

**Do you think the British appeasement policy or the American isolationist policy should be more responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War? Explain your answer with reference to the inter-war period.**

Appeasement is to negotiate with aggressor countries with a pacifying and yielding approach with a view to stopping their military expansion by satisfying their ambitions, while isolationism refers a policy of non-intervention that is to avoid getting involved in international affairs as far as possible. For the outbreak of the Second World War, the British appeasement policy should be more responsible than the American isolationist policy. The following essay is going to compare them in terms of encouraging totalitarian aggression, undermining the collective security system and making the international community more uncooperative.

Firstly, in encouraging totalitarian aggression, the American isolationist policy was of some importance. After WW1, America was of great significance for world peace as the most powerful country in economic and military terms. However, it adopted isolationism immediately after the Paris Peace Conference and avoided getting involved in European affairs as far as possible. As a result, the world lost an important force to keep aggressors in check. For example, concerning the *January 28th Incident* 一二八事變 of 1932 in which Japan invaded China, America, with its interests acted against, joined the League of Nations in stopping Japan from further attacking China, and forcing them to sign the *Shanghai Ceasefire Agreement* 上海停戰協定. However, America showed indifference to the German request for the *Sudetenland* 蘇台德區 (1938) and annexation of *Czechoslovakia* 捷克(1939), encouraging Germany to be more unscrupulous for its aggression and wage the world war without fear.

However, the British appeasement policy should be more responsible for promoting totalitarian aggression and causing WW2. Faced with totalitarian aggression in the 1930s, Britain adopted the appeasement policy that bolstered the conceit of aggressor countries. For example, when Germany demanded the return of the *Sudetenland* 蘇台德區 in 1938, Britain, together with France and Italy, held the *Munich Conference* 慕尼黑會議, at which the Sudetenland was decided to be given to Germany. This greatly boosted German confidence and encouraged Germany to annex *Czechoslovakia* 捷克 in 1939. This time, Britain stuck to the appeasement policy and gave Germany even more confidence to start an incursion into *Poland* 波蘭 in the same year. At the end, the world war broke out under the situation that Britain persisted with appeasement towards Germany. In comparison, the British appeasement policy was more responsible. In terms of *directness* 直接性, Britain directly promoted military expansion by repeatedly giving interests to the aggressors. For example, it gave Germany the Sudetenland at the Munich Conference of 1938 and directly provided Germany with new territories and population. By enhancing its national strength, Britain facilitated Germany's further aggression targeted at Czechoslovakia. On the contrary, the American isolationist policy should not be overly blamed because it only encouraged aggression indirectly without giving out interests directly. Therefore, the British appeasement policy was more responsible for the outbreak of WW2.

Secondly, in undermining the collective security system, the American isolationist policy was of some importance. America was the one that suggested setting up the League of Nations as a peace-keeping organization at the Paris Peace Conference, but it never joined the League and its absence meant the loss of an important pillar of the League from the very beginning. For example, after the *September 18th Incident* 九一八事變 of 1931 staged by Japan, America, being not a member state of the League, could still trade with Japan without following its instructions. In the absence of American support, other member states of the League abandoned their *economic sanctions* 經濟制裁 to avoid damaging trade with Japan. In addition, America, as one of the countries sponsoring the *Kellogg-Briand Pact* 凱格—白里安公約, supported the abandonment of war as an instrument of national policy, but it took no action when Italy and Germany invaded *Abyssinia* 阿比西尼亞 and *Czechoslovakia* 捷克 respectively in the 1930s, making the Pact a mere scrap of paper with no actual effect. Consequently, the collective security system became less effective and failed to prevent military aggression as it was supposed to, and the crippled system became a reason for the outbreak of war.

However, the British appeasement policy was still more responsible. In terms of the League of Nations, Britain tolerated totalitarian aggression in the 1930s despite being one of the permanent members of the Council of the League. For instance, when the League imposed economic sanctions on Italy for its invasion of *Abyssinia* 阿比西尼亞 in 1935, Britain had covert negotiations with Italy, which encouraged it to ignore the sanctions and occupy the whole of Abyssinia in 1936. This marked the complete failure of the League's sanctions. In terms of peace treaties, Britain was duty-bound to uphold the *Locarno Treaties* 羅加諾公約 as one of the countries guaranteeing it, but it still opted to appease Germany and did not stop its remilitarization of the *Rhineland* 萊茵河區 in 1936, which was in breach of the Locarno Treaties. As a result, the collective security system became ineffective and the world war subsequently broke out. In comparison, the British appeasement policy was more responsible. In terms of effectiveness of the League, in the absence of American assistance, it was still able to maintain regional peace in the 1920s with support from Britain and France. For instance, it stopped the Italian bombardment of the *Corfu Island* 科孚島 in 1923. However, the British appeasement policy in the 1930s towards aggressors directly made the League ineffective, and its failure led to the Second World War. In terms of deficiencies of the peace treaties, America initiated the Kellogg-Briand Pact but was not bound to uphold it, but Britain guaranteed the Locarno Treaties and was obligated to make sure it was implemented properly. Therefore, the British appeasement policy was more responsible for disabling the collective security system and causing the world war.

Lastly, in making the international community more uncooperative, the American isolationist policy was of some importance by making France more diplomatically isolated. In the 1920s, France attempted to join hands with America to keep the German influence in check and they jointly initiated the *Kellogg-Briand Pact* 凱格—白里安公約(1928). However, after America decided to avoid foreign entanglements due to the Great Depression of 1929, France became more isolated and helpless diplomatically in the 1930s and failed to bring other countries together to take practical actions. For example, when Germany reintroduced *conscription* 徵兵制 in 1935, France tried to stop it but this was not possible to be done single-handedly. As a result, it failed to unite with other countries to prevent the world war.

However, the British appeasement policy was more important. To begin with, this policy left France fighting alone. France was a supporter of a hardline stance against Germany but it could do nothing substantial without help from Britain, which was pursuing a policy of appeasement. For example, concerning Germany's remilitarization of the *Rhineland* 萊茵河區 in 1936, France tried hard to stop it but lacked the capability to do so without being backed by Britain and the whole thing was left unsettled. Worse still, the policy also aroused Soviet suspicion because the USSR regarded Britain giving the Sudetenland to Germany at the *Munich Conference* 慕尼黑會議 as an act of '*diverting the peril towards the east* 禍水東引' aimed at channeling German aggression eastwards. For fear of war with Germany, the USSR signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact (1939) that removed Germany's worry about a possible two-front war and motivated it to launch a sudden attack against *Poland* 波蘭, which triggered WW2. In comparison, the British appeasement policy was more responsible. In terms of impact on France, America, located in the continent of North America, was traditionally set apart from France and European affairs; however, Britain was geographically close to France and constituted a part of the European continent, but still Britain repeatedly ignored France's calls for action to stop German aggression and left it fighting alone. Also, in term of impact on the USSR, the American isolationism did not turn the USSR away from the international community, but the British policy of appeasement made the Soviets suspicious, and their failure to enter into sincere cooperation propelled the USSR to fueling the world war. Therefore, the British appeasement policy was more responsible for the outbreak of WW2.

In conclusion, the American isolationist policy only contributed to the world war indirectly and not as immediately as the British appeasement policy in terms of aggravating totalitarian aggression, weakening the collective security system and undermining international cooperation. Therefore, the British policy should be more responsible for the outbreak of WW2.

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