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Is the ‘Ghost of Munich’ Still Haunting Us Today?

Oleh

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Today, the 30th of September is the 84th anniversary of the Munich Agreement which continues to be a controversial symbol of the failure of appeasement in world politics. When Russia annexed Crimea with Russian-backed separatists occupying parts of eastern Ukraine such as the Donetsk and Luhansk areas in 2014, there were some claims that Russia should not be accommodated for its actions. The ‘Ghost of Munich’ was [invoked to compare](#) the annexation and occupation of Ukrainian territories with Nazi Germany’s aggressive moves to annex territories that were initially accommodated by European powers which later proved futile and led to the start of World War II. However, the ‘Ghost of Munich’ has been shot down by some as [a wrong analogy](#) to use to explain the Ukrainian conflict in 2014.

Eight years later, Russia [launched a ‘special military operation’](#) to invade and occupy large swathes of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The ‘Ghost of Munich’ has incarnated to haunt us. As of writing, the Russian-Ukraine war continues with significant detrimental global effects.

The ‘Ghost of Munich’ has its origins in the 30 September 1938 Munich Agreement. Adolf Hitler wanted to occupy some of Czechoslovakia’s land in the area bordering Germany, the Sudetenland. The European powers, the United Kingdom and France, were war weary as they had lost a generation of young men in World War I and also were just recovering from the global economic meltdown caused by the 1929 Great Depression.

In an attempt to avoid another European war, they 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.

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).

As Hitler's demand for Sudetenland became more unyielding, the situation became increasingly tense. Hitler was prepared to invade Czechoslovakia and as a signaling move, he deployed his troops near the Czech borders. To prevent hostilities from breaking out, the United Kingdom and France decided to intervene and mediate a mutual solution by diplomacy which resulted in a conference being convened in Munich on 29 September 1938 at a hotel in Munich. The United Kingdom's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier met Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini. Czechoslovakia's President Eduard Beneš was not invited to the conference which discussed the future of Czechoslovakia's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The major powers in the Munich Conference agreed that Sudetenland would be annexed by Germany. The Munich Agreement was signed on 30 September 1938 by the four major powers present at that conference, Germany, France, United Kingdom and Italy. Czechoslovakia's fate was sealed by the four powers and its territories was carved out by the Munich Agreement.

Hitler was thought to have been appeased, and Chamberlain flew back to London and made [his famous speech](#) in which he declared that they had achieved the "peace for our time", avoiding another war in Europe.

The next sequence of events finally revealed Hitler's true intentions. Hitler shortly after, 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.

The lessons from strategic history are important. The Munich Conference is a symbolic event often invoked as the prime example of the danger of appeasement in diplomacy and its failure which yielded future catastrophic events that led to the start of World War II with near-apocalyptic consequences.

The 'Ghost of Munich', epitomized by the unfair treatment of Czechoslovakia and the tragic strategic effects of allowing an aggressor power to dictate unfair terms, appears to continue to haunt us today.

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