

Introduction

On September 27, 1937, just before leaving his post in Berlin for Vienna, the highly regarded journalist William I. Shirer noted with alarm that “there is little understanding of the Third Reich, what it is, what it is up to, where it is going either at home or elsewhere abroad.” Shirer granted that the situation in Germany was “complex” and “confusing,” but in his view the thrust of Hitler’s policies could not be doubted. In *Mein Kampf*, published in two parts in 1925 and 1926, Hitler had “vowed . . . to seek world domination,” but not many people in Germany or abroad at all familiar with his ideas took him at his word. Part of the problem was that four years after the Nazi assumption of power there still was “no decent translation” of the work in English or French, which Shirer attributed to Hitler’s refusal to permit an accurate rendering of the text because “it would shock many in the West.” Neville Chamberlain, a leading figure in the British government who became prime minister in May 1937, about ten months before Germany launched its expansionist program by annexing Austria, had not read *Mein Kampf* and seemed unaware of Hitler’s declaration that “Germany will either be a world power, or there will be no Germany.” As a result, Chamberlain never understood that Hitler was moved as much by emotion as by rational calculation. Such ignorance of the German leader’s intentions and temperament was dangerous, Shirer warned, because the country “is stronger than her enemies realize.”²¹

Even statesmen with extensive experience in foreign affairs misunderstood National Socialism and failed to grasp that Hitler posed a menace to world order. Among them, David Lloyd George was the most prominent; for many years a leading member of Parliament devoted to progressive so-

cial and political causes, he had served as prime minister from 1916 to 1922. He was known as a friend of Jews, and during World War I he formed a close friendship with Chaim Weizmann, a leading Zionist and lecturer in chemistry at the University of Manchester. In 1917, Lloyd George strongly supported the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, which advocated the “establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” Yet after he returned in September 1936 from a short visit to Germany during which he met Hitler, he published an article in the *Daily Press* of November 17, 1936, in which he showered praise on the Führer and his New Order. To be sure, Lloyd George acknowledged that Hitler’s methods were “certainly not those of a parliamentary country,” but it could not be denied that he and his movement had “made a new Germany.” The country was now “full of hope and confidence,” the “people are more cheerful,” and all this was attributable to Hitler’s “magnetic, dynamic personality.” The man had accomplished nothing less than a “miracle.” Lloyd George also assured his readers that “The idea of a Germany intimidating Europe with a threat that its irresistible army might march across frontiers forms no part of the new vision. . . . The Germans will resist to the death every invader of their own country, but they have no longer the desire themselves to invade any other country.” Hitler knew from “personal experience” that war caused dreadful suffering, and hence “The establishment of a German hegemony in Europe which was the aim and dream of the old pre-war militarism, is not even on the horizon of Nazism.”²²

On the other hand, the British journalist Norman Ebbutt, who had spent many years in Germany and was well acquainted with leading officials in the country, including Heinrich Brüning, the chancellor from 1930 to 1932, shared Shirer’s concern about Europe’s future. On April 21, 1933, he sent a letter to the editor of the *Times of London* warning people in the West not to be misled by Hitler’s promise in his speeches to pursue a peaceful foreign policy. The “underlying spirit” of the “new Germany” is “[not] a peaceful one. Germany is inspired by the determination to recover all it has lost and has little hope of doing so by peaceful means. Influential Germans do not see ten years elapsing before the war they regard as natural or inevitable breaks out in Europe. One may hear five or six years mentioned.”²³ Ebbutt’s warnings did not reach many people. The letter cited here was published, but the editors of the London *Times*, who favored appeasement, did not print many of Ebbutt’s other reports from Germany critical of Nazism.

Within the British political class, Winston S. Churchill stood out as the most prominent, perceptive, and persistent Cassandra regarding Nazism.

As early as October 1930, he told Otto Christian Archibald, Prince von Bismarck, a diplomat serving in London, that he had carefully read press reports on political developments in Germany and had concluded that, if Hitler or his followers came to power, they “would seize the first available opportunity to resort to force.”⁴ Two years later, he argued against proposals for “rapid and comprehensive disarmament” by Britain and other European powers. Sir John Simon, the British foreign minister, believed that this was the only way to avoid war. Churchill, however, warned that “approximation in military strength between Germany and France” would inevitably lead to military conflict. France, with a population only two-thirds the size of Germany’s, would be an easy target for its neighbor in central Europe.⁵

And after Hitler assumed power, Churchill delivered a steady stream of well-crafted speeches and published numerous articles urging the British government to rearm and take a strong stand against Hitler’s aggressive moves. Invariably penetrating, they all touched on a theme he formulated with special trenchancy on November 5, 1936, in response to a government report on the impossibility of building capital ships that could survive attacks from the air: “There is no greater mistake than to suppose that platitudes, smooth words, and timid policies offer a path to safety. Only by a firm adherence to righteous principles sustained by all the necessary ‘instrumentalities,’ to use a famous American expression, can the dangers which close so steadily upon us and upon the peace of Europe be warded off and overcome.”⁶

Churchill’s oratory and premonitions were stirring, but for six years he exerted little influence in Parliament, most of whose members put a premium on keeping Britain out of conflict. Moreover, Churchill was a backbencher; although his colleagues in the Conservative Party and even a fair number of Labourites recognized him as brilliant and a masterful orator, they did not trust his political judgment. Many members of Parliament could not forgive him for having opposed the grant of limited government to India. Nor did his occasional outbursts of vitriolic oratory endear him to his colleagues in the legislature. During one debate, he referred to the “alarming and nauseating” sight of Mohandas Gandhi “striding half-naked up the steps of the Vice-regal palace to parlay on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor.”⁷

Churchill’s opposition in 1936 to the abdication of King Edward VII further isolated him politically. The king’s popularity had plunged because he planned to marry a woman who had been twice divorced; neither the

Church of England nor the British public sanctioned such a union. Despite these missteps, on the key issue of the dangers posed by Nazism, Churchill was prophetic. But he was a sullied prophet, and hence his appeal to his countrymen was limited.

Three years after World War II ended, an eminent historian, Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, advanced an argument similar to Shirer's in seeking to account for the failed foreign policies of Great Britain and France in the 1930s. In his scathing criticism of the strategies of the statesmen concerned for having appeased Hitler, Wheeler-Bennett contended that from 1933 to 1939 "all schools of thought in Britain and France" demonstrated a "fundamental ignorance of the German character and a complete inability to comprehend the lengths of evil, dishonesty and deception to which the Nazi mentality could extend. . . . The capacity of the Germans for sheep-like conformity to leadership was not appreciated, nor the fact realized that this new political phenomenon combined all the guile of the old pre-war duplicity of Prussian diplomacy with a new and ruthless deceit of unplumbed depths."⁸

The annoyance of Shirer, Ebbutt, and Wheeler-Bennett with the policymakers of the 1930s and their frustration with the political elite's poor grasp of world affairs are understandable. They wrote at a time when the struggle against Nazism was either unresolved or still fresh in the public consciousness. Newspapers and news magazines carried numerous articles on the Nazi transformation of Germany, but these rarely delved deeply into Hitler's ideology or personality, both critical for understanding the Führer's political success. Moreover, many of the reports by diplomats who had served in Germany were still classified; the information passed on to political leaders was not widely known in the 1930s.

Now that those reports are available, they reveal that the governments in London, Paris, and Washington were well served by their representatives in Germany. Well educated and often fluent in German, the diplomats of the three countries were also diligent; they traveled throughout the country, retained contact with individuals who had been prominent in various political parties, talked frequently with ordinary citizens, and on occasion even discussed public affairs with fairly senior members of the Nazi Party. In the five-year period from 1928 to 1933, the British embassy in Berlin sent the Foreign Office in London no fewer than four hundred reports and telegrams, as well as annual summaries of the staff's findings. The summary for 1932 was especially detailed, running to 718 paragraphs.⁹ After Hitler's rise to power, the reports increased in length and number. In addition, the various ambassadors maintained a lively correspondence with officials and

friends, in which they frequently touched on political developments in Germany. The French and American embassies in Berlin were no less productive. Moreover, the consulates of the three countries in the major cities of Germany sent extensive reports on local conditions, which in most cases buttressed and deepened the analyses produced in Berlin.

Taken as a whole, the reports and missives drafted by the diplomats of the three leading democracies provided the authorities in London, Paris, and Washington with information and assessments that amounted to an accurate and comprehensive picture of the state of affairs in Germany. The diplomats were not always on the mark in estimating how Nazism would evolve, they occasionally misjudged Hitler's intentions, and at times they were inconsistent in their recommendations on how to respond to Germany's domestic and foreign policies. It could hardly have been otherwise. Hitler and his cohorts created a political movement that was in many ways unprecedented in central Europe, causing much confusion among sophisticated observers of political developments in Germany. It was not uncommon for statesmen to be suspected of deviousness and callousness, but the deceptiveness and ruthlessness of the Nazis reached levels that few thought possible in the twentieth century, and certainly not in a country as enlightened and advanced as Germany.

Most Western diplomats rather quickly overcame their initial bewilderment over the character of Germany's new leadership. Within weeks of the Nazi ascent to power in 1933, they reported on the ways the Nazis were consolidating their position and transforming German society in so much detail and so graphically that senior officials in the three countries had no reason to claim, as they often did, that one could not be sure about the overall policy direction that Hitler was taking or even about the specific policies that his government was implementing. Nevertheless, in the weeks and months immediately after the Nazi accession to power, when the suppression of the opposition and the persecution of Jews proceeded apace, numerous statesmen in the three largest democracies expressed doubts about the durability of these harsh measures. These political leaders were at a loss in trying to make sense of the new regime. In 1934 and 1935, Stanley Baldwin, the British prime minister, described his own puzzlement: "no one knows what the new Germany means—whether she means peace or war."¹⁰ Baldwin was echoing the mood of uncertainty expressed most forcefully by Sir Maurice Hankey, the secretary of the cabinet, in October 1933: "Are we dealing with the Hitler of *Mein Kampf*, lulling his opponents to sleep with fair words in order to gain time to arm his people? . . . Or is it a

new Hitler who has discovered the burden of responsible office, and wants to extricate himself, like many an earlier tyrant, from the commitments of his irresponsible days? That is the riddle that has to be solved.¹¹

Even years after World War II, Gordon Wright, an insightful historian of modern France, expressed sympathy for statesmen who failed to adopt a firm policy regarding Nazi Germany. In 1960, he wrote that he found it “easy to see how risky and almost irresponsible” it must have “seemed to many” in 1936 to implement a hard line because “clear proof of Hitler’s aims was not then available.”¹²

The officials as well as large segments of the political class who spoke of Hitler as a riddle were obviously confused by his penchant for contradictory pronouncements. He often vowed to undermine the Treaty of Versailles, whose severe restrictions prevented Germany from regaining its pre-1914 status as a world power, but he almost as frequently declared his opposition to “violence of any kind.” He invariably told foreign dignitaries that all problems between nations should be “solved in a reasonable and peaceful manner.”¹³ In making these comments, Hitler tried to portray himself as a traditional statesman whose only concern was to restore Germany to its rightful place among the nations of the world. It was a deliberate deception that many in the West failed to perceive. On February 3, 1933, the editors of the London *Times*, generally regarded as one of the most sophisticated newspapers in the world, referred to him as a “moderate and decent person.” In addition, the editors wrote, “No one doubts Hitler’s sincerity. That nearly twelve million Germans voted for him blindly says much for his personal magnetism. . . . But nothing is known so far of his capacity for solid administration and for co-operation with allies or colleagues, which are the real tests for a ruler. And until he proves himself to possess these qualities, it is sheer waste of time to speculate about the future of Germany.”¹⁴

Today, after the horrors of Nazism and World War II, it is difficult to fathom the widespread misunderstanding of Hitler and his movement. But it is much less difficult if we keep in mind the powerful urge to avoid conflict fifteen years after the frightful bloodletting of World War I. Memories of that war were still fresh in the minds of many people in all the belligerents. In some circles, there were also strong feelings of guilt over the imposition of what they considered a harsh and unjust peace treaty on Germany. Even in 1940, months after World War II had begun, Evelyn Wrench, a well-known writer on international affairs and the former editor of *The Spectator*, asserted that “Nazism was the inevitable reaction of the German people to the errors of Versailles.”¹⁵

But there were other reasons for the widespread failure of people in the West to detect the dangers of Nazism. Many among the politically engaged viewed the Führer through ideological blinkers. People on the far left tended to dismiss him as a charlatan, a tool of the capitalists who would be discarded with the collapse of capitalism, which they insisted was imminent. Those on the right tended to believe that Hitler could be controlled by the conservatives in his government, who would soon regain their political preeminence.¹⁶ Many conservatives also viewed the Nazis as an effective counterpoise to Communism.

The diplomats in Germany representing Great Britain, France, and the United States quickly understood the shallowness of these positions. They realized early on that Hitler was a masterful, cunning, and dishonest propagandist, and they insisted that to understand the real thrust of Hitler's policies one would have to do much more than examine his many pronouncements and the decrees he had issued during the first months of his tenure as chancellor. Hitler must also be assessed as a leader: Was he trustworthy? Was he judicious? What was the relationship between his stated goals and his actual aims? In short, the foreign diplomats sought to assess Hitler's character in the broadest possible context.

In this book, special attention is paid to the diplomats' descriptions and assessments of Hitler's personal traits, although his policies and beliefs are by no means given short shrift. After all, by 1933, if not before, he was undoubtedly the preeminent figure in the Nazi Party. Indeed, he had become a cult figure whose judgments and policies were declared by party leaders to be sacrosanct. True, some senior officials were known to differ with him on certain issues and some were even rumored to have challenged his authority, but within a year and a half of his assumption of power Hitler had clearly crushed his potential rivals. His subsequent foreign policy successes, such as the occupation of the Rhineland in 1936 and the annexation of Austria in 1938, further strengthened his personal control. No major political initiatives could be undertaken in Germany without his approval, and much of the time he himself had suggested them. For statesmen who had to respond to his unexpected moves in foreign affairs, a correct evaluation of his state of mind was therefore essential.

Unlike Stalin, Hitler was not a reclusive leader. On the contrary, he enjoyed meeting foreign diplomats and dignitaries, in part because he had confidence in his powers of persuasion, but also because he relished putting on a show for foreigners, whom he generally considered his intellectual inferiors. Whatever the reason, he often met with dignitaries. He had at least

twelve such encounters with prominent Britons, including several leading appeasers (Lord Halifax, Nevile Henderson, Lord Londonderry, and Lord Lothian), and with Mackenzie King of Canada.* The latter meetings are interesting not so much for the light they shed on policy issues as for the political insights of the appeasers. The appeasers objected to any firm measures to rein in Hitler, and yet their comments about him were often distinctly unflattering, sometimes not very different from those of diplomats who despised the dictator and urged condemnation of his repressive policies within Germany as well as strong measures to resist his foreign policy moves. Unintentionally, the appeasers occasionally provided information about Nazi leaders that tended to buttress the judgments of their opponents.

I should note here that in the section on British assessments of Nazism I have taken the liberty of defining *diplomat* more broadly than is common. I include in this category several influential “private envoys” who traveled to Germany to meet Hitler and some of his leading subordinates in order to evaluate for themselves the state of affairs in the country. Most of these private envoys did not trust the reports emanating from Berlin and other German cities, and as soon as they returned to Britain they drafted long accounts of their impressions, which they often sent directly to Prime Minister Chamberlain and occasionally to other highly placed officials, so that in a sense they did the work of diplomats. They invariably belonged to the school of appeasement, and their activities are a significant part of the story presented in this book.

The French ambassador, André François-Poncet, saw Hitler more often than any other foreign diplomat, and his reactions to the Führer are both fascinating and puzzling. François-Poncet voiced many sharp and incisive criticisms of Nazi policies and of the dictator. He was especially forceful in pointing out that Hitler was not simply a political leader but a cult figure who commanded the unquestioning devotion of millions of Germans. Yet at times he was surprisingly reticent about Hitler’s personality and views. Until 1937, François-Poncet was also one of the most persistent advocates among the Western diplomats of attempts to reach agreements with Hitler.

*I do not discuss the views of outright supporters or advocates of Nazism such as Lord Rothermere and Oswald Mosley because their views had little resonance in senior circles of the British government. Nor do I include detailed considerations of the assessments of people who were ardent pacifists (such as George Lansbury) because they, too, did not seriously influence senior government officials. I include a brief discussion of King’s position because he had contact with Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. On Lansbury, see also below, p. 202.

Even now, after all his official papers have been made public, he is something of an enigma.

American diplomats saw Hitler much less frequently than their English and French colleagues, in large part because William E. Dodd, ambassador from 1933 to 1938, could not bear to be in his presence. Nevertheless, their reports, based on wide reading of the German press and discussions with German citizens from all strata of the population, contain valuable information on the domestic scene in Germany and show an acute understanding of Hitler's conduct of affairs.

Various scholars have challenged the usefulness of the judgments of the diplomats who reported from Germany during the Hitler period. Their principal criticism has been that the dispatches from Germany were not consistent; even those diplomats who early on recognized the dangers of Hitler's foreign policy often hedged their dire predictions of the likely consequences of Nazi behavior. To be sure, the most obdurate critics of Hitler occasionally conceded that they might be wrong in predicting disaster for Europe. The Führer might turn out to be more reasonable and pragmatic than his pronouncements suggested. The leadership of the Nazi Party, the diplomats frequently noted, was divided on major issues, and it was not clear which faction would ultimately prevail. Also, it seemed possible that the German people would not tolerate the extremist policies proposed by the Nazis and would take it upon themselves to overturn the government. These inconsistencies, in the view of some scholars, gave license for statesmen, especially in London and Paris, to adopt a hands-off approach toward Nazi Germany.¹⁷

The argument is not convincing. Diplomats are trained to be cautious and to express their conclusions undogmatically, and thus to allow for the possibility that their assessments may be faulty. Diplomats in Nazi Germany must have been especially prone to this approach, for they were required to describe and analyze totally unexpected and unprecedented events. In the decades before the Nazis' rise to power, no one thought that Germany, in many respects the most cultivated country in Europe, would be turned into one of the most ruthless dictatorships in history. If the diplomats occasionally faltered in their analyses and forecasts, it was up to their superiors in government to read their dispatches and draw their own conclusions. Although the reports of senior diplomats in Germany during the 1930s were not always consistent, a careful reading of them all indicates quite clearly the direction of their thinking. The diplomats who believed that Nazism was evil and dangerous and should be resisted made this point frequently

and forcefully, despite also making occasional concessions to the arguments of those who disagreed with them. Similarly, the appeasers leave no doubt in the reader's mind about the thrust of their arguments, even though they granted that Hitler was not committed to democratic and humane values.

In any case, the primary task of diplomats serving abroad is not to formulate national policy, although they are expected to make recommendations. Their main function is to report as fully as possible on conditions in the countries to which they are assigned, and those who represented the leading Western powers in Germany in the 1930s performed that task remarkably well. They touched on every conceivable aspect of Nazi rule: the ideology of Hitlerism, the primacy attached to racial doctrine, the persecution of political opponents and Jews, the economic policies of the rulers, the Nazis' conflict with the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the reorganization of the country's educational system, the stress on rearmament, and the regime's long-range aims in foreign affairs. Much of the information on the rapid and illegal enlargement of Germany's military forces came from intelligence officers attached to the embassies, and it corroborated the data collected by other intelligence agents. Peter Jackson, a historian of French intelligence, concluded in 1998: "A look at the archival record reveals that French soldiers and statesmen were better informed about the danger of the Nazi menace than has hitherto been assumed."¹⁸ This statement parallels my own findings about the reports of diplomats. Government officials in London, Paris, and Washington had ample information to guide them in devising policies with respect to Germany, but invariably that was not the decisive factor for them. Ideological preconceptions, domestic considerations, and plain poor judgment proved to be more crucial than all of the informative and at times erudite dispatches drafted by conscientious diplomats in Germany.

There are several reasons for my focus on Great Britain, France, and the United States. They were all democracies whose leaders could be expected to be appalled by the destruction of constitutionalism in Germany; and militarily they were the only ones in a position to rein in Hitler. Moreover, they had all fought against Germany in World War I and therefore had a special stake in trying to prevent a recurrence of military conflict. These considerations were not lost on "many" people in Germany who, even as late as December 1938, pinned their "faith" on the "democracies, particularly England, and hope[d] that British rearmament will be carried out with sufficient speed and determination, if not to upset Hitler, at least to deter him from the most dangerous excesses."

But George Ogilvie-Forbes, the British counselor and chargé d'affaires in Berlin, who wrote those words in a report to the foreign minister, Lord Halifax, added that those who hoped that the democracies would act decisively did so "without much conviction."¹⁹

I begin my study with Great Britain because it was still the predominant world power and most people who followed international affairs—particularly in France—believed that only Britain could take the lead in restraining Nazi Germany. The British political class was clearly aware of this, and their representatives abroad produced an especially large quantity of thoughtful commentary on Nazism. But the French and American diplomats did not lag far behind.

I turn next to a consideration of the French diplomats, whose country had suffered the most during World War I and who therefore had reason to be especially fearful of a Germany bent on expansion. Not surprisingly, the French government appointed as its ambassador to Berlin a man well versed in German culture and politics. François-Poncet was also a man of extraordinary energy and strong opinions, and his dispatches received far more attention in Paris than those of the French consuls in local areas of Germany. More than any other ambassador from major countries, he regularly provided his government with specific recommendations on how to deal with the Nazi regime. He saw himself not simply as an analyst of events but as a formulator and advocate of policies. The section on France is therefore devoted largely to his reports.

Finally, I turn to the American diplomats, whose task was in some ways the most challenging. The United States shared the democratic values of Great Britain and France, but it did not seem to have the same national interests as the other two. The American people widely believed that their country, far removed from Europe and therefore unaffected by developments there, should remain aloof from the unending squabbles of the Continent. In the end, of course, aloofness proved to be impossible, buttressing the argument of the few American political leaders who urged greater involvement in European affairs even in the 1920s and 1930s.

Inevitably, there is overlap in the dispatches of the three foreign contingents. After all, they were reacting to the same events, the Nazi ascent to power and Hitler's transformation of Germany from a democracy to a dictatorship that vested unprecedented power in the hands of the political leadership. I have tried to minimize repetition by focusing wherever possible on the unique character of the reporting of each group of diplomats. Thus, on the Nazi murder on June 30, 1934, of dozens of people suspected

of planning to challenge Hitler's authority, I devote more space to the French reporting than to that of the other foreign diplomats because François-Poncet, for reasons that will become evident, dealt with this subject more extensively than his colleagues. I discuss in each section of this study the Nazi campaign against the Jews because it demonstrated early on the barbarism of Hitler's regime. The diplomats of all three countries deplored the persecution of the Jews, but the British and even more so the American officials followed the subject with special care and devoted many dispatches to detailed descriptions of the pain inflicted on that minority. The different emphases on this issue can no doubt be attributed in part to the size and political influence of the Jewish communities in the three countries. On the persistent conflict between the Nazi regime and the Evangelical and Catholic Churches, I have discussed only the reports of the Americans because their dispatches struck me as the most systematic. However, readers should note that all three embassies treated this important subject in considerable detail.

Despite the different emphases of the three groups of diplomats in their assessments of Nazism, it should not be assumed that their approaches contradicted each other in any fundamental way prior to 1937, when the British ambassador swung sharply toward appeasement of Germany. On the contrary, they complemented one another; each group provided as trenchant a picture of National Socialism as one could expect from firsthand accounts. The British tended to focus on the ideology of Nazism and the personality of Hitler. The French stressed specific events, such as the murder of prominent Nazis and conservatives in June 1934 and the steady buildup of Germany's military power, understandably viewed as a serious threat to France, which had been subjected in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to three invasions from central Europe. Finally, the Americans devoted many of their assessments to the emergence in Germany of a new form of government, which they characterized as "total" or "totalitarian." Officials from the three democracies often shared information, giving them further insights into the nature of National Socialism. The fact that the diplomats of all three Western countries touched on the same issues demonstrates the degree to which they agreed on the essentials of Nazism. They recognized that their nations faced not only a military threat but also a challenge to their most basic social, political, and moral values.

Although the sources for this study are mainly diplomatic dispatches and other writings by diplomats, this is not a work of diplomatic history of the 1930s in the traditional sense, a subject that has been covered very well

by several distinguished historians.²⁰ Nor have I attempted to write a comprehensive history of National Socialism in power or even a full account of the events that I touch upon. At various points in the book, I consider specific diplomatic negotiations or domestic developments, but I do so only to clarify certain issues. My study is essentially one of perceptions. My aim is to elucidate how the diplomats of the three most important democracies who were stationed in Germany in the 1930s understood the new political and social order that was being established by Hitler and his followers. Did the emissaries convey an accurate picture to their superiors in London, Paris, and Washington of what they observed in Germany? Did they offer a sound and convincing answer to the question that lies at the heart of this study: Was Hitler a riddle, as so many prominent people in the 1930s believed? And if they did provide such an answer, how can we explain the failure of the three governments to take appropriate measures to stem the aggressiveness of Nazism? It is a question that still haunts historians.