

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN]

Appeasement



When Carthage paid the last of her fifty annual indemnities of 200 talents to Rome, she felt herself released from the treaty signed after Zama. In 151 she declared war against Numidia, and a year later Rome declared war against her.

The latter declaration, and the news that the Roman fleet had already sailed for Africa, reached Carthage at the same time. The ancient city, however rich in population and trade, was quite unprepared for a major war. She had a small army, a smaller navy, no mercenaries, no allies. Rome controlled the sea. Utica therefore declared for Rome, and Masinissa blocked all egress from Carthage to the hinterland. An embassy hastened to Rome with authority to meet all demands. The Senate promised that if Carthage would turn over to the Roman consuls in Sicily 300 children of the noblest families as hostages, and would obey whatever orders the consuls would give, the freedom and territorial integrity of Carthage would be preserved. Secretly the Senate bade the consuls carry out the instructions that they had already received. The Carthaginians gave up their children with forebodings and laments; the relatives crowded the shores in a despondent farewell; at the last moment the mothers tried by force to prevent the ships from sailing; and some swam out to sea to catch a last glimpse of their children. The consuls sent the hostages to Rome, crossed to Utica with army and fleet, summoned the Carthaginian ambassadors, and required of Carthage the surrender of her remaining ships, a great quantity of grain, and all her engines and weapons of war. When these conditions had been fulfilled, the consuls further demanded that the population of Carthage should retire to ten miles from the city, which was then to be burned to the ground. The ambassadors argued in vain that the destruction of a city which had surrendered hostages and its arms without

striking a blow was a treacherous atrocity unknown to history. They offered their own lives as a vicarious atonement; they flung themselves upon the ground and beat the earth with their heads. The consuls replied that the terms were those of the Senate and could not be changed.

When the people of Carthage heard what was demanded of them they lost their sanity. Parents mad with grief tore limb from limb the leaders who had advised surrendering the child hostages; others killed those who had counseled the surrender of arms; some dragged the returning ambassadors through the streets and stoned them; some killed whatever Italians could be found in the city; some stood in the empty arsenals and wept. The Carthaginian Senate declared war against Rome and called all adults — men and women, slave or free — to form a new army, and to forge anew the weapons of defense. Fury gave them resolution. Public buildings were demolished to provide metal and timber; the statues of cherished gods were melted down to make swords, and the hair of the women was shorn to make ropes. In two months the beleaguered city produced 8000 shields, 18,000 swords, 30,000 spears, 60,000 catapult missiles, and built in its inner harbor a fleet of 120 ships.

Three years the city stood siege by land and sea. . . . At last the population, reduced from 500,000 to 55,000, surrendered. Hasdrubal, their general, pleaded for his life, which Scipio granted, but his wife, denouncing his cowardice, plunged with her sons into the flames. The survivors were sold as slaves, and the city was turned over to the legions for pillage.

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THE STORY OF CIVILIZATION, PART III

Carthage could have observed the treaty, minded its own business, and left Numidia alone. Having instead chosen to initiate a war and indirectly challenge Rome, Carthage's decision then to appease Rome turned a poor choice into a historical disaster. Appeasement is the hallmark of weak and timid leaders. Its bloody footprints track through history, staining first this and then that nation. While appeasement begins quietly, it ends calamitously; accommodation satisfies only the appeaser as concessions whet

the appetite of the instigator. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had Great Britain stand aside to mollify Adolf Hitler. Germany's "man on horseback" accepted from Chamberlain the lands he wanted in Czechoslovakia; later he demanded all of Poland. Standing firm and not appeasing Hitler would have accelerated Britain's war preparations and saved countless lives. Chamberlain was voted out, Winston Churchill voted in. Appeasement ceased, war began, and Germany lost everything.

History finds no heroes among appeasers, only cowards. Acts of appeasement sometimes take a century to reverse, but sooner or later the price for placation is paid. Appeasement always brings misfortune to the people, who suffer more as time passes, for the price paid to escape boxes and traps is always cheapest at inception and becomes more dear with each passing day. The mediating leaders themselves rarely suffer; they usually die peacefully in bed. Because of the past cowardly actions of conciliatory leaders, future generations suffer misery. In the case of the Carthaginians, retribution against such leaders came in their lifetimes — too late, but not too little.

For eight generations, American citizens living at home and abroad were protected. They traveled unmolested through developed foreign nations and moved with relative safety in primitive countries. Even during the hazardous settlement of the western United States, only a few hundred pioneer settlers lost their lives in Indian raids. Within the U.S. borders, law enforcement and swift justice ensured dependable security. Foreign safe shelter occurred not because of the peacefulness of alien countries but due to the almost sacrosanct quality of being an American. Between 1812 and 1964, American civilians traveling abroad were enveloped in the aura of the power of the United States.

After 1964, however, the safety of Americans deteriorated at home and abroad. The resolve and steadfastness of the nation's leaders dwindled, slipping steadily until your advent. No American president of those years had the strength of character to maintain the determination of earlier heads of state. Concession, conciliation, placation, and propitiation became the American way to disguise the country's ripening rot. The nation's softening of resolve in foreign affairs was the harbinger of appeasement.

Indeed, foreign aid, a plague that the United States avoided for 169 years, represents a special form of appeasement. There is no surer way to lose respect, enrich greedy foreign rulers, and create resentment than through foreign aid. Aid to developing countries never produced a single country that moved from the developing to the developed stage. Developing countries remain in this state and collect foreign aid as long as nations continue to confer such funds. Appeasement within the United States also was rampant during my time. Domestic white flags of government dole and affirmative action fueled ethnic dissatisfaction and kindled race riots.

Only countries with more gold than good sense practice such benevolent bestowing. In my time, the United States borrowed money to fund foreign aid. Recognizing public resentment of such funding, politicians became adroit at hiding their foreign favors. Burying such bequests under “promoting peace” and “defense” was a popular political ploy. With no more gold and without the ability to borrow, undoubtedly you, Mr. President, will end foreign aid and discharge those bureaucrats paid to give it away.

Domestic accommodation and foreign aid along with foreign compromise were interpreted, inside and outside the United States, as weaknesses inviting more abuses. The nation soothed foreign buyers of American debt by accepting unfair trade practices from those countries. Presidents gave elaborate apologies to foreign leaders for trivial occurrences caused by American citizens.

Appeasement never delivers the hoped-for promise; it only kindles a desire for what previously was thought to be unattainable.