



The Specter of Munich: Reconsidering the Lessons of Appeasing Hitler

Jeffrey Record

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No historical event has exerted more influence on America's post-World War II use of military force than the Anglo-French appeasement of Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Informed by the supposed grand lesson of Munich—namely, that capitulating to the demands of aggressive dictatorships invites further aggression and makes inevitable a larger war—American presidents from Harry Truman through George W. Bush have relied on the Munich analogy not only to interpret perceived security threats but also to mobilize public opinion for military action.

In *The Specter of Munich*, noted defense analyst Jeffrey Record takes an unconventional look at a disastrous chapter in Western diplomatic history. After identifying the complex considerations behind the Anglo-French appeasement of Hitler and the reasons for the policy's failure, Record disputes the stock thesis that unchecked aggression always invites further aggression. He proceeds to identify other lessons of the 1930s more relevant to meeting today's U.S. foreign policy and security challenges. Among those lessons are the severe penalties that foreign policy miscalculation can incur, the constraints of public opinion in a modern democracy, and the virtue of consistency in threatening and using force.

The Specter of Munich concludes that though today's global political, military, and economic environment differs considerably from that of the 1930s, the United States is making some of the same strategic mistakes in its war on terrorism that the British and French made in their attempts to protect themselves against Nazi Germany. Not the least of these mistakes is the continued reliance on the specter of Adolf Hitler to interpret today's foreign security threats.

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