just to avoid a war. This made him think that he could continue to expand his demands and the appeasers would still continue to give in to them. It was this appeasement policy that gave Hitler a foundation and a base to increase the demands after every successful conquest that he achieved.

Conclusion

There are many opinions and views about the appeasement policy with some critics saying it was a betrayal and sacrifice of some nations for the benefit of others. Others say that it was Chamberlain's strategy of buying time to rearm Britain. But from Chamberlain's point of view, all that he wanted was to avoid another world war. It is not the appeasement policy that triggered the world war two but instead it was the greed of Hitler to enlarge the German territory and make Germany a superpower. The failure of the appeasement policy was because it was only Chamberlain who fulfilled his part of the bargain. He was convinced, on trying to appease Hitler that he (Hitler) was an honest trustworthy and honorable man which was a mistake and a misjudgment on his part.

Chamberlain felt that he had been betrayed by Hitler and that his appeasement policies were failing him. That is when he decided to take on a hard line approach towards the Nazi. Britain and France began rearming themselves. Italy on the other hand invaded Albania in April of 1939. It was Hitler's invasion of Poland that made these two countries declare war and Second World War officially began on 3rd September 1939.

Though he really wanted to avoid the war, there came a time that he knew that war was inevitable. It was only after the failure of the negotiations between him and Hitler that he declared war against Germany