Appeasement does not work

John Hyde

"The blood shed on the European continent in the course of the last three hundred years bears no proportion to the national result of the events.... Germany has solemnly recognised and guaranteed France her frontiers.... Without taking the past into account Germany has concluded a non-aggression pact with Poland.... We shall adhere to it unconditionally.... Germany neither intends nor wishes to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, to annex Austria, or to conclude an Anschluss.... Whoever lights the torch of war in Europe can wish for nothing but chaos."

These honeyed words were spoken by Adolf Hitler during the evening of May 21, 1935. This is what the "London Times" had to say about them: "It is to be hoped that the speech will be taken everywhere as a sincere and well-considered utterance meaning precisely what it says." The "Times" did not know that, during the morning of the same day, Hitler had promulgated the secret "Reich Defence Law", reorganising the German armed forces and appointing Schacht to organise a war economy.

Less than a year later, March 7, 1936, he launched his first military adventure, operation Schulung. A mere three German battalions 'occupied' the German Rhineland, which was, under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, a demilitarised zone.

Again Hitler promised peace: "We have no territorial demands in Europe.... Germany will never break the peace!" And the world, most notably France and Britain, did nothing. The League of Nations was, at the time, too preoccupied with its much-publicised but ineffectual sanctions intended to stop Italy's aggression in Abyssinia.

Peace diplomacy in the 1930s has many lessons for those who will heed them, today. We might recall how Belgium, faced
with German troops on its Eastern border, withdrew from the
Locarno pact—a serious loss for Western defence.

And we might with profit recall how Britain sought to
appease Nazi Germany. In May 1937, Chamberlain replaced
Baldwin as Prime Minister in Britain. Hitler was pleased; he
now had a foreign affairs expert to deal with. Chamberlain
soon visited him at Berchtesgaden.

Nine days before that meeting Baron von Neizacker, of the
German Foreign Office, wrote Hitler a secret memo. In part it
read: "From England we want colonies and freedom of action in
the East.... The British need for tranquillity is great. It
would be profitable to find out what England would be willing
to pay for such tranquillity." A German memorandum of the
Chamberlain/Hitler meeting reveals that Chamberlain was
prepared to pay with some concessions regarding colonies and
Eastern Europe.

As for Hitler’s promised tranquillity: a minute of about
the same time quotes him as saying to his senior generals:
"The history of all ages—the Roman Empire and the British
Empire—had proved that expansion could be carried out by
breaking down resistance and taking risks; setbacks were
inevitable. There had never... been spaces without a master,
and there were none today; the attacker always comes up
against a possessor."

On November 5, 1937, Hitler outlined his plans for war to
his Chiefs of Staff and Foreign Office heads. Three of these—
Blomberg, Fritsch and Neurath—voiced opposition. None
survived in office for three months! (Dictators cannot
tolerate opposition.)

The Anschluss of Austria followed in March 1938, even
though Austria’s independence was guaranteed by the League of
Nations. This aroused criticism which, in turn, prompted Herr
Hitler to say, "Not as tyrants have we come but as
liberators"—so says every tyrant!

Without firing a shot, Hitler had acquired 7 million
subjects and a considerable strategic advantage. The Anschluss
prompted Neville Chamberlain to say, "The hard fact is that
nothing could have arrested what has actually happened unless
this country and other countries were prepared to use force."
Instead of advocating the necessary force, however, he stated
publicly that Britain would not come to Czechoslovakia’s aid,
thereby, if there was any doubt left, sealing that nation’s
fate.

The Munich Conference at which the British, French and
Italians, handed Sudeten Czechoslovakia to Germany soon
followed. It was after that meeting, that Mr Chamberlain made
his famous (fatuous) "Peace in our time" promise.

The rest of what had been Czechoslovakia was soon gobbled
up and then it was Poland’s turn. At last Britain and France
reacted. World War II killed a total of 15 million combatants
on both sides whereas Hitler alone simply murdered some 17 million Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Ukrainians etc. (Despots usually kill more of their own or conquered peoples than they kill armed opponents.)

How much better would it have been to have stopped Hitler when he entered the Rhinelands, or Austria or even Czechoslovakia? The lesson is surely that it is possible to trick only with people whose word we can trust; others must be resisted.

War is indeed dreadful. It should be avoided, but not at all costs. I have, of course, chosen events to demonstrate that the price of buying off a tyrant who can be stopped will be high---I can, however, think of none that could carry the opposite message. Hussein is every bit as bad as Hitler. (Hitler was at least squeamish about murdering people with his own hands---not so Hussein.) Hussein is now in a stronger position than Hitler was at the time he sent troops into the Rhinelands, but not yet as strong as Hitler was when he invaded Poland. He can be stopped: therefore, he should be stopped.

Those few Peacenicks camped in the desert are brave, and therefore probably honourable people, but their opinion that lives can be saved by turning the other cheek to people like Saddam Hussein is dangerously wrong. If they were to convince the democratic nations that appeasement was the way to peace, they would, in fact, have created the conditions for World War III. Stopping Saddam Hussein after he had gained control of the entire Persian Gulf and armed himself with nuclear weapons, and when small nations feared to offer him offence, would have become as difficult as stopping Hitler ultimately proved to be.

I have no similar respect for those who, from the safety of Australia, gloat over the loss of Allied aircraft and sound so disappointed when they must report that people actually in the Gulf region are not suffering from the vapours.

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