

## 1. The Munich Agreement and World War II

**Prelims:** History in News

**Mains:** GS-I- History of the world- events from 18th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, redrawal of National Boundaries, Colonization, Decolonization, Political Philosophies like Communism, Capitalism, Socialism etc. their Forms and effect on the Society.

### Why in News?

- ▶▶ On -September 1, 1939- 80 years ago— German troops marched into Poland, triggering the beginning of World War II, the deadliest military conflict in the history of mankind, involving an estimated 100 million people from 30 countries.
- ▶▶ Great Britain and France, which had assured help to Poland, declared war on Germany and its allies two days later, on September 3. The beginning of the War exposed to the world the folly of the Munich Agreement that was signed less than a year previously — a deal that has been seen as a disastrous act of appeasement of Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime, and historical evidence that expansionist totalitarianism cannot be dealt with through placation.

### The Sudeten Crisis:

- ▶▶ Hitler had threatened to bring war to Europe unless the German-majority areas in the north, south, and west of Czechoslovakia were surrendered to Germany.
- ▶▶ The German-speaking people living in these areas, referred to in German as Sudetenland, had found themselves part of the new country that was created after the German-dominated Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed at the end of World War I in 1918.
- ▶▶ The annexation of Sudetenland, home to over three million Sudeten Germans, was part of Hitler's plan to create a "Greater Germany". Following the Munich Agreement, German troops occupied these areas between October 1 and October 10, 1938.

### The Munich Agreement:

- ▶▶ The Agreement was signed among Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain on September 29-30, 1938. Hitler's appeasement in an attempt to keep the peace in Europe was strongly supported by Great Britain's Prime Minister at the time, Neville Chamberlain.

- ▶▶ After coming back from Munich, Chamberlain waved the piece of paper signed by Hitler and called it a declaration of “peace with honour”. In return for European peace, the Sudetenland region was permitted to be annexed by the Germans.
- ▶▶ Czechoslovakia, the country whose region was about to be annexed, was not officially party to the Agreement. It was forced to agree to the deal under pressure from Great Britain and France, which had a military alliance with the country.
- ▶▶ The Czechoslovak leader Jan Masaryk had famously declared at the time, “We are not ready to accept peace at all costs!” And Prime Minister Jan Syrový, who was forced to accept the Munich Agreement, lamented: “We have been abandoned.”

### What Changed?

- ▶▶ The Agreement, signed after Hitler met Chamberlain and French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier along with Italy’s Prime Minister Benito Mussolini in Munich, allowed for the cessation to Germany of Sudetenland. The German occupation was to be done in four stages from October 1-10, 1938.
- ▶▶ The cessation in some places was subject to a plebiscite. The Czechoslovak government was supposed to release from their military and police forces within four weeks of the signing of the Agreement, any Sudeten Germans who wished to be released, and all Sudeten German prisoners. Six months after the Munich Agreement was signed, Hitler went back on his commitments and invaded the whole of Czechoslovakia. War was on its way.

