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Leo Amery's Imperialist Alternative to Appeasement in the 1930s

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Abstract

Leo Amery has long been seen as one of the leading figures in the anti-appeasement movement. However, key aspects of his case against government foreign policy are not addressed in previous work. This article considers Amery's reputation pointing out that it is problematic to characterize him as an 'antiappeaser' because he did not rule out concessions to Germany and was willing to see Germany dominate Central Europe. However, he differed from the government in advocating a Danubian economic bloc to create stability and satisfy some German desires. This flowed from Amery's imperialism and his economic nationalism. Meanwhile, he fervently opposed colonial concessions, believing that German grievances could only be satisfied in Europe. Considering whether Amery was an 'anti-appeaser' or a 'real appeaser', the article analyses Amery's doubts over whether to support Neville Chamberlain over the Munich agreement. It concludes that although Amery disagreed with Chamberlain more on tactics than strategy, these alternative tactics were significantly different from government policy. As such, aspects of the anti-appeasement case should be seen as being more nuanced than previously recognized, and the imperialist dimension of it should be understood.

Introduction

In the extensive literature on British foreign policy in the 1930s, the so-called 'anti-appeasers' loom large. Exploring their views on what alternative might have been pursued is crucial because criticisms of Neville Chamberlain start from the perspective that he 'made choices among alternative possibilities' and 'rejected effective deterrence'.[1]

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[1] R. A. C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War (London, 1993), 345–7. See also Greg Kennedy, '"Rat in Power": Neville Chamberlain and the Creation of British Foreign Policy, 1931–39', in T. G. Otte (ed.), The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher (London, 2002), 173–95. For an alternative view, see, John Charmley, Chamberlain and the Lost Peace (London, 1989).

Countless books have covered Churchill's case, most recently that by Alastair Parker;[2] different Conservative responses to appeasement have been analysed by Neville Thompson, Nick Crowson and Graham Stewart;[3] the opposition parties and at least one senior civil servant are also well served.[4] Flowing from this body of literature is a view of the anti-appeasers which is much more nuanced than was once the case. There are now three issues around which debates on anti-appeasement are broadly agreed. First, the definition of what constituted an 'anti-appeaser' is recognized as being open to question. There were blurred lines between those supporting and opposing government policies, based upon the need to balance career prospects, principles and policies in making decisions on how to act. Second, the phrase 'alliance diplomacy' can be used to describe the alternatives put forward by most anti-appeasers. This term is used in the title of Michael L. Roi's study of Robert Vansittart, the permanent under-secretary of state at the Foreign Office from 1930 to 1937. Yet, the idea that Britain should use diplomacy to build alliances against Hitler was also at the core of most Conservative alternatives to the appeasement. Third, notwithstanding that, there were significant divisions within the ranks of so-called anti-appeasers. That label can stretch all the way from those such as Archibald Sinclair, the Liberal leader, who believed that colonial concessions would be a useful way of removing legitimate grievances, to those such as Winston Churchill, who were utterly against such measures.

Yet, despite the extensive literature on the Parliamentary events relating to appeasement, the precise nature of the alternative put forward by one of the leading anti-appeasers, Leo Amery, has been surprisingly neglected. Amery has regularly been described as one of the most consistent opponents of appeasement, and although some writers have challenged this view, they have only scratched the surface of his so-called 'alternative'. Yet, Amery's approach was quite distinct from other leading anti-appeasers such as Winston Churchill and Archibald Sinclair. His strategy was based on withdrawal from many aspects of European diplomacy. He also rejected the League of Nations

[2] R. A. C. Parker, Churchill and Appeasement (London, 2000).
[3] Neville Thompson, The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s (Oxford, 1971); N. J. Crowson, Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935–1940 (London, 1997); Graham Stewart, Burying Caesar: Churchill, Chamberlain and the Battle for the Tory Party (London, 1998).
[4] Michael L. Roi, Alternative to Appeasement: Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934–1937 (Westport, Conecticut, 1997); Richard S. Grayson, Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement: The Liberal Party 1919–39 (London, 2001); Sabine Wichert, 'The British Left and Appeasement: Political Tactics or Alternative Policies?', in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker (eds), The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement (London, 1983), 125–41.

and disarmament which both carried significant cross-party support. Instead, Amery believed that Britain should develop the economic and military unity of the Empire. However, Amery was not a simple isolationist where Europe was concerned, and set out an alternative policy for creating stability in Europe. As an economic nationalist he believed that future stability and prosperity rested in building national economic blocs. As such, he was at his most distinctive as an 'anti-appeaser' in believing that the economic cooperation he wanted to develop within the British Empire could be applied to continental Europe. Moreover, he was not a marginal figure, attracting support from a wide range of Conservative MPs on foreign policy issues throughout the 1930s.[5]

This should make Amery a key figure in studies of the anti-appeasers, and he does feature prominently as a participant in Parliamentary debates and behind-the-scenes machinations, not least because his own diaries provide valuable insights into events. However, analysis of Amery's alternative policy is almost entirely missing from the historiography, not only from general studies.[6] Parker makes one brief mention of Amery in his treatment of alternatives to appeasement, while Crowson, although thoroughly and impressively covering Amery's role in Parliament (especially on national service and Anglo-Italian relations), does not consider the economic bloc policy. Only Neville Thompson does that and then in just two paragraphs. Nor does previous work specifically on Amery draw out these points. Amery's diaries only tackle his alternative policy obliquely, with the case made more thoroughly in his letters. Thus, the Barnes and Nicholson introduction to the second volume of the diaries deals with Amery's support for economic blocs in seven lines, while his doubts at the time of the Munich crisis are ignored. Only Amery's disagreements with the government over colonial concessions to Germany are thoroughly analysed.[7] Meanwhile, Roger Louis' study of Amery focuses on Amery's relationship with Churchill. In so doing it makes important points about Amery's case, but his economic bloc policy is not mentioned.[8]

If the diversity of the anti-appeasement case is to be understood fully, Amery's case deserves analysis. This article asks how far Amery's strategy was different from government policy, and whether any differences were tactical rather than strategic. In that context,

[5] See below, 22–5.
[6] See, for example, Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler (Cambridge, 1975), 120–2 and 224–8.
[7] Amery Diaries, II, 341, 346 and 489.
[8] W. Roger Louis, In the Name of God Go! Leo Amery and the British Empire in the Age of Churchill (New York, 1992).

Amery's support for Japan in Manchuria and Italy in Abyssinia are particularly important. Set alongside Amery's belief that timing was the major problem with Chamberlain's concessions to Hitler in the Munich Agreement, this suggests problems with previous presentations of Amery as an opponent of appeasement. However, the article concludes that some of Amery's strategic proposals, and his tactical differences with Chamberlain, meant that he was articulating a vision that was significantly different from the set of policies labelled 'appeasement'.

Amery's Reputation

Amery's reputation relating to appeasement is mixed. A.L. Rowse summed up how contemporaries tended to describe Amery after 1940 when he wrote that Amery was 'consistently opposed to appeasement'.[9] Yet, one of the most important studies of Conservative anti-appeasers, by Neville Thompson, concludes that 'Apart from imperial matters … Amery was no particular foe of the Government until Hitler's seizure of Austria in March 1938.'[10] Even after that point, Thompson argues, Amery advocated his 'own form of appeasement' and 'had no objection to appeasing Germany at the expense of Central and Eastern Europe though he deplored the means by which Hitler acquired those areas'.[11] W.R. Louis takes a similar approach in his study of Amery, arguing that during the Munich crisis, 'Amery's mind still balanced the opposing principles of anti-appeasement and pro-appeasement'[12]
How can this difference between contemporary views and those of historians be explained? Amery's reputation as an anti-appeaser can be linked to two episodes. First, Amery's actions in May 1940, when he led the charge in Parliament against Neville Chamberlain's handling of the war effort, have left the impression that he was against Neville Chamberlain on all issues. Amery's criticisms of the government in 1940, when he undoubtedly tapped the mood of Parliament, can be telescoped back into the 1930s, to give him Churchillian status. In so far as there has been a public perception of Amery's position in the 1930s, his role in 1940 is likely to have had an impact on it. Second, this built upon the impression created by Amery's abstention in the vote on the Munich agreement, along with figures such as Churchill, Eden and Duff Cooper. That marked out Amery as an opponent of the government's foreign policy, even if he did not actually vote against it.

[9] A. L. Rowse, All Souls and appeasement (London, 1961), 1.
[10] Thompson, The Anti-Appeasers, 26.
[11] Thompson, The Anti-Appeasers,. 33 and 34.
[12] Louis, 117.

Yet, the evidence for Amery's pro-appeasement credentials is rather more extensive. It begins with his support for Japan's territorial claims in Manchuria, and Italy's claims in Abyssinia. As regards Germany, Amery was clear for much of 1938 that he had no objection in principle to concessions to Hitler in Europe—so long as the timing did not make Hitler think that threats of force were productive. In other words, Amery can be presented as differing from Neville Chamberlain on tactics rather than strategy. Then, during the Munich debate, Amery noted privately that he had considered supporting the government line on the basis of Neville Chamberlain's performance in Parliament. Some of this has only become apparent to historians as archives have slowly opened, and can point historians to conclusions different from those reached by contemporaries.

Such revisions of Amery's reputation as an anti-appeaser have significant implications for our understanding of appeasement's dominance of the policy agenda. If they are the final word, then we are left with a picture of one of the senior anti-appeasers being, in fact, an appeaser in all but name, differing on tactics but not overall strategy. However, this article argues that there should be more nuanced verdicts on Amery's foreign policy views in the 1930s, and on the nature of the anti-appeasement case. It does this for two main reasons. First, none of the studies of Amery's approach to foreign policy has given any serious attention to his widely articulated long-term alternative. That is understandable because to some extent, the detailed thought that Amery gave to this subject has only become apparent with the opening of his private papers in January 2005. These have been available privately to researchers for several decades, but it is only now that they have been professionally catalogued that their full scope has emerged. They provide details of an alternative that involved developing the military and economic bonds of the British Empire, alongside the development of economic blocs in Europe to create stability on the Continent. This was a key aspect of Amery's thought that has not been appreciated. Second, the article argues that Amery's approach represented a viable alternative to appeasement precisely because of its closeness to the policy followed by Neville Chamberlain. Amery was not putting forward something that was unacceptable to Conservatives—in the way that the Liberal alternative was.[13] Based on a similar strategy to Neville Chamberlain's, Amery's policy could comfortably have been implemented by Conservative politicians. Even just adopting alternative tactics—economic appeasement and rejecting

13 Grayson, Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement.

concessions which were accompanied by threats of force—would have resulted in different actions, and potentially, different outcomes.

Amery's Strategic Thinking

Amery's approach to appeasement should be placed in the context of his strategic thinking as a whole. This had four dimensions: rejection of a role in European diplomacy; development of naval strength; development of the Empire and good diplomatic relations with Japan and Italy. First, by the 1930s, Amery believed that Britain should play only a limited role in European diplomacy. He believed, as he wrote during the First World War, that 'We are not a part of Europe, even if the most important unit of the British community lies off the European coast. This war against a German domination in Europe was only necessary because we had failed to make ourselves sufficiently strong and united as an Empire to be able to afford to disregard the European balance.'[14] So in the mid-1920s, when a European security pact was on the table, Amery did all that he could to reduce the nature of British involvement,[15] and subsequently expressed dismay that the foreign secretary of 1924–29, Austen Chamberlain, was 'so preoccupied with …all these tiresome and trivial European issues'.[16] That approach was at the core of Amery's strategy. In 1935, he wrote The Forward View, which was the most detailed statement of his political credo. In this he argued, 'It is high time that someone in authority stated clearly and plainly, for all the world to understand, that we do not regard ourselves as one of the nations of Europe, have no intention of intervening in any European conflict that does not directly menace our interests, and are only anxious to leave to Europe the responsibility for settling her own affairs.'[17] The only British interest in Europe that Amery was prepared to defend was the traditional concern for the security of the Channel coast. This meant that Amery came to see Locarno as being about defining Britain's commitment to European security in limited terms, and was eventually happy to support it. In 1935, he wrote to Beaverbrook, 'I do not mind Locarno interpreted simply as a warning to others that we will not have an aggressive major war fought in the immediate neighbourhood of the Straits of Dover.'[18] A year later, he wrote to Smuts that, 'I am quite prepared myself,

[14] Amery to Lord Milner, 25 May 1915, Amery Papers, AMEL 1/3/41, Churchill College, Cambridge, quoted by permission of the Master and Fellows of the College.
[15] Richard S. Grayson, Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe: British Foreign Policy, 1924–29 (London, 1997), 47–50.
[16] Leo Amery to Stanley Baldwin, Baldwin Papers 115, 18 September 1926, 120–3.
[17] Amery, Forward View, 285.
[18] AMEL 2/1/25 LA to Beaverbrook, 29 March 1935.

whether by way of an agreement or of a unilateral Monroe Doctrine, to say to Germany "no unprovoked attack on Holland, Belgium or France".'[19] Beyond this, the only other interests in Europe to which Amery gave special attention were the trading links with Portugal and the Scandinavian countries, hoping that the impact of diplomacy with these countries would be 'to associate them more closely and permanently with ourselves'.[20]

The next two aspects of Amery's strategy were contained in his statement that the alternative to engagement in Europe was 'relying on our naval strength alone and upon the development of Empire resources and Empire cooperation'. Amery wanted to ensure that no country in Europe would have 'a sufficient surplus of striking power to afford to be able to go to war with us'.[21] That primarily meant rejecting treaty restrictions on cruisers and aircraft carriers. But he also wanted to develop RAF strength in the Middle East, and encourage closer cooperation between the military of each of the Dominions.[22] Meanwhile, as early as 1919, he had looked forward to an Empire foreign and defence policy which he believed could strengthen the navy.[23] So Amery wanted the combined might of the British Empire and its Dominions to be so vast as to act as a deterrent to any European aggressor, and also to police and protect the wider Empire to secure it against both internal unrest and foreign aggression.

This vision of imperial military cooperation was problematic. In the short term at least, Amery was rowing against the tide of some opinion in the Dominions which, after the First World War, sought greater autonomy from the UK in both foreign and defence policy. For example, while New Zealand gladly contributed its relatively small navy to wider imperial operations, the Australians jealously guarded their naval autonomy. Meanwhile, Amery's policy also faced the problems that different Dominions took different views on the best way to deal with Japan, and that ideas for an Imperial Fleet did not come to fruition. However, there was still what one writer has described as 'an overarching solidarity' between Britain and the Dominions, with even W.L. Mackenzie King, Canada's independent-minded Prime Minister, saying in 1937 that all the Dominions would help the UK in the event of a German attack.[24] Moreover, Amery's policy recognized

19 AMEL 2/1/27 LA to Smuts, 5 August 1936.
20 Amery, Forward View, 276.
21 Amery, Forward View, 278. See also, H. C. Deb. 5s., 287, 12 March 1934, col. 71.
22 Amery, Forward View, 304, 311 and 313.
23 AMEL 2/1/2 LA to Geoffrey Robinson (Dawson), 2 January 1919.
24 Anthony Clayton, '"Deceptive Might": Imperial Defence and Security, 1900–1968', in Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (eds), The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV, The Twentieth Century (Oxford, 1999), 282–6.

the aspirations of the Dominions and sought to build upon them. That meant he was clear that any imperial cooperation must be 'free cooperation'. He believed that all the forces of each part of the Empire 'must be directly raised, administered, and controlled by the Government and Parliament of that part'.[25] The Dominions could then take part in discussions about a shared foreign and defence policy from a basis of equality. So, even though Amery's policy sought greater cooperation than existed at the time, he started from a clear understanding of the Dominions' concerns.

A further aspect of Amery's strategy was to place defence policy cooperation within a scheme for the development of an imperial economic system. All his hopes flowed from this as he believed it would unite the Empire, recasting the relations between Britain and the Dominions, with the effect of making the Dominions more likely to play a part in a broad imperial defence strategy.[26] In 1928, he believed that Britain was facing a long-term choice. Either it could 'drift on' and 'from a position of ever-increasing relative economic weakness, Great Britain …will eventually have to be absorbed inside the European Economic Union', while Dominions were drawn to America. Alternatively, Britain could develop its Empire and 'make of Pan-Britannia a far greater thing in every sense …than either Pan-America or Pan-Europa can ever be'. This would be economically driven. Amery said, 'I am more profoundly convinced to-day than ever before, that effective fiscal preference is an essential and indispensable element in our development.'[27] In addition to fiscal preference, Amery also wanted other forms of economic unity, such as an Imperial Sterling Area, and an 'Empire Shipping Policy' to preserve the existence of a steamship network throughout the Empire.[28] Throughout, he argued for the principle of 'nationalism' versus 'internationalism' saying that 'the decisive issue in politics in the next few years is going to be between those who believe in a policy of national and Imperial strength, development, and consolidation, and those who still hanker after a policy of internationalism, both in economics and in politics.'[29]

The fourth aspect of Amery's strategy was good diplomatic relations with Japan and Italy. That stemmed from Amery's belief that securing the Empire should be the focus of British policy, and both countries, if hostile, were potential threats. Amery also judged that

[25] Amery, Forward View, 313.
[26] Amery, Forward View, 322–335.
[27] Amery, Empire in the New Era, 11–2.
[28] AMEL 2/1/23 NC to LA, 10 March 1933. Amery, Forward View, 322–35. AMEL 1/5/ 38 Speech by LSA at Council of British Empire League, 10 December 1935.
[29] H.C. Deb. 5s., 281, 7 November 1933, col. 111.

Germany and Russia were less likely to be destabilizing if they were isolated from potential allies. In taking this view Amery shared some common ground with those anti-appeasers who sought to use 'alliance diplomacy' to counteract German strength, even if Amery was focused on Japan and Italy rather than France and Russia. For Amery, Italy was the keystone of a stable European structure, and he set great store by the Stresa Front, through which Britain, France and Italy briefly collaborated in 1935. As discussed subsequently, it also meant that Amery was supportive of Italy's claims in Abyssinia and Japan's case in Manchuria. Amery's strategy was set out in simple terms in a letter to Neville Chamberlain in November 1937, when he said that a major goal of British policy should be 'to square both Italy and Japan in the first instance' because 'Germany can be squared much more easily after the balance of forces has been shifted against her'.[30] Meanwhile, he opposed bringing Russia into an alliance against Germany because it would be likely to mean 'committing ourselves to Russia against Japan in the Far East'.[31] Moreover, if Germany believed it was being encircled by both France and Russia, it would be more likely to behave aggressively. As he wrote to Smuts in 1937, Amery believed that 'we cannot really approach Germany with any hope of success unless Russia can somehow be eliminated, and France will not agree to that now, though I think she might be persuaded to do so after Italy has been won over'.[32] So good relations with both Japan and Italy were crucial to Amery, both to offer a strong diplomatic front against Germany, but also to remove any need for cooperation with Russia against Germany. This was Amery's brand of alliance diplomacy.

Amery's strategic thinking brought him into conflict with two points of consensus in inter-war foreign policy: the League of Nations and disarmament. In particular, he rejected the 'collective security' of the League of Nations. Even in the mid-1930s, most leading figures (including Winston Churchill and Austen Chamberlain) at least paid lip service to the League. Yet, Amery argued in 1935 that 'the Covenant of the League is dead.' Instead, he said, British policy should be based on 'getting together the nations in groups or commonwealths capable of being inspired by a common idea, a wider patriotism, and so disposed to co-operate in defence, in policy, and in trade'.[33] Amery believed the League had only limited practical use as a standing conference, rather than as a coercive body. He pointed to the

[30] AMEL 2/1/26 LA to NC, 11 November 1937.
[31] AMEL 2/1/25 LA to Beaverbrook, 29 March 1935. See also Amery Diaries II, 428, 1 October 1936
[32] AMEL 2/1/27 LA to Smuts, 2 December 1937.
[33] Amery, Forward View, 72.

Greco-Bulgarian dispute of 1925, and issues around the Saar plebiscite, as the sorts of problems that the League could help solve.[34] In Parliament in March 1935, he attacked the idea that the League could ever protect Britain against attack saying, 'we might as well call on the Man in the Moon for help as make a direct appeal to the League. Our only chance of safety lies in our own strength'.[35] This argument was expanded in The Forward View, in which Amery argued that 'the attempt to control them by any single scheme of universal application or through any centralized machinery is bound to fail.'[36] That was a significant contrast to the approach of Winston Churchill who saw the League as a body that could maintain a balance of power in Europe. He spoke of the potential for 'recreating the Concert of Europe through the League of Nations'.[37]

Amery also rejected the view that disarmament should be a policy priority. On this, he was in tune with Churchill whose most consistent argument in the 1930s was that Britain needed to rearm. As early as 1932, Amery opposed schemes for further disarmament. In a Parliamentary debate in November he said, 'I believe that nothing has done more harm to the cause of peace since the Great War than the constant reiteration of the idea that armaments as such are the main causes of war, and that disarmament as such will bring about peace.'[38] He was particularly critical, in March 1933, of Baldwin's claim that the growth of air power had changed the nature of war. Commenting on the idea that flight had made war more barbaric, because it would involve bombing of civilians, Amery called Baldwin's approach 'wholly distorted and unreal', arguing that air power would make wars end more quickly. Amery added that international control of aviation, which many in Britain were urging, was completely unworkable, would reduce Britain's ability to police its possessions in the Middle East and would not make Europe more secure.[39] In a private letter to Smuts, Amery added that 'Personally I think disarmament an excellent thing in its way but a minor matter compared with the real underlying issues of national rivalry.'[40] These arguments were repeated by Amery throughout 1933–35.[41] They partly reflected his general hostility to universal peacekeeping schemes, but they were also linked to his belief that naval power should be the

[34] Amery, Forward View, 39.
[35] H.C. Deb. 5s., 299, 11 March 1935, col. 101.
[36] Amery, Forward View, 10.
[37] H.C. Deb. 5s., 281, 7 November 1933, col. 141.
[38] H.C. Deb. 5s., 272, 23 November 1932, col. 113.
[39] H.C. Deb. 5s., 275, 14 March 1933, cols 1843–8.
[40] AMEL 2/1/24 LA to Smuts, 3 January 1934.
[41] See, for example, H.C. Deb. 5s., 280, 5 July 1933, cols 374–9; Amery, Forward View,11.

basis of British defence. Amery believed that, despite recent developments in flight, the Royal Navy should remain the basis of British power projection. While he saw aeroplanes as a useful weapon of the navy, he believed that their inability to carry large bulk and their limited range meant that they required a naval platform to be effective. However, Amery also believed that the army had a crucial role in imperial defence, and this led him to argue for the need for reforms of the army. In particular, he wanted to introduce shorter periods of service to aid recruitment.[42]

Economic Blocs

Amery's belief in detachment from Europe was not atypical among Conservatives in the 1930s. However, his emphasis on imperial development meant that Amery was distinctive on foreign policy. In particular, the conclusions he drew on the benefits of developing the Empire as a British economic bloc, led him to believe that economic cooperation among European nations could promote European stability. It was in this area that his contribution to policy debates was unique and where it becomes clear that he was offering a definite alternative to government policy.

Amery was a nationalist. His objection to the League was that it was 'universalist' or 'internationalist' and he also opposed internationalism in economics. Instead, he wanted nations in geographical proximity to work together and urged 'the really effective cooperation of groups or commonwealths of nations drawn together by effective ties of geographical proximity, of historic tradition, or economic interest'. The latter point, economic interest, was the core of Amery's case. As he sought to develop the Empire through closer economic ties, he believed that economic co-operation between potentially hostile nations could reduce the likelihood of war. Ironically, similar arguments were made by advocates of free trade, but Amery believed that such internationalism was flawed. Instead, he wanted to 'jettison the economic internationalism of the last century and build upon a frank recognition of the economic nationalism of our own day'.[43] That, he argued, could lead to 'getting together the nations in groups or commonwealths capable of being inspired by a common idea, a wider patriotism, and so disposed to co-operate in defence, in policy, and in trade'.[44] As part of that, regional security agreements could be made and by 1935, he had

42 Amery, Forward View, 297 and 303–5.
43 Amery, Forward View, 14.
4 Amery, Forward View, 72.

come to see Locarno as a possible model for this, describing it as a step 'in the process of disentangling ourselves both from Europe and from the obligations of the Covenant of the League'.[45]

Amery's assessment of German intentions also informed his support for economic blocs. Amery correctly concluded that Germany's aims were European rather than colonial, and prior to the German–Austrian Anschluss in March 1938, he believed that this primarily meant securing influence rather than territorial acquisition. While conceding that it was difficult to gauge German intentions, Amery wrote to Neville Chamberlain in November 1937 that 'In the main, I am certain that Germany can only be satisfied in Europe.' Consequently, Amery did not want Britain to get involved in any dispute between Germany and Russia over the Baltic States, and believed that Britain should accept 'German economic hegemony in the Danube area'.[46]

Amery's economic nationalism and his judgement of German aspirations led him to advocate the formation of a Danubian bloc. This fed into a debate on European federalism, which had been stimulated by Count Coundehove-Kalergi's Pan-Europa movement. Amery believed that a federal Europe was a worthwhile goal, while making it clear that the UK could have no part of it.[47] Instead, Britain's role was to be 'an outside friendly Power'. He argued that 'With the example of our own effort at uniting the Empire before us we can go to the European nations and encourage them to get together among themselves, to bring into being something in the nature of a common European patriotism.'[48] Amery set out the details of his views in private letters to the Czechoslovak foreign minister, Eduard Benesˇ. In the first instance, Amery thought that the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia) could form a core membership of a new economic bloc, drawing in Hungary and, possibly, Austria. The Little Entente had been formed as a bulwark against treaty revision sought by Hungary, and Amery believed that an economic bloc could make such revisions either less necessary, or, if they did take place, less problematic for countries losing territory. Amery spent much time in Switzerland pursuing his passion for mountaineering, and he appears to have been impressed by the Swiss model. He drew from this the lesson that an economic union could secure 'racial and linguistic toleration' in a way that would reduce controversy over minorities in border areas. It could also undermine 'the racial linguistic

[45] Amery, Forward View, 49.
[46] AMEL 2/1/26 LA to NC, 11 November 1937.
[47] Amery, My Political Life, III, 44–46. AMEL 2/1/19 LA to Coudenhove-Kalergi, 28 July 1930. AMEL 2/2/5 RN Coudenhove-Kalergi to LA, 7 March 1931.
[48] H.C. Deb. 5s., 272, 23 November 1932, col. 119.

idea …. [which] in its narrowest form has swept triumphantly through Germany, and implies a tremendous menace to the whole future stability of Europe'. Specifically on the issue of revision, Amery argued that 'the whole question of revision would lose much of its difficulties and dangers from the point of view of both sides if the regime of toleration were first recognized and established, and secondly if the nations concerned were so bound together in a permanent constitutional pact that a small transfer of territory within the wider union meant no real loss of defensive strength or economic prosperity to the party affected.' To make this a reality, Amery proposed a trial period of five years during which there 'should be the same complete cessation of linguistic intolerance as there is in Switzerland'. At the end of the trial period, a revision of precise frontiers could be discussed.[49] Although some of this might have appeared to be fanciful, Benesˇ replied to Amery that the latter's ideas were 'in a great measure in conformity' with his own.[50] Amery was soon making the case for a Danubian union to British policy makers, telling Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon that 'I believe the only answer to Hitlerism in Europe today is the inclusion of Austria and Hungary in a Danubian group, based not only on economic cooperation but also on the principle of racial and linguistic tolerance.' He added that 'Such a group might form for the Europe of the future the same kind of nucleus that the original three Cantons formed for the Swiss Federation.'[51]

Amery wanted Britain to take an active role in encouraging cooperation among others, and his key was the Most Favoured Nation Clause. This clause in trading agreements had developed almost universal applicability over centuries, with countries making commercial treaties with each other agreeing that they would grant to the other any concessions that they granted to other countries. So if countries agreed favourable bilateral trading terms, they were obliged to extend those to countries with whom they had commercial treaties including a Most Favoured Nation Clause. As the number of commercial treaties steadily increased, it became almost impossible for any country to grant special privileges to another, and this bolstered free trade. By the middle of 1933, Amery was arguing that Britain should waive all claims it would have under the Most Favoured Nation Clause if European nations wanted to form economic unions.[52] Towards the end of the year, he was seeking to build broad

49 AMEL 2/1/23 LA to Eduard Benesˇ, 26 May 1933.
50 AMEL 2/1/23 Benesˇ to LA, 8 June 1933.
51 AMEL 2/2/24 LA to Sir John Simon, 26 June 1933.
52 AMEL 2/2/24 LA to Sir John Simon, 26 June 1933.

support for the idea, both in Parliament and also more widely. In particular, he urged Benesˇ to 'secure a concerted attack upon the Most Favoured Nation Clause which stands in the way of any scheme of mutual preference among neighbouring nations'. The only price that Britain would be paid would be similar release from MFN restrictions, so that it could reach preferential treaties with, for example, Scandinavia and the Argentine.[53] Amery also took these arguments into the popular press, writing an article in the Daily Mail in September 1934, saying that the British Empire offered a model for closer European cooperation and that 'If Europe wishes to be saved she must look to Ottawa and not to Geneva for her model.' Again, however, he was clear that 'We cannot ourselves form part of any scheme of European union. Our die is cast; our partnership is with the Empire. We cannot have both Empire Preference and European Preference. We cannot foster both an Empire patriotism and a European patriotism …. We can never be good Europeans.'[54]

Amery consistently repeated these arguments throughout 1933–38, during which time he increasingly emphasized the benefits of European cooperation for Germany. He wrote to J.L. Garvin that 'I believe that the economic approach is not only the right one in Europe at this moment on general merits, but has the tactical advantage of naturally excluding Russia.' By establishing 'that Russia is no part of Europe', it would ensure that 'a German quarrel with Russia over the problem of the Baltic States is not a reason for intervention by anyone else'. Meanwhile, if European colonies were included in a system of mutual preference, Germany would gain access to both markets and raw materials 'infinitely more …than can ever result from any possible restoration of her former colonial territories'.[55] Amery believed that Germany could reach agreements with the Little Entente, Holland and Belgium 'which might eventually cover the whole of Continental Europe and its Colonies and so provide an effective economic counterpart to the British Empire or to the United States'.[56]

Whether such developments would have made a significant impact on German policy is, of course, wide open to question. If that policy had been run by Gustav Stresemann, then it might have been an appealing approach because it would have steadily built German power and influence in a way that Stresemann found attractive. However, it was not Stresemann (who died in October 1929) nor anyone

53 H.C. Deb. 5s., 281, 7 November 1933, cols 107–8; AMEL 2/1/23 LA to Benesˇ, 17 November 1933.
54 AMEL 1/6/3 LSA 'Whither Europe?' Daily Mail, 3 September 1934.
55 AMEL 2/1/26 LA to Garvin, 26 October 1936.
56 AMEL 2/1/27 LA to Smuts, 22 November 1937.

like him with whom British policy-makers had to deal in the 1930s. From 1933, it was Adolf Hitler. How appealing would Amery's scheme have been to him if pursued by the British government? Given the extensive literature on the nature of Hitler's intentions and the ongoing debate on whether he was an opportunist who simply took advantage of perceived weaknesses, it is difficult to answer that question with any certainty. One can be fairly sure that by the late 1930s, when it was clear that Hitler was bent on territorial conquest in Eastern Europe, Amery's plan would have had little impact. However, it is at least possible that, combined with the deterrent effect of a militarily stronger British Empire (if Amery's plans in that direction had yielded results), such a plan would have had some attractions to Hitler in the mid-1930s. If Hitler had accepted the idea (even if he intended to use aggression later on), it might have had enough of an impact on German society and the German economy to reduce the attraction of eastern aggression at a later point. Meanwhile, at least one can say of Amery's plan that it was based on some understanding of the German desire for greater influence in Eastern and Central Europe, which cannot be said of all the alternative policies on offer.

Resistance to Colonial Appeasement

One of these alternatives was making colonial concessions to Germany and Amery argued that European economic cooperation was better for Germany than regaining colonies partly because, from 1936, he was seriously concerned that the British government was considering making such concessions. These were first proposed by Lloyd George in the House of Commons in February 1936,[57] and the German government demanded 'colonial equality' a month later. So while Amery wanted to abandon the Most Favoured Nation Clause as a long-term policy, his main short-term concern was opposition to colonial concessions. This was at the core of his public case throughout 1936–39.

Amery had long seen colonial rivalry as a source of German grievance against Britain.[58] However, from 1917 onwards he believed that allowing Germany to maintain its colonies after the war would make it too strong in any future conflict.[59] Moreover, his reading of Mein Kampf led him to believe that the return of colonies stripped from Germany under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles meant little to Hitler. Amery correctly judged that Hitler's ambitions were European,[60] and he allied himself

57 Amery, My Political Life, III, 247.
58 Amery, My Political Life, III, 246.
59 Louis, 68–9.
60 Amery, My Political Life, III, 247.

with Winston Churchill and Austen Chamberlain in urging the government to make it clear that no concessions were on the table.[61] However, the government reply was vague, and Amery noted that 'Austen, like myself, is by no means happy about Neville's answer on the colonial question the other night, and thinks Neville himself anything but sound.'[62] So Amery established and chaired a committee of likeminded MPs, such as Duncan Sandys and Sir Henry Page-Croft, which resulted in a deputation to the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, on 19 May 1936. The argument put by Amery and others rested on three points. First, German colonies run by Britain were a form of compensation for losses in the Great War. Second, settlers had moved to the colonies on the assumption that they would remain British-run. Third, handing colonies back to Germany would take no account of the wishes of the native population.[63]

Amery's deputation did not receive satisfactory assurances and for the next two years Amery's most active campaign in international policy was against colonial concessions. He wrote on the subject in a wide range of publications, ranging from The Times to the Journal of the Royal African Society, and was a persistent agitator in Parliament. He also met with Neville Chamberlain in 1938, when the government had secretly offered colonial concessions to Germany. Amery did not know about this offer and concluded that an agreement must be some way off, which was coincidentally true, but only because Hitler had rejected the terms.[64] Not deterred by Neville Chamberlain being downcast over the possibility of agreement, Amery feared that the government still wished to pursue colonial concessions and, in the autumn of 1938, set up the Parliamentary Colonial Defence Committee to organize sympathetic MPs. He also published, early in 1939, a book summarizing his arguments against concessions. The central argument of The German Colonial Claim was that making colonial concessions would not satisfy Hitler in any significant sense, and that European economic cooperation was the best way forward. The book was a rallying cry for all those opposed to colonial concessions and was also a clear sign of Amery's opposition to a core aspect of government international policy in 1938–39.

Anti-Appeaser or Real Appeaser?

So a clear picture of Amery's long-term policy emerges: he advocated a European policy based on economic cooperation that differed

[61] H.C. Deb. 5s., 310, 6 Apr 1936, cols 2478–58.
[62] Amery Diaries II, 413, 7 April 1936.
[63] Amery Diaries II, 417, 19 May 1936; AMEL 1/5/50 Notes of Deputation to PM, 19 May 1936.
[64] Amery Diaries II, 460, 10 March 1938. See also 344–5.

radically from the government's approach. At the same time, he strongly opposed colonial concessions to Germany. Why then, does any question arise, of whether or not Amery was an opponent of appeasement? The answer lies in three areas: his attitude towards fascism; his support for Japanese and Italian expansion and his view that European territorial concessions to Germany might be justified.

Amery's view of Germany and Nazism was typical of many Conservatives in the 1930s. While alarmed by Hitler, Amery believed that he could be contained. Moreover, Amery distinguished between Nazism and fascism, seeing the latter as an ideology with which he had something in common. It is important though, not to take some of Amery's comments on fascism out of their very precise historical context, or one risks reaching the misleading conclusion that he was at best a fellow traveller with fascists, at worst, a proto-fascist himself. The potentially misleading comments include his diary entry about a meeting with two Austrian Nazis, of whom he said, 'their general European conception is very much mine'.[65] More strikingly, when he met Hitler in 1935, Amery recorded that 'We got on well together I think, owing to the fundamental similarity of many of our ideas.'[66] These statements, however, must be heavily qualified and put in the context of a weight of other evidence. First, when Amery saw common ground with fascism, he was referring to economics. Like fascists, he believed in state support for key industries. Even more significantly, he thought about economics in national terms, rather than in terms of internationalist free trade. However, for all this shared ground, Amery noted that he had got on with Hitler probably because they had avoided all controversial subjects, and from 1933, there is ample evidence that he feared Hitler's intentions. Very soon after Hitler seized power, Amery praised Austen Chamberlain's speech warning of the dangers posed by the new regime.[67] A year later he was also clear about 'the extravagant racialism and anti-Christian bias of the Nazi movement.'[68] However, the crucial point about Amery's views of Germany in the mid-1930s is that he thought Hitler was someone who could be dealt with through diplomatic means as any other national leader. For example, he wanted to tackle Germany's 'psychological grievance by telling her that the Versailles period is over and that she can now rearm as she likes'. He added that once

[65] Amery Diaries II, 375, 25 February 1934.
[66] Amery Diaries II, 397, 13 August 1935.
[67] Amery Diaries II, 292, 7 April 1933.
[68] AMEL 2/1/24 LA to Smuts, 26 March 1934.

Germany had this right 'it will be much easier for Hitler to counsel moderation in its use'.[69]

Such views of Germany did not put Amery as out of step with some Conservative colleagues as did his attitudes to Japan and Italy. On the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, he said in Parliament, 'Japan has got a very powerful case based upon fundamental realities.' He argued that Japan was behaving no differently in Manchuria than Britain had done in occupying Egypt and India to safeguard its interests. He also used the situation as a stick with which to beat the League of Nations, saying that if the League Covenant had not guaranteed every existing border, then China would probably have reached an agreement with Japan.[70] Even more controversial than this was his attitude to Mussolini. In his memoirs, Amery said that Neville Chamberlain simply did not understand the importance of detaching Mussolini from Hitler.[71] This was fundamental to Amery's strategic outlook. Thus when Italy invaded Abyssinia, Amery argued in the major Parliamentary debate in October 1935 that action should have been taken years before by Britain and France to give parts of the country to Italy, and that no League action should be taken against Italy. Many Conservatives were entirely at odds with Amery on the subject.[72] But that did not prevent Amery continuing to make Italy's case, arguing in February 1936, that for some territories taken by Italy it was 'a merciful deliverance to have been freed from Abyssinian control'.[73] By this point, Mussolini had already written to Amery, 'Please accept my cordial thanks for all you are doing to assist in bringing about a better understanding in the relations between Italy and England.'[74]

Following on from Amery's attitude to Japan and Italy, where he was willing to make concessions to both, it is striking that he also believed Britain should look favourably on German aspirations to revise the treaty settlement. There has been a tendency for previous writers to emphasize the importance of the March 1938 Anschluss in stiffening Amery's resolve against Germany.[75] There is certainly much in this view, in that he became more vociferous in urging firmness against Germany. However, Amery supported meeting some German demands before and after Anschluss. Moreover, his support for territorial concessions became a more central part of his case after Anschluss,

[69] AMEL 2/1/24 LA to Smuts, 3 January 1934.
[70] H.C. Deb. 5s., 275, 27 February 1933, col. 81.
[71] Amery, My Political Life, III, 228.
[72] H.C. Deb. 5s., 305, 23 October 1935, cols 182–194.
[73] H.C. Deb. 5s., 309, 24 February 1936, col. 102.
[74] AMEL 2/1/25 Mussolini to LA, 15 November 1935.
[75] Louis, 116–7; Thompson, 162.

when it became clear that Germany could not be satisfied by the influence he had thought it might gain over the Central European economic bloc he had earlier advocated.

At the time of Anschluss, Amery was also confused about how Britain should respond if there was a subsequent threat to Czechoslovakia. For example, he said in Parliament on 14 March 1938 that Britain should make it clear what would happen if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia.[76] However, a few days later, he noted in his diary that he felt 'no little uncertainty myself as to whether we ought to declare definitely that we stand behind Czechoslovakia'.[77] When there was no such guarantee, Amery wrote to his friend Lord Tweedsmuir (formerly John Buchan), 'Neville was right I think in not going further than he did in the direction of a guarantee.' That was because Amery believed that Germany did not need to attack Czechoslovakia because 'She is now in a position to squeeze Czechoslovakia economically.' He added that although in a few years both Czechoslovakia and Hungary might be dominated by Germany, that would not be a problem because Germany and Austria would still be weaker than they were in 1914. Amery wrote, 'What in effect will then have happened is that the excessive swing of the pendulum resulting from the complete collapse of Germany and Austria will have been partially reversed and a new equilibrium reached.'[78] At the same time, at a public meeting, he said that there may come a time for a guarantee, but that that time had not been reached.[79] Throughout the spring and early summer of 1938, that remained Amery's position.[80]

Yet, despite all these doubts, Amery came to differ significantly with Neville Chamberlain over tactics during the Munich crisis. Amery had a sophisticated understanding of the tactics employed by the Nazis themselves. In 1939, in The German Colonial Claim, he wrote of the concept of ' "dynamism" inherent in the Nazi conception of foreign policy'.[81] In this approach to foreign policy, demands would be made until they were resisted effectively, and there could be no settlement until there was resistance. By September 1938, some of Chamberlain's words gave some hope to the Czechoslovaks that Britain might come to their aid. But at the same time, he was encouraging the Nazis to make demands by shifting ground in the face of those demands. Thus Amery thought that the problem with Chamberlain's policy was that Britain

[76] H.C. Deb. 5s., 333, 14 March 1938, col. 86.
[77] Amery Diaries II, 498, 18 March 1938.
[78] AMEL 2/1/28 LA to Tweedsmuir, 29 March 1938.
[79] AMEL 1/5/39 speech at Right Book Club's meeting to support PM's foreign policy, 29 March 1938.
[80] See, for example, Amery Diaries II, 506, 30 May 1938.
[81] Amery, German Colonial Claim, 15.

appeared to have caved in to threats of German aggression. Even in mid-September, Amery was willing to make some territorial concessions to Germany. He made that case to Halifax, the foreign secretary,[82] and wrote to Chamberlain on 17 September that 'The one thing possible and justifiable would be to press the Czechs to give up the North Western corner of Bohemia with a million Germans in it.' He added that Benes˘ and Masaryk had wanted to do that in 1919, but had not succeeded. However, if the Czechoslovaks were willing to make such a concession, it would have to be backed by 'external guarantees from her neighbours and also from France and ourselves'. He said that 'I realise all the objections to indefinite guarantees' but added that in the current situation 'the guarantee would be well worth it as a means of averting a continual crisis.'[83] Two days later, he noted in his diary, 'I find it very difficult to make up my own mind on it all.'[84] However, he judged from newspaper reports that a deal of this nature might be possible, but warned Neville Chamberlain that there could be no question of giving away every area with a German majority. This was in fact what the British and French governments were in the process of agreeing and Amery said that this would mean 'That Hitler should have it all his own way for a policy of brutal interference and disregard of all the ordinary decencies would be disastrous for the future.'[85] Two days later, when the precise nature of the deal which Britain and France were imposing on Czechoslovakia became more clear, Amery was dismayed. To his colleague Patrick Hannon, he wrote that he would have been prepared to cede a corner of Czechoslovakia but that 'it is one thing doing that as a negotiated policy and another doing it in desperate haste, and on almost any terms, as a capitulation to Hitler's threat of war'.[86] In another letter, to the former Australian Prime Minister, William Hughes, Amery set out his fear that a much tougher stance on negotiations should have been taken: 'the thing should be done decently, by negotiation and on the clear understanding that if Hitler refuses or breaks faith by attacks on Czechoslovakia while the negotiations are on, it will be war with both France and ourselves'. The result of Chamberlain's policy was, Amery believed, that both Germany and Japan would be encouraged to make aggressive demands in future.[87]

When Germany increased its demands, by asking for almost immediate cession of the territory in question, Amery wanted

[82] Amery Diaries II, 509, 16 September 1938.
[83] AMEL 2/1/28 LA to NC, 17 September 1938.
[84] Amery Diaries II, 510, 19 September 1938.
[85] AMEL 2/1/28 LA to NC, 19 September 1938.
[86] AMEL 2/1/28 LA to Paddy Hannon, 21 September 1938.
[87] AMEL 2/1/28 LA to Hughes, 21 September 1938.

Chamberlain to take a tough stand. He wrote to Chamberlain, 'Are we not bound to tell Hitler that the demand is in our opinion unreasonable, that we cannot blame the Czechs for rejecting it, and that if, instead of considering reasonable alternatives, he invades Czechoslovakia, he must realize the consequences?'[88] At the same time, he believed that the UK should mobilize its armed forces.[89] Then, when the terms of the Munich Agreement were announced, Amery still did not argue against the value of concessions to Germany. Even though he abstained with Churchill, Eden and others in the vote in Parliament, he nearly supported the government, telling Chamberlain, 'Your speech moved me deeply, and very, very nearly persuaded both myself and Anthony Eden to vote.'[90] However, Amery remained of the view that the tactics adopted were dangerous. Amery's diary records, 'Fundamentally it is a policy which I have always favoured; my difference on this occasion has been, not with the policy itself, but for adopting a very different policy up to the last moment and then abandoning it under panic conditions which are only likely to increase Hitler's annoyance.'[91]

Following Munich, Amery was not certain that disaster would ensue. During the crisis he had noted, 'It may be that the best thing for us is to accept German hegemony and preoccupation with Central Europe, and if so what has happened, however lacking in chivalry or fairness, may have been the best way of liquidating the Czech problem. We shall see.'[92] In the subsequent Parliamentary debate, he said that the agreement was one which could be interpreted in two ways, although he chose to focus on the danger that in the future, people may see it as 'the triumph of sheer, naked force, exercised in the most blatant and brutal fashion'.[93] Soon after, he wrote to Eden of Chamberlain's policy that 'there is much to be said for the policy of deliberately withdrawing both France and ourselves from Central Europe'. This was because while 'Germany will undoubtedly be much stronger materially', Britain and France were now 'psychologically and strategically …in a much simpler position'.[94] So it remained clear that Amery had differed from Chamberlain over tactics rather than overall strategy, and post-Munich, he had two main tactical concerns. First, he continued his long-standing opposition to colonial concessions. He wrote to Eden, 'The strategical reasons which may have justified throwing Czechoslovakia on to the

[88] AMEL 2/1/28 LA to NC, 25 September 1938.
[89] AMEL 2/1/28 NC to Hoare, 27 September 1938.
[90] AMEL 2/1/28 LA to NC, 6 October 1938. See also, Amery Diaries II, 528, 6 October 1938.
[91] Amery Diaries II, 529, 8 October 1938.
[92] Amery Diaries II, 521, 28 September 1938.
[93] H.C. Deb. 5s., 339, 4 October 1938, col. 199.
[94] AMEL 2/2/10 LSA to AE, 10 October 1938.

scrap heap certainly do not apply to weakening our defensive position in the Empire by admitting Germany back into the Colonial sphere, above all in Tanganyika. My final judgement of Neville will depend very much on whether he is prepared to make a stand there.'[95] Second, Amery believed that Britain should work closely with France. He wrote to Lord Tweedsmuir (John Buchan) in January 1939 that 'We cannot afford to desert France, now our only standby in Europe, and therefore the probability is that we shall be drawn in.'[96]

Beyond this, Amery pressed two policy issues. First, he urged the government to take measures to boost the nation's preparedness for war. During the Munich debate in Parliament, he said the government should adopt 'a far bolder policy of national health, of nutrition, or encouragement of family life. We may have to recast much of our economic system so as to afford better opportunities, greater security, more social justice for all'.[97] In particular, Amery called for plans for conscription to be made, and launched the Citizens' Service League in January 1939.[98] This was based on his belief that government should be proactive in planning aspects of life which related to national efficiency. Second, especially after Kristallnacht in November 1938, which was the clearest sign yet of Nazi intentions towards German Jews, Amery argued that Britain should welcome increased numbers of Jewish refugees. This was a case he pressed on Lord Halifax, asking if Britain could take in Jews 'on a purely training camp or road mending basis', prior to sending them to Palestine.

A key question relating to Amery's alternative policy is how much support it secured. On imperial policy generally, Amery did secure significant support, for example, through the Empire Unity Campaign, which was launched to an audience of around 8000 people at the Albert Hall on the centenary of Joseph Chamberlain's birth, and points to significant grassroots enthusiasm for the imperial cause.[99] On imperial economic policy, he was supported by business people through bodies such as the Empire Economic Union, which Amery had set up with the Chairman of Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), Lord Melchett. There was also the Empire Industries Association, which consisted of at least 40 Conservative backbenchers and pushed the case for protection.[100] Aside

[95] AMEL 2/2/10 LSA to AE, 10 October 1938.
[96] AMEL 2/1/29 LA to Tweedsmuir, 24 January 1939. See also, AMEL 2/1/29 LA to Garvin 7 February 1939.
[97] H.C. Deb. 5s., 339, 4 October 1938, col. 207.
[98] L. S. Amery, 'National Service', The National Review, Vol. 111, No. 670, December 1938, 725–35. AMEL 1/7/82 LSA, 'Citizen Service' Address at Inaugural meeting of Citizen's Service League, 17 January 1939. See also, Crowson, Facing Fascism 161–2.
[99] Amery Diaries II, 423, 8 July 1936.
[100] Amery Diaries II, 47.

from Amery, leading figures in the general movement for tariff reform in the early 1930s included Sir Henry Page-Croft MP and Lord Lloyd of Dolobran (George Lloyd). Both had reputations as Conservative Diehards. The same label applied to many of the MPs involved in the 'Constitutional Club', organized by Herbert Williams MP. In October 1935, Amery attended one of their meetings where they were debating the Italian occupation of Abyssinia. Amery recorded that 'There were about two dozen there, largely young Die-hards, but also some very solid moderates.' This meeting passed a resolution opposing sanctions and also formed 'an ad hoc body' which took part in a deputation to Baldwin arguing against sanctions.[101] Despite that deputation, Amery's approach to Italy was initially badly received by Conservatives in Parliament and even Page-Croft backed sanctions.[102] However, over the course of 1936 opposition to sanctions steadily increased, with both the 1922 Committee and the Conservative Foreign Affairs Committee coming to oppose them.[103]

On other foreign policy issues, Amery was most in tune with his Conservative colleagues in Parliament in opposing colonial concessions. Early Day Motions taking this line consistently secured as many as 124 signatures.[104] But in general, the depth of Amery's support was much shallower than on imperial economic issues. Some of his potential allies, such as Page-Croft and Lloyd, took a very different view from him on India: they opposed moves towards Indian self-government, on which Amery backed the government policy. This was one of the major divisions in Conservative ranks in 1934–35, and it separated Amery from many of the more imperially minded Conservatives who might have supported his arguments for an international policy of imperial development. It particularly separated him from Winston Churchill, with whom Amery and Austen Chamberlain worked on rearmament, but whom Amery had long regarded as unsound on economic policy (because of Churchill's belief in free trade). There had also been long pent-up hostility between Amery and Churchill. It was partly personal, beginning in their days as pupils at Harrow School (when Churchill pushed Amery into a swimming pool), but it was also political, especially during the Baldwin government of 1924–29, when Amery had seen Churchill as a barrier to imperial preference. Their personal hostility again emerged during the June 1934 debate on a Committee of Privileges investigation of Amery's close friend Samuel Hoare. Churchill had been pushing the case against Hoare and Amery

[101] Amery Diaries II, 401, 11 and 15 October 1935.
[102] Amery, My Political Life, III, 177–9. H.C. Deb. 5s., 305, 24 October 1935, col. 409.
[103] Crowson, Facing Fascism, 70.
[104] Crowson, Facing Fascism, 77 and 112.

recorded that he had 'given Winston the best ducking he has had since he first pushed me into Ducker in 1889'.[105]

Beyond the Parliamentary Conservative Party, Amery had an ongoing dialogue with Beaverbrook. Amery felt too much party loyalty to back Beaverbrook's Empire Free Trade campaign. However, the two were regular correspondents in 1935–36 over foreign policy, on which they shared a general commitment to what Beaverbrook termed 'Isolation'. However, Amery was frustrated by Beaverbrook not doing more in his newspapers to make the case or to provide funding. When Beaverbrook wrote to Amery saying that support for 'Isolation' was growing, and asked 'Why don't you lead the movement?', Amery replied angrily. He said that he had spoken and written at length: 'Tell me, my dear Max, what more could I have done in the way of leading, or establishing my claim to lead? What I want is more support. You can do a lot in your Press.'[106]

During the Munich crisis, Amery began to work more closely with non-Conservatives, particularly the Liberal leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair. However, when people such as Winston Churchill, Robert Cecil and Sir Archibald Sinclair were all in the same room with Leo Amery, the range of opinions was enormous. Such a group could only emerge because of hostility to Munich, and a sense of impending crisis, rather than in support of Amery's imperial alternative. The Liberal position, for example, throughout the 1930s, had been for an 'open door' for all western powers in the colonies,[107] which was directly opposed to Amery's approach. Sinclair was particularly resistant to Amery's suggestion in December 1938 that there could be a cross-party organization in Parliament to develop foreign policy alternatives.[108] It is no wonder that Amery's first impression of the core group that came to oppose Munich was that it was 'a queer collection' given the range of opinions it encompassed.[109]

As for other Conservative MPs, until the Munich crisis, Amery's only consistent supporter was Duncan Sandys, elected as a Conservative MP in 1935. Sandys was very supportive of the arguments in The Forward View and told Amery that he wanted to 'get together a nucleus of members who treating it as their Bible will systematically press for an Empire policy'.[110] Sandys worked with Amery in resisting colonial

[105] Amery Diaries II, 383, 13 June 1934; H.C. Deb. 5s., 290, 13 June 1934, col. 1738.
[106] AMEL 2/1/26 Beaverbrook to LA, 10 Nov 1936; LA to Beaverbrook, 12 November 1936.
[107] Grayson, Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement, 122.
[108] Thurso Papers, THRS II, 37/2: Amery and Sinclair correspondence, 9 and 13 December 1938.
[109] Amery Diaries II, 517, 26 September 1938.
[110] Amery Diaries II, 407, 30 January 1936.

concessions to Germany.[111] However, in the summer of 1938, Sandys became unpopular in Parliament when he asked questions about defence preparations that raised the issue of whether he had breached the Official Secrets Act.[112] Post-Munich, Amery began to attract more support, and worked closely with a number of Conservative anti-appeasers. It is even suggested that he had his own group of supporters. Robert Boothby wrote, 'There was a Churchill group, an Eden group, and an Amery group. I belonged to the last and we met pretty frequently'. Robert Bower took a similar line.[113] However, Amery does not appear to have seen himself as having his own group distinct from Eden's, describing instead an 'Eden-Amery group'. That group included prominent backbenchers such as Ronald Cartland, Duff Cooper, Harold Macmillan and Harold Nicolson. The latter noted, however, 'We decided that we should not advertise ourselves as a group or even call ourselves a group. We should merely meet together from time to time, exchange views, and organise ourselves for a revolt if needed.'[114] However, this group did not exist to back Amery's imperial alternative. Rather, it was to tackle immediate problems of foreign policy. It had a particularly important role after September 1939 when, although still known as the Eden Group, Amery took the chair because Eden was now back in the Cabinet. Amery used the group to reach out to people in other parties and draw together opponents of Chamberlain. In parallel with the work of other groups, such as Lord Salisbury's Watching Committee and those under the guidance of the future Liberal leader Clement Davies, Amery's work with this group led directly to the Prime Minister's defeat in May 1940.[115]

Conclusion

It was argued earlier that Amery's reputation as an anti-appeaser flows in part from the position he took in May 1940 when he led the Parliamentary charge against Neville Chamberlain. His stance, it was suggested, 'can be telescoped back into the 1930s, to give him Churchillian status' and can create 'the impression that he was against Neville Chamberlain on all issues'.[116] Yet, it has been argued here that

[111] Amery, My Political Life, III, 248; Amery Diaries II, 460, 10 March 1938.
[112] AMEL 1/5/54 Harlech to LSA, 11 October 1938.
[113] Robert Boothby, I Fight to Live (1947), 164; Amery Diaries II, 489–90.
[114] Nicolson, 371.
[115] David Dutton, 'Power Brokers or just "Glamour Boys"? The Eden Group, September 1939 – May 1940', English Historical Review, CXVIII, 476 (2003), 412–24.
[116] See above, 4.

Amery held some similar strategic views to Neville Chamberlain in that he was willing to see Germany dominate central Europe. This means that Amery's policy can be presented as simply another type of appeasement. In early 1939, he was himself careful to distinguish between his approach and 'any policy of Danegeld masquerading as appeasement or restitution'.[117] This was written in the context of debates on colonial concessions to Germany that he saw as unjustified and unlikely to satisfy German demands. However, it is clear from his language that he saw 'genuine' appeasement as justified, and the evidence of his own views is that he saw limited territorial concessions in Europe as appropriate if not given under threat of force. To that extent, then, characterizations of Amery as an anti-appeaser are problematic and might even lead one to question whether his position in May 1940 flowed logically from his position earlier in the 1930s, or whether his views underwent change in the early years of the war. Did he pursue his own form of appeasement in Europe right up until the declaration of war, at which point, with his opposition to Chamberlain's conduct of the war, he was simply swept up in the movement of those who had opposed appeasement?

Such a view underestimates the extent to which Amery was still presenting an alternative policy throughout the mid to late 1930s. His approach was entirely different from that of the government in terms of tactics and the extent to which Amery and Chamberlain differed over tactics was a distinctive feature of debates. Even though, as Louis argues, Amery's 'mind still balanced the opposing principles of anti-appeasement and pro-appeasement' during the Munich crisis, he did advocate a different approach.[118] Moreover, it is important to recognize that throughout the 1930s, key aspects of Amery's policy differed from the government and he offered a very different alternative based on the development of economic blocs in Europe. As an economic nationalist he believed that future stability and prosperity rested on building national economic blocs, and he was clearly distinctive in believing that economic cooperation within the British Empire was a model that could be applied to continental Europe. The aim of that policy was to avoid the need for any kind of crisis diplomacy in the first place and it was an especially important alternative because it was one that could comfortably have been implemented by Conservative politicians unlike, for example, the policies put forward by Liberals such as Sinclair.[119]

[117] L. S. Amery et al., Germany – What Next? (London, 1934), 204. [118] Louis, 117. [119] Grayson, Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement.

That Amery's differences with Neville Chamberlain were tactical was even hinted at in his choice of words in the crucial 7 May 1940 Commons debate. Amery delivered a remarkably personal attack on Chamberlain, without naming him, saying that peace-time politics tended 'to breed peace-time statesmen who are not too well fitted for the conduct of war'. He added that the virtues of a peace-time politician, 'caution in advancing an unpopular view, compromise and procrastination', were 'fatal qualities in war' and that 'we cannot go on being led as we are'. In closing his speech, Amery's choice of quotation from Oliver Cromwell was similarly imbued with the sense that Chamberlain personally was now the wrong man to lead the country when he said 'You have sat here too long for any good you have been doing' ending with the killer blow, 'In the name of God, go!'[120] In other words, by May 1940, Amery's grievance with Chamberlain was not about what Chamberlain was trying to do, but the way he did it, and that points to a seamless line from Amery's position on appeasement to 1940.

In the context of the existing views of anti-appeasement outlined in the first paragraph, this suggests that our understanding of the anti-appeasement case should be even more nuanced than previously. There should be a greater recognition of blurred lines between appeasers and anti-appeasers in Conservative ranks, in addition to recognizing that there were divisions between people from different parties. Crucially, Amery shared some ground with those who supported alliance diplomacy in that he wanted good relations with Japan and Italy. But he otherwise put forward a view that was very different from the alliance diplomacy of other Conservative anti-appeasers in supporting the growth of economic blocs in Europe. That flowed from his views on the development of the British Empire, and points towards a dimension of alternatives to appeasement that has been missing from our understanding of the anti-appeasers: the imperialist alternative. Although it was not a major part of the debate in 1938, in the years before that it was at the heart of the alternative of one of those still remembered as a leading anti-appeaser. In the history of the anti-appeasement case, it is therefore time to write in a significant imperialist dimension.

[120] H.C. Deb. 5s., 360, 7 May 1940, cols 1149–50.