

# Munich Agreement



## Background

Having occupied Austria in March 1938, Adolf Hitler turned his attention to the ethnically German Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia. Since its formation at the end of World War I, Czechoslovakia had been wary of possible German advances. This was largely due to unrest in the Sudetenland which was fomented by the Sudeten German Party. Formed in 1931, the party worked to bring the region under German control. Though not recognized by the Czechoslovak government, it was strongly supported among Sudeten Germans.

The loss of the Sudetenland was strongly opposed by the Czechoslovak government as the region contained a vast array of natural resources, as well as a significant amount of the nation's industry and banks. In addition, as Czechoslovakia was a polyglot country, there were concerns about other minorities seeking

independence. Long concerned about German intentions, the Czechoslovaks had constructed the bulk of their border defenses in the mountains of the Sudetenland. Also, they were able to secure military alliances with France and the Soviet Union.

## Tensions Rise:

Assessing the situation in 1938, Hitler ordered his generals to begin making plans for an invasion of the Sudetenland and instructed the Sudeten German Party to cause trouble. It was Hitler's hope that those supporters would foment enough unrest that it would show that the Czechoslovaks were unable to control the region and provide an excuse for the German Army to cross the border. In response to the actions of the party, the Czechoslovak government was forced to declare martial law in the region. Following this decision, Hitler began demanding that the Sudetenland immediately be turned over to Germany.

## Diplomatic Efforts:

As the crisis grew, a war scare spread across Europe leading Britain and France to take an active interest in the situation as both nations were eager to avoid a war for which they were not prepared. In an attempt to calm the situation, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain sent a telegram to Hitler requesting a meeting with the goal of finding a peaceful solution. Traveling to Berchtesgaden on September 15, Chamberlain met with the German leader.

Controlling the conversation, Hitler lamented about Czechoslovak persecution of Sudeten Germans and boldly requested that the region be turned over. Unable to make such a concession, Chamberlain departed stating that he would have to consult with the Cabinet in London and requested that Hitler refrain from military action in the meantime. Though he agreed to this, Hitler continued military planning. As part of this, the Polish and Hungarian governments were offered part of Czechoslovakia in return for allowing the Germans to take the Sudetenland.

Meeting with the Cabinet, Chamberlain was authorized to concede the Sudetenland and received support from the French for such a move. On September 19, the British and French ambassadors met with the Czechoslovak government and recommended ceding those areas of the Sudetenland where Germans formed more than 50% of the population. Largely abandoned by its allies, the Czechoslovaks were forced to agree. Having secured this concession, Chamberlain returned to

Germany on the 22nd and met with Hitler at Bad Godesberg. Optimistic that a solution had been reached, Chamberlain was stunned when Hitler made new demands.

Not happy with the Anglo-French solution, Hitler demanded that German troops be permitted to occupy the entirety of the Sudetenland, that non-Germans be expelled, and that Poland and Hungary be given territorial concessions. After stating that such demands were unacceptable, Chamberlain was told that the terms were to be met or military action would result. Having risked his career and British

prestige on the deal, Chamberlain was crushed as he returned home. In response to the German ultimatum, both Britain and France began mobilizing their forces.

## The Munich Conference:

Though Hitler was willing to risk war, he soon found that the German people were not. As a result, he stepped back from the brink and sent Chamberlain a letter

guaranteeing the safety of Czechoslovakia if the Sudetenland were ceded to Germany. Eager to prevent war, Chamberlain replied that he was willing to continue talks and asked Italian leader Benito Mussolini to aid in persuading Hitler. In response, Mussolini proposed a four-power summit between Germany, Britain, France, and Italy to discuss the situation. The Czechoslovaks were not invited to take part.

Gathering in Munich on September 29, Chamberlain, Hitler, and Mussolini were joined by French Prime



Minister Édouard Daladier. Talks progressed through the day and into the night with a Czechoslovak delegation forced to wait outside. In the negotiations, Mussolini presented a plan which called for the Sudetenland to be ceded to Germany in exchange for guarantees that it would mark the end of German territorial expansion. Though presented by the Italian leader, the plan had been produced by the German government and its terms were similar to Hitler's latest ultimatum.

Desiring to avoid war, Chamberlain and Daladier were willing to agree to this "Italian plan." As a result, the Munich Agreement was signed shortly after 1:00 AM on September 30. This called for German troops to enter the Sudetenland on October 1 with the movement to be completed by the 10th. Around 1:30 AM, the Czechoslovak delegation was informed of the terms by Chamberlain and Daladier. Though initially unwilling to agree, the Czechoslovaks were forced to submit when informed that should a war occur they would be held responsible.

### **Aftermath of the Munich Agreement**

As a result of the agreement, German



<http://militaryhistory.about.com/od/worldwarii/p/World-War-ii-Munich-Agreement.htm>

forces crossed the border on October 1 and were warmly received by the Sudeten Germans while many Czechoslovaks fled the region. Returning to London, Chamberlain proclaimed that he had secured "peace for our time." While many in the British government were pleased with the result, others were not. Commenting on the meeting, Winston Churchill proclaimed the Munich Agreement "a total, unmitigated defeat." Having believed that he would have to fight to claim the Sudetenland, Hitler was surprised that Czechoslovakia's erstwhile allies readily abandoned the country in order to appease him.

Quickly coming to contempt Britain and France's fear of war, Hitler encouraged Poland and Hungary to take parts of Czechoslovakia. Unconcerned about retaliation from the western nations, Hitler moved to take the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. This was met with no significant response from either Britain or France. Concerned that Poland would be Germany's next target for expansion, both nations pledged their support in guaranteeing Polish independence. Going further, Britain concluded an Anglo-Polish military alliance on August 25. This was quickly activated when Germany invaded Poland on September 1 starting World War II.