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THE '1938 MUNICH AGREEMENT' AGAIN? THE US-ISRAEL 'DEAL OF THE CENTURY' FOR PALESTINE

By
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Picture: The 1938 Munich Conference.

From left: Neville Chamberlain, Édouard Daladier, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini (standing on Mussolini's left is his son-in-law and Italy's foreign minister Galeazzo Ciano).¹

In the midst of a global outbreak of a new coronavirus at the end of January, dubbed the Covid-19, the President of the United States (US), Donald Trump announced a 'Deal of the Century' to resolve the long standing conflict and territorial issues plaguing Palestine and Israel. The 'Deal' apparently was designed by a US team led by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and took three years to prepare after secret consultations with Israel, and a small number of Arab states. Kushner also told the team not to use

'history' while designing the plan, considered odd as the whole Palestine-Israel conflict is steeped in rich historical background and strategic context.² The 'Deal' was officially unveiled by Trump with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a White House press conference on 28 January 2020.³

There was a problem, however. Strangely, the Palestinians, which in the 'Deal' will see the redrawing of future territorial sovereignty and rights of Palestine, were not invited for the drafting of the 'Deal' and the announcement of the 'Deal'. This reminds us of the 1938 Munich Conference and the resultant Munich Agreement.

The 1938 Munich Conference is a symbolic event often invoked as the prime example of the danger of appeasement in diplomacy or more reflective in this context, the failure to halt Hitler and Nazi Germany aka an aggressor state which yielded future catastrophic events. The Munich Conference is often recognized as an important event that led to the start of World War II and subsequently Nazi Germany's mass killing of Jews known as the Holocaust. So, let's have a look at what the ghost of Munich has to tell us about the 'Deal'.

In 1938, Hitler wanted to occupy some of Czechoslovakia's land in the area bordering Germany, the Sudetenland. During this time the British and French powers were war weary (they had lost a generation of young men in World War I) and, in an attempt to avoid another war, were prepared to accommodate Hitler's demand - the return of Sudetenland to Germany. Hitler argued that ethnic Germans in Sudetenland had been attacked by mobs and their properties destroyed. These acts of provocation and violence against ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia necessitated the need for Germany's intervention in Sudetenland. In reality, German *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) operatives under the direction of Reinhard Heydrich, were conducting subversive and covert operations inside Czechoslovakia. They disguised themselves and organised demonstrations against Germans and became *agent provocateurs* during these anti-German demonstrations that resulted in violence and destruction of properties.

Hitler promised that he would make no further claims for territories once he had obtained Sudetenland. Hitler however, had plans to expand Germany's power, land and resource bases and intended to return Germany to the former glory of the First Reich (German Empire). Hitler was also hard-pressed to make Germany self-sufficient in resources and industrial capability, as part of his *Lebensraum* policy. Hitler targeted Czechoslovakia for its rich natural resources in coal and lignite, and for its arms factories and iron and steel works. Czechoslovakia had one of the strongest fundamental economies in Europe by 1930.

As Hitler's demand for Sudetenland became more adamant, the situation became increasingly tense. Hitler was prepared to invade Czechoslovakia and has moved his troops near the Czech borders. The major powers in Europe, Britain and France, decided to intervene and mediate a mutual solution by diplomacy which resulted in a conference being convened in Munich to discuss about the

crisis. Both Britain and France were not willing to go to war over Czechoslovakia. They decided to meet Hitler to try to resolve the crisis. In the ensuing conference held on 29 September 1938 at a hotel in Munich, Great Britain's Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, and French Prime Minister, Édouard Daladier, met Hitler and Italy's Mussolini. Ironically, Czechoslovakia's President Eduard Beneš was not invited to the conference that discussed the future of Czechoslovakia's sovereignty and territorial integrity!

The major powers in the Munich Conference ultimately decided that Sudetenland would be given to Germany. The Munich Agreement was signed on 30 September 1938 by the four major powers present at that conference, Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy.

Hitler was thought to have been appeased, and Chamberlain flew back to London and made his famous speech in which he declared that he had achieved the "peace of our time." Czechoslovakia's fate was sealed by the four external powers and its territories was carved out by the Munich Agreement.

The next sequence of events finally revealed Hitler's real intentions. After having fooled the British and French governments, Hitler then invaded the remaining areas of Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939. He divided Czechoslovakia into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and a separate territorial state of Slovakia.

Hitler did not stop at Czechoslovakia - he later invaded Poland on 1st September 1939 that ultimately led to the start of World War II in Europe. Trump's 'Deal of the Century' appears to have similarities with what had happened during the 1938 Munich Conference - a plan to decide the future fate of Palestine *without* the involvement of Palestine but drafted by other states. The President of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas vehemently rejected the 'Deal'. A large number of states including the US's closest ally, the United Kingdom, have also condemn and/or rejected Trump's 'Deal'.⁴

The lessons from history are important, and Kushner could have done better if he had understood some hard lessons of history while drafting the 'Deal'. He would have learnt about the 1938 Munich Conference and Agreement, the unfair treatment and victimization of Czechoslovakia, and the tragic consequences of allowing an aggressor power to dictate terms.

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¹ Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R69173 / CC-BY-SA 3.0; Licensed by Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 German.

² Chris McGreal, "'Don't talk about history': how Jared Kushner crafted his Middle East 'peace' plan", *The Guardian*, 28 Jan 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/27/jared-kushner-israel-palestine-peace-plan>

³ For details of the 'Deal' see "REVEALED: Trump's 'deal of the century' map for a future Palestine, Israel", *Middle East Eye*, 28 Jan 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/revealed-trumps-deal-century-map-future-palestine-israel>; and Sydney Wise, "The Middle East Reacts to Trump's 'Deal of the Century'", *Cairo Times*, 30 Jan 2020, <https://www.thecaireview.com/tahrir-forum/the-middle-east-reacts-to-trump-deal-of-the-century/>

⁴ Rashed Khalidi, "No deal: why Trump's plan for Palestine will only create more conflict", *The Guardian*, 30 Jan 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/30/no-deal-why-trumps-plan-for-palestine-will-only-create-more-conflict>