

The Influence of the Munich Appeasement  
on American Foreign Policy

Karan M. Cummings Department of History

Dr. Betty M. Unterberger Department of History

In their search for the correct course of action, world leaders and their advisers are often tempted to draw parallels between their own situation and those of their predecessors. One of the most popular historical antecedents is the September 1938, Munich Conference. It was here that Britain's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain acceded to German absorption of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain's sincere effort to maintain peace was later termed "appeasement". This process of giving in to one's enemies by gradual degrees in hopes of pacification soon came under attack; the show of weakness by the West led to the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and the invasion of Poland, and control of Czechoslovakia gave Hitler a gateway to the East in his quest for world domination.

The anathema of Munich was ingrained in those who would later direct American foreign policy. In June 1950, Dean Acheson convinced Truman that nonintervention in Korea would be another failure by the democracies to stand up to aggression, which could conceivably lead to another world war. The ghost of Munich also played a part in Kennedy's initial decision not to trade the Jupiter missile bases in Turkey for their Soviet counterparts in Cuba during the October 1962, crisis. The aftermath of the 1939 Conference had made Kennedy wary of compromise. Finally, in Doris Kearnes' Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, Johnson is quoted as saying:

Everything I knew about history told me that if I got out of Vietnam and let Ho Chi Minh run through the streets of Saigon, then I'd be doing exactly what Chamberlain did in World War II. I'd be giving a big, fat reward to aggression. . . . And so would begin World War III.

In my paper I will point out these instances and several others where the distastefulness of appeasement influenced the actions of this country's principal decision makers. I will also try to determine whether this influence was beneficial or detrimental in the majority of the cases.

The Evans Library should be able to provide me with the resources necessary to write this paper. I intend to use primary sources whenever possible. Personal accounts of the key incidents in modern American foreign policy and autobiographies by the chief actors (e.g. Lyndon Johnson's The Vantage Point, Harry S Truman's Memoirs, George Kennan's Memoirs) will be especially useful in determining the extent of the Munich Conference's influence on foreign policy decisions.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MUNICH APPEASEMENT  
ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

by

Karan M. Cummings  
Department of History

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the  
University Undergraduate Fellows Program

1985-86

Approved by:

*Betty M. Unterberger*

Dr. Betty M. Unterberger

April 1986



War is a fearful thing, and we must be very clear, before we embark upon it, that it is really the great issues that are at stake.  
-- Neville Chamberlain<sup>1</sup>

At Munich in September 1938 the leaders of Britain and France, Prime Minister Chamberlain and Premier Edouard Daladier, handed over to Adolf Hitler's Reich a large portion of territory belonging to their Czechoslovakian allies. In doing so, they saw a possibility of preventing a second international conflict on the scale of the disaster which had plagued Europe from 1914 to 1918. A little less than a year after Munich, the Allies would discover that they had only hastened the realization of their greatest nightmare by giving in to Hitler.

Americans learned a great deal from World War II and the events in Europe which led to its outbreak. The initial effect of the Munich Agreement was an increased distrust of British policy that strengthened the isolationist camp in the United States.<sup>2</sup> No doubt these isolationists felt some remorse for their attitudes when it became apparent that American aid had been necessary for the defeat of the fascists. After 1945 it was difficult to argue that the United States had, willingly or not, inherited primary importance in world affairs; the atomic bomb and the strength of the American economy gave her undeniable

---

<sup>1</sup>John Wheeler-Bennett, Munich: Prologue to Tragedy (New York, 1962), p.5.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.436.

preeminence and increased responsibility for the course of world events.

Much as the United States had filled the vacuum of power left by Japan and Western Europe in 1945, George F. Kennan's theory of containment filled the vacuum of foreign policy in Washington in 1946. Kennan foresaw the creeping extension of Soviet power; his policy of containment provided a framework and a justification for the Truman Administration's interest in halting this expansion. Kennan's theory would be reshaped to the beliefs of each new administration, but the American view of the Soviet Union as the new totalitarian menace to freedom and democracy was a constant. The former menace, in the guise of Nazi Germany, was the "great issue" that Chamberlain failed to see at Munich. The Americans, all too aware of Chamberlain's mistakes, were forever searching for and finding the new totalitarian, and usually communist, threat in every part of the world. From Korea to Cuba to Vietnam they saw the necessity of rejecting appeasement. Certainly this belief was stated more often than it was recorded, but the written references to the Munich appeasement are ample evidence of its influence on American foreign policy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The time, interest and enthusiasm of several people made research for this thesis much more enjoyable and much easier than it might have been without their help. First of all, and principally, I offer sincere thanks to my adviser, Dr. Betty M. Unterberger, a very busy lady who nonetheless generously gave time, suggestions and support to this paper. My respect for her motivated me as much as any other factor in continually working to make this thesis better. Several workers, particularly those in the second-floor government documents section, at the Sterling C. Evans Library at Texas A&M allowed me to try their patience while searching for overdue books and obscure congressional hearings. Their contribution was enormous. My roommate, Pamela Nilsson, was also extremely tolerant, allowing me to leave books, papers and coffee cups scattered throughout the house while I was oblivious to everything except the Munich Conference and American cold war foreign policy. Finally, and with much love, my appreciation goes to Elizabeth Rosen and Kristi Sherrill, two very dear friends who read and reread drafts, made corrections and suggestions, listened to presentations and to all my worries, and always managed to instill me with new confidence. During this project and in many other 'crises,' their friendship has proved unflinching.

To Donald and Loveta Cummings,  
whose contributions are too numerous to list

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction . . . . . 1

II. Review of Research Materials . . . . . 4

III. The Influence of the Munich Conference on American Foreign Policy

    A. The Culmination of Appeasement at Munich . . . . . 6

    B. Non-Appeasement under Truman . . . . . 9

    C. Eisenhower and Appeasement . . . . . 16

    D. Munich, Kennedy and Johnson . . . . . 18

IV. Conclusion . . . . . 24

V. Bibliography

## INTRODUCTION

As a student of modern American history, I have often read references to the 1938 Munich Conference in relation to American foreign policy decisions. This thesis has provided me with an opportunity to research the influence of this most famous example of appeasement on American foreign policy. The appeasement at Munich became a sometimes useful, sometimes abused historical analogy which justified opposition to aggression by other nations.

In World Politics in the Twentieth Century, political scientist Peter R. Beckman argues that the failure of the Munich Conference taught the democracies four lessons, summarized as "alliances, confrontations, no negotiations; and to have peace, prepare for war."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the United States, Britain and France learned to take the course opposite that pursued by the Allies in September 1938. This paper supports Beckman's argument. If American diplomats and statesmen believed these lessons, they would implement them.. And in Iran, Korea, Formosa, Cuba, and Vietnam they did.<sup>2</sup> These actions and the frequent mention of Munich or

---

<sup>1</sup>Peter R. Beckman, World Politics in the Twentieth Century (Englewood Cliffs), 1984, p.164.

<sup>2</sup>Although they are not included in the scope of this paper, other governments also developed a Munich psychology. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and French Premier Guy Mollet referred to Munich and compared Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser to Hitler during the 1956 Suez Crisis. [John G. Stoessinger, Crusaders and Pragmatists: Movers of Modern American Foreign Policy (New York, 1979), p.118; Anthony Eden, Full Circle (Boston, 1960), p.578] Winston Churchill, in June 1948, said the Berlin Blockade raised issues "as grave as those we now know were at stake at Munich ten years ago. [New York Times, 27 June 1948, p.1]

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Stalin

appeasement lend credence to the hypothesis that a Munich psychology did indeed enter into American cold war foreign policy.

The Munich analogy was used to justify both successes and failures. The problem with the lessons of Munich, as with all historical parallels, is that

. . . one can infer too much from similarities that may only be superficial. Analogies are never perfect and may not hold up under all conditions. Sometimes what appears to some to be 'appeasement' may be a sensible response to a complex action by another nation.<sup>3</sup>

In the events covered in this report, American statesmen easily saw communist expansion as analogous to Hitler's attempted domination of Europe. To avoid another war, they drew upon the experiences of the pre-World War II period, and they became

---

justified the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact (a direct result of the Munich Conference, for it had confirmed Stalin's fears of capitalist encirclement and of the undependability of the Allies [Charles E. Bohlen, Witness to History, 1929-1969 (New York, 1973), pp. 60-61, 64]) by saying he had only done what the capitalists had done at Munich: bought time to rearm. [John G. Stoessinger, Why Nations Go to War (New York, 1982) pp. 42-43].

And during the crisis in Iran in 1945-46, Hussein Ala, the Iranian ambassador to the United States, begged American help in removing the Russian occupation forces. He feared "the history of. . . Munich would be repeated and Azerbaijan would prove to have been first shot fired in third world war." [U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945 (Washington, 1969) vol.8, p.508].

<sup>3</sup>George C. Edwards and Stephen J. Wayne, Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making (New York, 1985) pp. 225-226.

. . . captives of the unanalyzed faith that the future would be like the recent past. They expected its aftermath to be in most respects the same. And they defined statesmanship as doing those things which might have been done to prevent World War II from occurring.<sup>4</sup>

Expectedly, non-appeasement was included in this definition of statesmanship. This aversion to appeasement, the situations that evolved from it, and the degree of its influence are the subjects of this thesis.

---

<sup>4</sup>Ernest May, The 'Lessons' of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy (New York, 1973), p.7.



## REVIEW OF RESEARCH MATERIALS

The Munich Agreement and American foreign relations during the cold war encompass a vast body of literature, but no effort has yet been made to deal with both topics in a single work. Historians such as John Lewis Gaddis, Walter LaFeber, Ernest May and John G. Stoessinger have briefly mentioned the existence of a 'Munich psychology' or a 'Munich syndrome' in some of their works; however, none cover the phenomenon with more than a few words. In seeking to detail the influence of appeasement, primary sources proved most useful. These included presidential memoirs and public papers, congressional hearings, and documents of the U.S. Department of State (American Foreign Policy, the Department of State Bulletin, and Foreign Relations of the United States). Also helpful were memoirs or books by those in government positions who influenced, or recorded the influence of others on American foreign affairs as they personally viewed it. These persons include Dean Acheson, Charles Bohlen, James Forrestal, Eric Goldman, George Kennan, Arthur Schlesinger, Theodore Sorenson, and Arthur Vandenberg.

Secondary sources were used principally for a more objective view of events, and for dates and other details not covered in primary sources. They also helped immensely by sometimes documenting quotes made by government officials who referred to Munich or appeasement, and thereby opening new avenues of research. The most helpful secondary sources were John W. Wheeler-Bennett's Munich: Prologue to Tragedy, Laurence Thompson's The Greatest Treason: The Untold Story of Munich, Elie Abel's The Missile

Crisis, Glenn Paige's The Korean Decision, June 24-30, 1950, and John F. Kennedy's Why England Slept.

This paper makes no claims to being the final word on the Munich psychology in American foreign relations. Such a paper would require much more time than the nine months spent on this thesis. The author has some small hope that it might one day stir a more knowledgeable historian to continued research on the topic, which has relevance not only to post-World War II international relations, but also to the application of history to the determination of the future.

THE CULMINATION OF APPEASEMENT AT MUNICH<sup>1</sup>

In the early hours of September 30, 1938, the leaders of Britain, France, Italy and Germany signed the Munich Agreement, a document which ceded the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland to Hitler's Third Reich. The Sudetenland encompassed the northern borderlands of the young Czechoslovak state and was inhabited by three and one-half million Germans who, under the leadership of Nazi Konrad Heinlein, were agitating for their annexation to Germany. Hitler encouraged their demands, not especially because they furthered his plans of bringing all Germans into a single state,<sup>2</sup> but because the Sudetenland also contained the natural defenses of the Erzgebirge mountains and the Bohemian forest, as well as the miniature Maginot Line which the Czechs had erected with the aid of the French, and without which the Czechs were naked to military aggression.

The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, and the French Premier, Edouard Daladier, agreed to Hitler's demands for various reasons, the primary one being the haunting specter of the First World War. Chamberlain sincerely believed in 1938 that he had bought peace in Europe with the allied sacrifice of their alliance with Czechoslovakia. And at the time, it seemed the

---

<sup>1</sup>The information in this section was largely drawn from John Wheeler-Bennett's Munich: Prologue to Tragedy (New York, 1962) and Laurence Thompson's The Greatest Treason: The Untold Story of Munich (New York, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>A quarter-million Germans remained within the borders of the Czechoslovak state after the loss of the Sudetenland. (Wheeler-Bennett, p.184).

rest of Europe shared his assurance. When he returned to London, he was widely hailed as he proclaimed "peace with honor. . . peace for our time." Another reason for the Allies' consent to the dismemberment of the bastion of democracy in Eastern Europe was sheer military unpreparedness. They felt in no way capable of combating the German war machine. The Allies may have also suffered from guilt bred by the overly harsh Treaty of Versailles and sought to relieve a bad conscience.<sup>3</sup> Chamberlain could have also simply been following an established domestic and foreign policy of appeasement which Britain began in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In Chamberlain's eyes, this policy could succeed because Hitler was a rational man who would negotiate in good faith and keep his promise of making no more territorial demands in Europe in return for the Sudetenland.

The peace of Munich collapsed in only six months when German troops moved into the remainder of Czechoslovakia which had not been parceled out to Poland and Hungary. Hitler proved untrue to his word. Immediately after the German occupation the Allies, laden with remorse, pledged themselves to the defense of Poland. This commitment drew them into World War II as the Germans invaded

---

<sup>3</sup>A. Lentin makes this argument in Lloyd George, Woodrow Wilson and the Guilt of Germany: An Essay in the Pre-History of Appeasement (Baton Rouge, 1984).

<sup>4</sup>See Paul Kennedy, Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870-1945 (London, 1983), pp.13-39. Kennedy comes to the conclusion that appeasement was "the 'natural' policy for a small island state gradually losing its place in world affairs. . . and developing internally from an oligarchic to a more democratic form of political constitution in which sentiments in favor of a pacific and rational settlement of disputes were widely propagated." p.38.

Poland September 1, 1939. Munich, Chamberlain, and his rolled umbrella became powerful symbols of the failure of appeasement. The failure was due to the Allies' military unpreparedness, the betrayal of their alliance with Czechoslovakia, and their hesitancy to confront Hitler with force.

These mistakes were viewed in 1938 primarily with disgust or disinterest by the American public. The United States did not feel any commitment to the defense of Europe at this time.<sup>5</sup> But the unprecedented power that fell into American hands upon the close of the war brought new responsibilities which demanded interest and participation in international affairs. In seeking to fulfill these new responsibilities they completely rejected the policy pursued by Chamberlain. Appeasement was replaced by the lessons of Munich: do not negotiate, do not hesitate to confront militarily, maintain alliances, and be prepared for war.

---

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of the Roosevelt Administration's reaction to the Munich Agreement, see John McVickar Haight, Jr., "France, the United States, and the Munich Crisis," Diplomatic History, 4(1960), pp.340-358.

## NON-APPEASEMENT UNDER TRUMAN

Upon the death of Franklin Roosevelt in April 1945, Harry S Truman ascended to the American presidency. Truman, a student of history and perhaps given to historical parallels more than most, firmly established a tradition of non-appeasement which would extend to the tragedy in Vietnam a quarter-century later. During his administration, Soviet-American relations, which had never been cordial, rapidly faltered. Fear concerning the communist doctrine of expansion was beginning to pervade public opinion. In mid-1947 William C. Bullitt, a former ambassador to Moscow, expressed the prevailing view in Washington when he told an audience at the National War College, "The Soviet Union's assault upon the West is at about the stage of Hitler's maneuvering into Czechoslovakia. . . . The final aim of Russia is world conquest."<sup>1</sup> The tendency Bullitt showed to equate the leaders and aims of Nazi Germany with Soviet Russia was not uncommon at this time.<sup>2</sup> Truman himself was a victim of it. In a press conference in May 1947 he said

There isn't any difference in totalitarian states.  
I don't care what you call them -- Nazi, Communist,  
Fascist or Franco, or anything else -- they are

---

<sup>1</sup>Stephen E. Ambrose, Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938, 4th ed. (New York, 1985), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup>Two well-documented articles on the parallels drawn between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany as far back as the 1930s are Les K. Adler and Thomas Paterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s-1950s," American Historical Review, 4(1970), pp. 1046-1064; and Thomas R. Maddux, "Red Fascism, Brown Bolshevism: The American Image of Totalitarianism in the 1930s," Historian, 1(1977), pp. 85-103.

all alike.<sup>3</sup>

The statement was made only two months after the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine. Truman's speech before a joint session of Congress on March 12, 1947, effectively persuaded that body that aid to Greece and Turkey was necessary to save the two countries from communist domination. In a letter of May 12, 1947, the Republican Senate Majority Leader and head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Arthur Vandenberg, commented on his hopes for the American aid.

Greece must be helped or Greece sinks permanently into the communist order. Turkey inevitably follows. Then comes the chain reaction which might sweep from the Dardanelles to the China Sea. . . . I do not know whether our new American policy can succeed in arresting these subversive trends (which ultimately represent a direct threat to us). I can only say that I think the adventure is worth a try as an alternative to another 'Munich' and perhaps to another war. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The Under-Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, a fair representative of the administration's views, believed the communist insurgency which the Greeks were fighting was supported by the Soviet Union, and that the movement, if successful, would cause the collapse of the Near and Middle East, India, and China. Stalin, he believed, like Hitler in 1938, was intent on unlim-

---

<sup>3</sup>Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Harry S Truman, Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, 1947 (Washington, 1963), p.238 (hereafter referred to as Truman Public Papers).

<sup>4</sup>Arthur Vandenberg, Jr., ed., The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg (Boston, 1952), pp.341-342.

ited conquest.<sup>5</sup> This process, like that described by Vandenberg, i.e. the collapse of neighboring nations to communism, was later termed the 'domino theory' by Eisenhower, and was a reformulation of the Munich analogy.<sup>6</sup> Mention of the domino theory would later occur frequently, side by side with the Munich analogy.

During the Korean War references to Munich and appeasement were more common than at any other period during the cold war. The correlations between the communist aggression of North Korea against the Republic of Korea in the south, and the Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia were too great for many to resist making the comparison. Truman, General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Douglas MacArthur, and Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, all paid lip service to Munich or appeasement during this period.

Concerning the first Blair House meeting, held June 25, 1950, the day following the North Korean attack, Ambassador-at-Large Philip Jessup said, ". . . the United States was prepared to accept the catastrophe of World War III if it proved to be unavoidable because of American refusal to accept the intolerable evils of 'appeasement.'"<sup>7</sup> The next day in the Senate, Senator Styles Bridges

---

<sup>5</sup>Walter LaFeber, America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945-1984, 5th ed. (New York, 1985), pp.36-37.

<sup>6</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House (Boston, 1965), pp.495-496.

<sup>7</sup>Glenn D. Paige, The Korean Decision, June 24-30, 1950 (New York, 1968) p. 143.



stated his belief that the United States was avoiding war, and that this course was "the course of appeasement."<sup>8</sup> On the same day the second Blair House meeting was held. At this conference, according to General Omar Bradley

. . . the decision was made that here was another act of aggression, that if we appeased in this, something else would come along, and either you appeased again or took action in the next one. . . one appeasement leads to another until you finally make war inevitable.<sup>9</sup>

The following day Truman committed American air and naval units in South Korea, and two days later, on June 29, Representative Philip Philbin expressed his satisfaction that a "chain of appeasement" stretching back before World War II had finally been broken.<sup>10</sup>

Later in the war, at a September 1, 1950, press conference, Truman discussed his reasons for committing U.S. troops to South Korea. He said

One course would have been to limit our action to diplomatic protests, while the Communist aggressors went ahead and swallowed up their victim. That would have been appeasement. If the history of the 1930's

---

<sup>8</sup>Paige, p.151.

<sup>9</sup>United States Senate, Military Situation in the Far East, Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations, 82nd Congress, 1st Session, to Conduct an Inquiry into the Military Situation in the Far East and the Events surrounding the Relief of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur from his Assignments in that Area, 5 vols. (Washington, 1951), vol. 2, p.890 (hereafter referred to as MacArthur Hearings).

<sup>10</sup>Paige, p.242.

teaches us anything, it is that appeasement of dictators is the sure road to world war. If aggression were allowed to succeed in Korea, it would be an open invitation to new acts of aggression elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

He would repeat this argument later in his memoirs when he related his thoughts on first hearing of the attack on the Republic of Korea.

In my generation, this was not the first time the strong had attacked the weak. I recalled some earlier instances: Manchuria, Ethiopia, Austria. I remembered how each time the democracies had failed to act it had encouraged the aggressors to keep going. Communism was action in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen and twenty years earlier. I felt certain that if South Korea was allowed to fall Communist leaders would be emboldened to override nations closer to our own shores. . . . no small nation would have the courage to resist threats and aggression by stronger Communist neighbors. If this was allowed to go unchallenged it would mean a third world war, just as similar incidents had brought on the second world war. <sup>12</sup>

And on December 15, 1950, following the entrance of the Communist Chinese into the war, he said

We will take every honorable step we can to avoid general war.  
But we will not engage in appeasement.  
The world learned at Munich that security cannot be bought by appeasement.<sup>13</sup>

During the MacArthur hearings, after the General's dismissal in April 1951, MacArthur asserted that trying to limit the use of

---

<sup>11</sup>Truman Public Papers, 1950 (Washington, 1965), pp.609-610.

<sup>12</sup>Harry S Truman, Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope, vol.2 (Garden City, 1956), pp. 332-333.

<sup>13</sup>Truman Public Papers, 1950 (Washington, 1965), p. 742.

force in Korea introduced "a new concept into military operations -- the concept of appeasement."<sup>14</sup> His definition of appeasement was "anything that does not attempt to stop that [aggression]." Douglas MacArthur was fired from his post largely because of his unwillingness to limit his use of force.

The sixty-eighth paper of the National Security Council, commonly termed NSC 68, is included in almost any discussion of the Korean War. The paper was authorized by Truman in January 1950 as a general policy reappraisal of American national security interests. The Korean conflict made the passage through Congress of appropriations for NSC 68's recommendations much easier for the administration. Among its recommendations were 1)no negotiations with the Soviet Union since conditions in the Kremlin were not yet sufficient to force it to change its policies drastically; 2)the maintenance of a strong alliance system (i.e. NATO) directed by the United States; 3)development of the hydrogen bomb, rapid building of conventional military force, and increased taxes to pay for this new military establishment.<sup>16</sup>

The lessons of Munich (no negotiations, maintenance of alliances, military confrontations, preparation for war) are readily apparent in the National Security Council's sixty-eighth paper and in the administration's actions in Korea.

---

<sup>14</sup>MacArthur Hearings, vol.1, p.39.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., vol.1, p.146.

<sup>16</sup>LaFeber, p.97; and NSC 68 in U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950 (Washington, 1977), vol.1, pp.235-292, esp. pp. 259,265-67,271,291.

In several other instances during Truman's presidency the image of Munich was invoked in views which prevailed. For example, in 1946, the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, felt the United States should not "endeavor to buy [the Soviets'] understanding and sympathy" by giving them information on the atomic bomb, because "we tried that once with Hitler. There are no returns on appeasement."<sup>17</sup> The Marshall Plan was necessary, especially after the 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia, because Americans were "faced with exactly the same situation with which Britain and France were faced in 1938-39 with Hitler" according to Harry Truman.<sup>18</sup> In 1950 former Ambassador to the Soviet Union Averell Harriman knew that if NATO was not carried through, "a restrengthening of those that believe in appeasement and neutrality" would occur.<sup>19</sup> And seating Red China on the United Nations Security Council in 1950 "sounded like appeasement" to Dean Acheson.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>Walter Millis, ed., The Forrestal Diaries (New York, 1951), p. 96.

<sup>18</sup>Margaret Truman, Harry S Truman (New York, 1973), p.359.

<sup>19</sup>U.S. Senate, The Vandenberg Resolution and the North Atlantic Treaty, Hearing Held in Executive Session before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 81st Congress, 1st Session on Executive L, The North Atlantic Treaty (Washington, 1973), p.231; cited in LaFeber, p.84.

## EISENHOWER AND APPEASEMENT

Dwight Eisenhower referred to Munich in only two recorded instances from 1952 to 1961. Perhaps the General, with greater experience in war than any other cold war leader, was hesitant to make general endorsements of military confrontations. And in 1952 the Munich analogy, only fourteen years old, still provoked a powerful emotional response in favor of military confrontation. Although the Hungarian press did so in 1956, in hindsight it would be difficult to call Eisenhower an appeaser. In Jordan, Formosa, Lebanon and Guatemala the President appeared more than willing to use force. And the famed 'pactomania' of his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, indicates an urge to build effective alliance systems, a symptom of the Munich syndrome. During the 1952 campaign, Eisenhower promised the American public that his administration "would always reject appeasement."<sup>1</sup> But at Suez in 1956 he severely, though not irreparably, weakened the NATO alliance; and he resisted involvement at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, although he compared the threat in Vietnam to Hirohito, Mussolini and Hitler.<sup>2</sup>

The second incident during which Eisenhower referred to Munich (the first being the 1952 campaign) was the off-shore islands crisis in 1958. On August 23 the Communist Chinese began

---

<sup>1</sup>New York Times, 25 Oct. 1952, p.1.

<sup>2</sup>Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change (Garden City, 1963), pp.294, 691-692.

bombarding Quemoy and Matsu, two islands in the Formosa Straits under the control of the Nationalist Chinese. Eisenhower regarded this as a threat to Chiang's regime in Formosa; if the threat succeeded, it would lead to an "anti-Communist barrier" in the Pacific which could include Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indochina, Burma and Okinawa.<sup>3</sup> In a television and radio report to the American people on September 11, he rhetorically asked

Do we not still remember that the name of 'Munich' symbolizes a vain hope of appeasing dictators? . . . . If the democracies had stood firm at the beginning, almost surely there would have been no World War. . . . I know something about that war, and I never want to see that history repeated. But, my fellow Americans, it certainly can be repeated if the peace-loving democratic nations again fearfully practice a policy of standing idly by while big aggressors use armed force to conquer the small and weak. . . . a Western Pacific Munich would not buy us peace or security. It would encourage the aggressors. It would dismay our friends and allies there. If history teaches us anything, appeasement would make it more likely that we would have to fight a major war. . . . There is not going to be any appeasement.<sup>4</sup>

The crisis ceased after the American Seventh Fleet began escorting Nationalist troops and supplies to Quemoy and Matsu, and moved into Quemoy eight-inch howitzers capable of firing atomic shells.

---

<sup>3</sup>Dwight D. Eisenhower, Waging Peace, 1956-61 (Garden City, 1965), pp.294, 691-692.

<sup>4</sup>Eisenhower Public Papers, 1958, pp.694-700.

## MUNICH , KENNEDY AND JOHNSON

The Munich analogy resurfaced intact in 1961 when John F. Kennedy came to the Oval Office. Kennedy was probably the most personally affected by the Munich crisis of all American presidents. He was in Europe at the time, since his father, a supporter of the Munich settlement, was Ambassador to Saint James Court. He was in Prague, thanks largely to the machinations of George Kennan, who was working in the American embassy there, immediately after the German occupation of the city in March 1939.<sup>1</sup> So the future president saw first-hand the initial results of the Munich Agreement.

In 1940 Kennedy published an expanded version of his senior thesis at Harvard which drew largely on the 1938-39 European tour which included Prague. The book, Why England Slept, contained Kennedy's own lessons of Munich, which was the point at which the British 'awoke' to the dangers of war. Two of the lessons are paraphrases of those that Beckman would later outline: to have peace, prepare for war; and do not hesitate to confront militarily. Kennedy believed that "armaments must equal commitments," and that the democracies "must be prepared to back up those commitments, even to the ultimate point of going to war." A third lesson Kennedy drew from Munich is noteworthy because he followed it so well after he became president. He believed

---

<sup>1</sup>George F. Kennan, Memoirs, 1925-1950 (Boston, 1967), vol.1, p.92.

the democracies needed more "forward-looking," "young, progressive and able leaders" to guide their policies.<sup>2</sup>

Kennedy appears to have learned the other lessons of Munich equally well. His administration began a build-up of conventional and nuclear arms after the lapse of conventional military power during the Eisenhower years. And at Cuba in 1962 he proved ready to approach "the ultimate point of going to war" as he pushed the world as close to the nuclear abyss as it has ever come. When he revealed the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba to the American public on October 22, 1962, he recalled the failure of appeasement, saying, "The 1930's taught us a clear lesson: aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged, ultimately leads to war."<sup>3</sup> And during the crisis Kennedy also saw the importance of maintaining alliances; the approval of the Organization of American States and the leaders of Britain, Canada and France was sought and gained concerning the blockade, or 'quarantine,' as Kennedy preferred to call it, against Cuba.<sup>4</sup> And among the scratches on a yellow legal pad used by the President during the October 22 meeting of the Executive Committee, the phrase 'holding the alliance' was scribbled several times.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Beckman, p.164; John F. Kennedy, Why England Slept (New York, 1940), pp.217-229.

<sup>3</sup>Kennedy Public Papers, 1962 (Washington, 1963), p.807.

<sup>4</sup>Elie Abel, The Missile Crisis (Philadelphia, 1968), pp.111-114, 130-131.

<sup>5</sup>Theodore C. Sorenson, Kennedy (New York, 1965), p.705.



During the decision-making process which led to the blockade, several viewpoints were advanced and retracted. According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a Special Assistant to the President, "Supporters of [an] air strike marshaled their arguments against the blockade. They said that it would. . . mean another Munich."<sup>6</sup>

Adlai Stevenson, Ambassador to the United Nations, was later accused of being an appeaser for his willingness to negotiate the United States-leased Naval base at Cuba's Guantanamo Bay and American Jupiter missiles in Turkey for the Cuban missiles.<sup>7</sup> Kennedy, however, believed Stevenson "showed plenty of strength and courage, presenting that viewpoint at the risk of being called an appeaser."<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, Kennedy saw the value of negotiations during the thirteen days of the crisis. Although they were rejected for a week after the discovery of the missiles in order to firmly establish the position that should be taken with Khrushchev, negotiations, however indirect they sometimes were, led to the peaceful resolution of the Soviet-American confrontation in Cuba.

In Vietnam, the United States were less successful in their confrontation with communism, and the Munich analogy had a debilitating effect on American prestige. According to Kenneth O'Donnell, Kennedy wanted to pull American military advisers out of

---

<sup>6</sup>Schlesinger, p.736.

<sup>7</sup>Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett, "In Times of Crisis," Saturday Evening Post, Dec. 1962, pp.16-20.

<sup>8</sup>Kenneth P. O'Donnell and Dave F. Powers, "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye" (New York, 1972), p.373.

South Vietnam in the spring of 1963, and intended to do so in 1965 after his reelection, although, in his words, "I'll become one of the most unpopular Presidents in history. I'll be damned everywhere as a Communist appeaser."<sup>9</sup> Being labelled an appeaser in 1963 would have been enough to prevent reelection in 1964.

Obviously Kennedy questioned the necessity of American aid to South Vietnam's viability or, more likely, he questioned the necessity of a non-communist South Vietnam for American security. The problem fell into Lyndon Johnson's hands in November 1963, and Johnson undoubtedly would have been among those whose opinion Kennedy feared, those who would have seen the withdrawal of American military advisers as appeasement. The failure of the Munich Conference left a strong impression on Lyndon Johnson, a U.S. Representative in 1938. In 1960, during the Democratic campaign for the presidential nomination, he attacked Kennedy through his father, saying, "I wasn't any Chamberlain umbrella man."<sup>10</sup> And in Vietnam he went to great lengths to prove his statement.

In 1965 when Johnson sent American Marines to South Vietnam, he had several other historical analogies to 'prove' the global validity of non-appeasement. He frequently spoke with Truman about the Korean intervention and thoroughly agreed with the former president's analysis. During his term as vice-president the

---

<sup>9</sup>O'Donnell, p.16.

<sup>10</sup>Eric F. Goldman, The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson (New York, 1969), p.450.

Cuban missile crisis seemed to insure that the United States had discovered an "invaluable and enduring principle" in the policy of non-appeasement.<sup>11</sup> Johnson implied this in his May 4, 1965, message to Congress.

Wherever we have stood firm, aggression has been halted, peace restored, and liberty maintained. This was true in Iran, in Greece, and in Turkey, and in Korea. It was true in the Formosa Straits and in Lebanon. It was true at the Cuban missile crisis. And it will be true again in Southeast Asia.<sup>12</sup>

Other, more direct references to Munich are frequent. In an April 1965 news conference, Johnson stated

Defeat in South Vietnam would encourage and spur on those who seek to conquer all free nations within their reach. . . . This is the clearest lesson of our time. From Munich until today we have learned that to yield to aggression brings only greater threats and even more destructive war.<sup>13</sup>

And according to Eric Goldman, a Special Assistant to the President from December 1963 to September 1966, Johnson once snapped, "No more Munichs!" during a discussion of the situation in Vietnam.<sup>14</sup> And twice during Lyndon Johnson's conversations with his biographer Doris Kearns, he referred to his fear of appeasement.

. . . if I left that war (for the Great Society) and let the Communists take over South Vietnam,

---

<sup>11</sup>Goldman, pp.450-451; and Doris Kearns, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream (New York, 1976), p.267.

<sup>12</sup>Johnson Public Papers, 1965 (Washington, 1966), pp.497-498.

<sup>13</sup>Johnson Public Papers, 1965 (Washington, 1966), p.449.

<sup>14</sup>Goldman, p.451.

then I would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would both find it impossible to accomplish anything for anybody anywhere on the entire globe.<sup>15</sup>

. . . everything I knew about history told me that if I got out of Vietnam and let Ho Chi Minh run through the streets of Saigon, then I'd be doing exactly what Chamberlain did in World War II. I'd be giving a big fat reward to aggression.<sup>16</sup>

When Johnson left office in January 1969, the Americans were still in Vietnam, holding the alliance with the South Vietnamese government. Negotiations were being held, although primarily with bombs until October 1968, and a peaceful solution at the Paris Peace Talks was still many months away.

---

<sup>15</sup>Kearns, p.263.

<sup>16</sup>Kearns, p. 264.

## CONCLUSION

References to Munich, and even to appeasement, are now rare, although the defense policies of the Reagan Administration are fertile grounds for a Munich analogy. Following the April 14, 1986 American attack on Libya in response to the Libyan terrorist bombing of a West Berlin discotheque, Secretary of State George Schultz stated, "Tolerance or appeasement of aggression has always brought more aggression."<sup>1</sup> Schultz failed to note that Hitler was not a terrorist, nor that, in dealing with terrorists, retaliation also can bring more aggression.

In general, Vietnam has effectively dampened Munich's influence on American foreign policy making. According to Henry Kissinger, "America faces. . . the problem of its new generation. The gulf between their historical experience and ours is enormous. They have been traumatized by Vietnam as we were by Munich. Their nightmare is foreign commitment as ours was abdication from international responsibility."<sup>2</sup> Richard Nixon is of the same opinion. In his book No More Vietnams he concludes that Vietnam has given rise to a new group of isolationists who fear trying as much as failing to maintain a role in world affairs that is consonant with American obligations.<sup>3</sup> The new isolationists might

---

<sup>1</sup>George Schultz, Television Address to the American People, 14 April 1986.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of State, Department of State Bulletin, 1871 (1975), p.560.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Nixon, No More Vietnams (New York, 1985), pp.212-213, 237.

ask, "What are the limits to these obligations?" And today in Washington, White House spokesman Larry Speakes fears that the opponents of aid to Nicaragua are suffering from a "Vietnam syndrome."<sup>4</sup>

In any analysis of the use of historical analogies one must question the validity of comparisons. Of course, no two situations are exactly alike. But if each must be considered as a distinct incident, separate from the continuum of history, then to what extent is history useful to understanding the present?

The problem with the Munich analogy seems to be that the parallels were drawn before a full analysis of the contemporary situation was made. Nevertheless, the analogy sometimes worked well. The Korean action saved the Republic of Korea from communist domination which could have easily had repercussions in Japan and adversely affected its astounding post-war economic growth, as well as American military bases in the Pacific.

Kennedy's response in Cuba to the Soviet missiles is more questionable. Those missiles did not profoundly affect the Soviet-American military balance; Soviet nuclear submarines were already capable of reaching the United States. However, the missiles would have altered perceptions of power, and perceptions can be as important as reality, especially in the nuclear age.

Johnson's use of the Munich parallel resulted in failure.

---

<sup>4</sup>"Echoes of an Old War," Newsweek, 7 Apr. 1986, p.34.

The extent is evidenced by the new Vietnam psychology which so profoundly affects Americans minds today. As Kissinger concluded his statement, "It is possible that both generations learned their lessons too well."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Department of State, Department of State Bulletin, 1871(1975), p. 560

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Public Documents

- U.S. Department of State. American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. American Foreign Policy, 1956-1967: Current Documents. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957-1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Department of State Bulletin. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948-1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1938-1954. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1955-1981.
- U.S. Senate. Military Situation in the Far East, Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services and Committee on Foreign Relations, 82nd Congress, 1st Session, to Conduct an Inquiry into the Military Situation in the Far East and Facts surrounding the Relief of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur from his Assignments in that Area. 5 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Vandenberg Resolution and the North Atlantic Treaty, Hearings Held in Executive Session before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 81st Congress, 1st Session on Executive L, The North Atlantic Treaty. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973.
- U.S. President. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Harry S Truman, Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, 1945-1953. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1961-1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953-1961. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960-1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. John F. Kennedy, 1961-1963. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1962-1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1969. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965-1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Richard M. Nixon, 1968-1974. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1970-1975.



Memoirs and Contemporary Accounts

Acheson, Dean. Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department. New York: Norton, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_. Sketches from Life of Men I Have Known. New York: Harper, 1961.

Benes, Eduard. Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Benes: From Munich to New War and New Victory. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954.

Bohlen, Charles E. Witness to History, 1929-1969. New York: Norton, 1973.

Council on Foreign Relations. The United States in World Affairs, 1950-1968. New York: Harper, 1951-1969.

Daladier, Edouard. In Defense of France. Paris: 1939; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Librairies, 1971.

Eden, Anthony. Full Circle. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960.

Eisenhower, Dwight D. Mandate for Change. Garden City: Doubleday, 1963.

\_\_\_\_\_. Waging Peace: 1956-1961. Garden City: Doubleday, 1965.

Johnson, Lyndon B. The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1971.

Kennan, George F. From Prague after Munich: Diplomatic Papers, 1938-1940. Princeton: Princeton University, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. Memoirs, 1925-1963. 2 vols. Boston: Little, Brown, 1967, 1972.

Kennedy, Robert F. Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis. New York: Norton, 1969.

Millis, Walter, ed. The Forrestal Diaries. New York: Viking, 1951.

Truman, Harry S. Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope. Garden City: Doubleday, 1956. Vol II.

Vandenberg, Arthur, Jr., ed. The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952.

Articles, Magazines, Newspapers and Television

Adler, Les K., and Paterson, Thomas G. "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s-1950s." American Historical Review, 4 (1970), 1046-1064.

Alsop, Stewart, and Bartlett, Charles. "In Times of Crisis." Saturday Evening Post, Dec. 1962, pp.16-20.

Ambrosius, Lloyd E. "The Orthodoxy of Revisionism: Woodrow Wilson and the New Left." Diplomatic History, 2 (1977), 199-214.

Haight, John McVickar, Jr. "France, the United States, and the Munich Crisis." Journal of Modern History, 4 (1960), 340-358.

LaFeber, Walter. "Crossing the 38th: the Cold War in Microcosm." In Lynn H. Miller and Ronald W. Prussen, eds., Reflections on the Cold War: A Quarter Century of American Foreign Policy. Philadelphia: Temple University, 1974, pp. 71-90.

Maddux, Thomas R. "Red Fascism, Brown Bolshevism: American Image of Totalitarianism in the 1930s." Historian, 1 (1977), 85-103.

Paterson, Thomas G. "Bearing the Burden: A Critical Look at JFK's Foreign Policy." Virginia Quarterly Review, 2 (1978), 193-212.

Trevor-Roper, H.R. "The Dilemma of Munich is Still with Us." New York Times Magazine, 15 Sept. 1968, pp.35,72,76,82,84.

Newsweek, 7 Apr. 1986.

New York Times, 1938-1972.

Schultz, George. "Television Address to the American People." April 14, 1986.

Books

- Abel, Elie. The Missile Crisis. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1968.
- Acheson, Dean. The Korean War. New York: Norton, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Morning and Noon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
- Ambrose, Stephen E. Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938. 4th ed. New York: Penguin, 1985.
- Bailey, Thomas A. A Diplomatic History of the American People. 10th ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980.
- Barber, James David. The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977.
- Beckman, Peter R. World Politics in the Twentieth Century. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984.
- Bell, Coral. Negotiation from Strength: A Study in the Politics of Power. New York: Knopf, 1963.
- Druks, Herbert M. Harry S Truman and the Russians, 1945-1953. New York: Speller, 1966.
- Edwards, George C., III, and Wayne, Stephen J. Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making. New York: St. Martin's, 1985.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. Russia, the Soviet Union and the United States: An Interpretive History. New York: Wiley, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar United States National Security Policy. New York: Oxford University, 1982.
- Goldman, Eric F. The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson. New York: Knopf, 1969.
- Greenstein, Fred I. The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader. New York: Basic Books, 1982.
- Guhin, Michael A. John Foster Dulles: A Statesman and His Times. New York: Columbia University, 1972.
- Halberstam, D. The Best and the Brightest. New York: Random House, 1972.
- Hoopes, Townsend. The Devil and John Foster Dulles. Boston: Little, Brown, 1973.

- Kearns, Doris. Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream. New York: Harper, 1976.
- Kennan, George F. American Diplomacy. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984.
- Kennedy, John F. Why England Slept. New York: Wilfred Funk, 1940.
- Kennedy, Paul. Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870-1945. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983.
- LaFeber, Walter. America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945-1984. 5th ed. New York: Wiley, 1985.
- Lentin, A. Lloyd George, Woodrow Wilson and the Guilt of Germany: An Essay in the Pre-History of Appeasement. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1984.
- May, Ernest. The 'Lessons' of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy. New York: Oxford University, 1973.
- Miller, Merle. Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S Truman. New York: Berkley, 1973.
- Morgenthau, Hans. Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace. 3rd ed. New York: Knopf, 1960.
- Nixon, Richard M. No More Vietnams. New York: Arbor House, 1985.
- O'Donnell, Kenneth P. and Powers, Dave F. "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye." New York: Little, Brown, 1972.
- Osgood, Robert, et al. America and the World from the Truman Doctrine to Vietnam. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1970.
- Paige, Glenn D. The Korean Decision, June 24-30, 1950. New York: Free Press, 1968.
- Presseisen, Ernst L. Amiens and Munich: Comparisons in Appeasement. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978.
- Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr. A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
- Sorenson, Theodore C. Kennedy. New York: Harper, 1965.
- Stoessinger, John G. Crusaders and Pragmatists: Movers of Modern American Foreign Policy. New York: Norton, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Might of Nations: World Politics in Our Time. 7th ed. New York: Random House, 1982.

- Stoessinger, John G. Why Nations Go to War. 3rd ed. New York: St. Martin's, 1982.
- Thompson, Laurence. The Greatest Treason: The Untold Story of Munich. New York: Morrow, 1968.
- Truman, Margaret. Harry S Truman. New York: Morrow, 1973.
- Werth, Alexander. France and Munich: Before and after the Surrender. New York: Fertig, 1969.
- Wheeler-Bennett, John W. Munich: Prologue to Tragedy. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1962.