

What if...

BRITAIN AND FRANCE HAD NOT DECLARED WAR ON GERMANY?

Could a decision to remain on the sidelines have given Hitler free rein to ravage Europe for the Fatherland?

INTERVIEW WITH



Jonathan Trigg

A former British Army officer, Jonathan has written extensively on the subject of the Second World War, basing his work on in-depth interviews with veterans. A regular expert contributor to all aspects of media, he has been published in over a dozen languages. His most recent book, *The Air War Through German Eyes: How the Luftwaffe Lost the Skies over the Third Reich*, is published by Amberley Publishing.



RIGHT

The signing of the Munich Agreement was a Nazi smokescreen

With the spectre of the horrors of World War I still ingrained in many minds, the prospect of confronting Germany, yet again, was a step too far for many. Inaction would only serve to fuel the Nazi propaganda machine, though, as Hitler embarked on his plans. By once again standing up to the German threat many lives would yet again be sacrificed. By doing nothing those lives would be saved, but it would mean accepting that weakness, breaking of promises, and trust in the words of a fanatical dictator were a reasonable price to pay. And so, with the Nazi war machine able to sweep through Europe unopposed, nowhere and no one would be safe.

What would have happened to domestic politics in Britain and France if they had reneged on their agreement with Poland after the German invasion?

Having famously promised "Peace for our time", after abandoning Czechoslovakia to Hitler at Munich, confidence in Britain's prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, would have plummeted within the UK. However, the anti-war faction in the ruling Conservative Party - led by the foreign secretary, Lord Halifax - would continue to keep him safe in No 10, fearing a repeat of the bloodbath of World War I.

The government of the French prime minister, Édouard Daladier, was already creaking under the weight of internal division in the country, with both communist and neo-fascist extremists battling it out in the streets. However, with the German-Soviet Non-

Aggression Pact holding firm, neither the communists or their erstwhile pro-Nazi opponents would shed a tear for Poland and would continue to shout loudly for the maintenance of peace as long as Hitler's gaze faced east.

With no need to worry about a Franco-British intervention in the West, Germany's victory over Poland would have been even quicker, and its swiftness would have convinced public opinion in Britain and France that any sort of peace with Hitler was better than conflict with a seemingly invincible Nazi war machine.

What boost would it have given Hitler and his regime and what would he have done next?

The swift defeat of Poland - coupled with the fact there was no subsequent declaration of war from Britain and France - would have raised Hitler's own image, along with that of his regime, to unimagined heights both domestically and also on the international stage.

What little internal resistance there was to Hitler within the higher echelons of the German Army would have faded away, and hitherto wavering states in Eastern Europe, such as the Kingdom of Romania, would have been forced to switch their alliance from Britain and France and throw their lot in with the Axis Powers of Germany, Japan and Italy much earlier than they eventually did. Unable to rely on London and Paris, the



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NEWS

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NOT

JOHANNESBURG, SEPTEMBER 3, 1939.

THREEPENCE.

WAR ^ DECLARED ON GERMANY



Britain's Ultimatum
Ignored By Hitler



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THE PAST

1937

COVERT MANOEUVRES

In May, Neville Chamberlain is appointed prime minister of Britain. It is he who heads the policy of appeasement towards Germany. The horrors of WWI were still fresh in the memory of the country and for many, the avoidance of a second conflict was the only option. The views of those who tried to argue that Hitler could not be trusted, such as Winston Churchill, were dismissed as scaremongering. In November of 1938 Hitler called a meeting of the Reich Chancellery in which the policy of 'lebensraum', or expansion of the German state, was adopted as official foreign policy.

1938

NOT WORTH THE PAPER

In a bold move in March, Hitler annexed the federal state of Austria into the German Reich. Despite such an obvious act of expansion, the appeasement of Hitler's regime continued, and in September the Munich Agreement was signed by Britain, France, Germany and Italy. Germany would be allowed to annex the Sudetenland, a German-speaking area of Czechoslovakia, in exchange for peace. Chamberlain returned to Britain, famously waving a piece of paper in his excitement at having confirmed such an important agreement with honour. Later, outside 10 Downing Street, he was to say, "I believe it is peace for our time... go home and get a nice quiet sleep".

1939

THE TRUTH WILL OUT

In January Hitler implements Plan Z, an expansion of the German Navy, despite the agreement with Britain that each limit their naval power. Expansionism continues, with the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia in direct contravention of the Munich Agreement. By March, Britain and France are guaranteeing Polish independence. In April plans begin for the German invasion of Poland; Hitler renounces the Anglo-German Naval agreement and the German-Polish declaration of non-aggression. In July Chamberlain reaffirms support for Poland, but Hitler wants access to the Baltic Sea through the 'Polish Corridor'. He is refused and on 1 September, Germany invades Poland. On 3 September Chamberlain announces Britain is at war with Germany.

Kingdom of Yugoslavia and authoritarian Greece would have had little choice but to join the Axis as well, forming a powerful pro-Nazi coalition that would draw in Turkey, and effectively ring an increasingly worried Moscow with potentially hostile countries.

The awkward peace with Britain and France would mean no naval blockade closing off world markets to German shipping. Also, southeastern Europe's inclusion in the Axis would guarantee Hitler access to vital raw materials such as Romania's oil.

His western flank secure, Hitler would have focused solely on his dream of invading the Soviet Union and destroying communism once and for all. Fascist Italy - with no Mediterranean war to prosecute given the peace with Britain and France - would also look east to build the empire Mussolini craved so desperately.

What may have been the impact on global politics and relationship with the USA?

Globally, the prestige of Britain and France would have suffered enormous damage from the act of abandoning an ally they had so recently and so loudly defended in public. The beleaguered League of Nations would have lost all its remaining credibility, given Britain and France were its most powerful members, as smaller states lost their faith in any sort of rules-based order to protect them against an aggressor. In all likelihood the mass of nation members would leave the League and it would have become moribund as a result.

Across the world states of all stripes would have raced to strengthen their militaries as the only trusted means of national defence, while governments



with expansionist goals would have been hugely emboldened. Border disputes across South America especially would become extremely fractious and a number of local conflicts would flare up with Paraguay, Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru fighting each other for land and resources.

In the United States, Franklin Roosevelt's growing resolution that America would need, at some point, to intervene in the conflict in Europe on the side of the democracies would have received a hammer blow at what his own electorate would view as Franco-British duplicity. Republican isolationists within the Senate in particular would have been empowered to strengthen American non-intervention with additional Neutrality Acts. These would have tied Roosevelt's hands from being able to support Britain and France in the future, and the Lend-Lease Act would not have been passed in 1941. Crucially, this would mean no support to the Soviet Union, even as

BELOW

Britain was hopeful the agreement would maintain the peace

BELOW RIGHT

Appeasement politicians did not want a return to the horrors of The Great War





German panzers rolled towards Moscow, thus depriving the Soviets of over \$175 billion of aid in today's money.

ABOVE
With Britain and France sidelined, Hitler could properly concentrate on Soviet Russia

What would it have meant for Europe and how would Europe have looked?

Leaving Poland to its fate would have irrevocably altered the balance of power in Europe - at the time by far the most powerful continent in the world. Nazi Germany would have cemented its position as Europe's most dominant land power, with national boundaries that would include Austria, Czechoslovakia, and western Poland. All of Eastern Europe would be in its thrall, and an 'iron curtain' would have been drawn across Europe from the Heligoland Bight in the north, south to neutral Switzerland and then on to the Italian Riviera.

Far-right political parties - of which Western Europe had many - would have received a huge political boost, and in the Netherlands, Belgium and Norway would have been elected to government. France, already suffering a national crisis of confidence, would have lost faith in both itself and its British ally, and would conclude a separate treaty with Germany that would effectively bind it as a junior partner, giving Hitler access to its global empire in return for protection of its position in Europe.

What public opinion issues would have needed to be managed in Britain and France?

In Britain, the outrage felt by many at the government's desertion of Poland would have been tempered by a feeling of relief at being kept out of the war, and a sense among sections of the population that what happens in the European continent was none of their business anyway.

Winston Churchill's warnings of future Nazi aggression, and the evils of the regime, would have continued to fall on deaf ears, and as life went on as normal, Chamberlain would recover his popularity. With much of Western Europe sliding into the new Nazi orbit, British public opinion would increasingly turn its face against a conflict, and only the direct threat of a German invasion - which Hitler did not want - would be enough for any government to declare war.

French public opinion would be split once more as the people realised what growing German hegemony meant for them. On the one hand they still possessed a worldwide empire second only to Britain's in size, and thus still felt themselves to be a global power. But they also would begin to understand that their much-cherished goal of reunifying their lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine with the mother country was now impossible, and that they were now very much in Germany's shadow. For a French public used to the idea of 'la gloire' this would be a bitter pill to swallow.

Would there still have been a full-scale war and, if so, at what point, and what would it look like?

If Britain and France had deserted Poland there would still have been a full-scale war, but it would have come later and looked radically different. With much of Western Europe in Hitler's pocket - and Britain refusing to get involved - Hitler would have been free to concentrate all his military might on crushing the Soviet Union. With no Lend-Lease aid and no allies to turn to, Stalin would have been defeated and the Nazis would have created the largest land empire the world had seen since the time of Genghis Khan.

The British Empire and the United States would now realise they faced an existential threat and would form a mutual protection alliance, even as Hitler loudly and publicly declared he was only interested in friendship with two countries he regarded in some ways as role models for global empire.

The flashpoint for general war would shift from Europe to the Pacific. Its ambitions thwarted by the continuing American embargo, Imperial Japan would have launched its attack on the US Navy in Pearl Harbor and then swept south through Britain and France's Southeast Asian colonies and west across the Pacific.

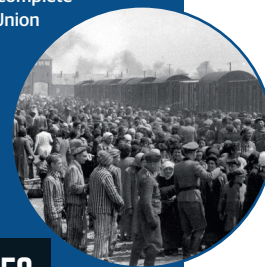
With Stalin beaten but the conquest of the Soviet Union still unfinished, Hitler would - inexplicably - declare war on both Britain and the United States.

THE POSSIBILITY

1939 ONWARDS

WIPED FROM THE MAP

With no resistance to Germany's expansion, Poland, and possibly many other European countries, would cease to have existed as a nation and would be eradicated from subsequent history by the Nazis. The same would happen to the Jews of Europe right across the continent, with Hitler spreading his 'final solution' to his complete overthrow of the Soviet Union and the Slavic peoples, eradicating much of the population of the former Soviet Union, leaving the rest to live as part of the Nazi 'empire' and a cruel and oppressive regime.



1939-1950

MUTUALLY ASSURED DEADLOCK

When war did break out, the full-scale conflict between the Anglo-American allies and the German and Japanese empires would be fought out across the globe to stalemate, with neither side strong enough to finally defeat the other. Because of British and French inaction regarding Hitler's ambition, he was now the master of Europe. The Soviet Union is all but defeated and neutralised, and France and Britain are in no position to support their assets in South Asia, leaving the door open for Japanese occupation, giving them a stronger foothold in the Pacific for their war with the USA.

1945

THE SCIENTIFIC SOLUTION

With a global conflict rumbling on with neither side making a decisive blow, the balance would finally be tipped by America's invention of the atomic bomb. With thousands of lives lost and billions of dollars spent, the only solution would be the deployment of one single weapon that could do the work of thousands of troops and armour. The only way the Nazis and the Japanese empires could be defeated was through the repeated use of the bomb on both Japan and Nazi Germany. The price for peace would be making much of Europe and Japan uninhabitable.



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