

Why was Hitler's foreign policy so successful 1933-9?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Hitler was remarkably successful in foreign policy in the 1930s. In this chapter you are going to examine the reasons for his success under the following headings:

- A** What were Hitler's aims and plans in foreign policy? (pp. 376-9)
- B** How did the situation in Europe in the 1930s help Hitler? (pp. 380-1)
- C** Key events and personnel in Hitler's foreign policy 1933-9 (pp. 382-3)
- D** Why was Hitler able to smash the Versailles settlement? (pp. 384-95)
- E** How did the major powers react to Hitler's foreign policy 1933-9? (pp. 396-9)
- F** Was Hitler a master planner or an opportunist? (pp. 400-1)
- G** Review: Why was Hitler's foreign policy so successful 1933-9? (pp. 402-5)

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 What were Hitler's aims?
- 2 What methods did Hitler use to achieve his aims?
- 3 How did other powers react to his measures?
- 4 How successful was Hitler in achieving his aims?
- 5 Why was he successful?

A What were Hitler's aims and plans in foreign policy?

Sources 20.2-5 are a narrow but important selection of sources that record Hitler's views on foreign policy matters. Some historians consider *Mein Kampf* and Hitler's *Zweite Buch* (see opposite) to be the mere musings of a fringe politician, but most argue that they express broad aims that Hitler still held when he became Führer. His 1936 Memorandum on the Four-Year Plan and his speech to the generals at the 'Hossbach' Conference in 1937 also shed light on his policy.

SOURCE 20.1

A display poster for *Mein Kampf*.

This book was written by Hitler when he was in prison in 1924; it was published in 1925-6 and widely available from 1933. References to foreign policy are scattered throughout *Mein Kampf*, and Hitler stresses Russia as Germany's main enemy and *Lebensraum* as the main purpose



The acquisition of new soil for the settlement of the excess population possesses an infinite number of advantages, particularly if we turn from the present to the future. For one thing, the possibility of preserving a healthy peasant class as a foundation for a whole nation can never be valued highly enough. Many of our present-day sufferings are only the consequence of the unhealthy relationship between rural and city population. A solid stock of small and middle peasants has at all times been the best defence against social ills such as we possess today . . .

If land was desired in Europe, it could be obtained by and large only at the expense of Russia, and this meant that the new Reich must again set itself on the march along the road of the TEUTONIC Knights of old [a medieval religious order of knighthood], to obtain by the German sword sod [earth] for the German plough and daily bread for the nation. For such a policy there was but one ally in Europe: England . . . With England alone was it possible, our rear protected, to begin the new Germanic march . . . But we National Socialists must go further. The right to possess soil can become a duty if without extension of its soil a great nation seems doomed to destruction. And most especially when not some little nigger nation or other is involved, but the Germanic mother of life, which has given the present day world its cultural picture. Germany will either be a world power or there will be no Germany . . . And so we National Socialists consciously draw a line beneath the foreign policy tendency of our pre-war period. We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west and turn our gaze towards the land in the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-war period and shift to the soil policy of the future.

If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her VASSAL border states. Here fate itself seems desirous of giving us a sign . . . This colossal empire in the east is ripe for dissolution, and the end of Russia as a state.

Hitler's Second Book

Hitler dictated a second book as a sequel to *Mein Kampf* in May-July 1928. It was then kept at the headquarters of the Nazi Party with orders that it was not to be published until after Hitler's death. The Americans discovered it in 1945, and it was authenticated and published in 1958 in German as *Hitlers Zweite Buch* (Hitler's Second Book) and translated and published in English as *Hitler's Secret Book*. It contains a far more considered view of foreign policy than the sporadic references in *Mein Kampf*. In it, Hitler stressed the need for *Lebensraum* in the east and his explanation of why he thought Britain would not oppose Germany in Europe, since Germany was no threat to the British Empire. He also talked more of the final struggle between German-dominated Europe and the United States of America.

SOURCE 20.3 An extract from *Hitler's Secret Book*

For this earth is not allotted to anyone . . . It is awarded by providence to people who in their hearts have the courage to conquer it, the strength to preserve it, and the industry to put it to the plough . . . Every healthy, vigorous people sees nothing sinful in territorial acquisition, but something quite in keeping with nature. The primary right of this world is the right to life, so far as one possesses the strength for this. Hence on the basis of this right a vigorous nation will always find ways of adapting its territory to its population size . . .

For this, however, a nation needs weapons. The acquisition of soil is always linked with the employment of force.

Four-Year Plan, 1936

This memorandum, rare because it was written by Hitler himself, was produced during the economic troubles of 1936 in order to justify continued massive rearmament, so as to be ready for war in four years.

SOURCE 20.4 The Four-Year Plan, 1936

Since the outbreak of the French Revolution the world has been moving with ever increasing speed towards a new conflict, the most extreme solution of which is Bolshevism; and the essence and goal of Bolshevism is the elimination of those strata of mankind which have hitherto provided the leadership and their replacement by worldwide Jewry.

No nation will be able to avoid or abstain from this historical conflict. Since Marxism, through its victory in Russia, has established one of the great empires as a forward base for its future operations, this question has become a menacing one . . . The military resources of this aggressive will are . . . increasing from year to year . . . Germany will as always have to be regarded as the focus of the Western world against the attacks of Bolshevism . . . we cannot . . . escape the destiny . . . Apart from Germany and Italy, only Japan can be considered as a Power standing firm in the face of the world peril . . .

This crisis cannot and will not fail to occur, and . . . Germany has the duty of securing her existence by every means in the face of this catastrophe . . . For a victory of Bolshevism over Germany would lead not to a Versailles Treaty but to the final destruction, indeed to the annihilation, of the German people . . . In the face of the necessity of warding off this danger, all the other considerations must recede into the background as completely irrelevant.

SOURCE 20.5 Extract from the Hossbach Memorandum

The aim of German policy was to make secure and to preserve the racial community and to enlarge it. It was therefore a question of space . . . before turning to the question of solving the need for space, it had to be considered whether a solution holding promise for the future was to be reached by means of autarky or by means of an increased participation in the world economy . . .

The question for Germany ran: where could she achieve the greatest gain at the lowest cost? German policy had to reckon with two hate-inspired antagonists, Britain and France, to whom a German colossus in the centre of Europe was a thorn in the flesh, and both countries were opposed to any further strengthening of Germany's position either in Europe or overseas . . . Germany's problem could only be solved by means of force, and this was never without attendant risk . . . there remain still to be answered the questions 'when' and 'how'? In this matter there were three cases to be dealt with . . .

Case I: period 1943-45. After this date only a change for the worse, from our point of view could be expected . . . Our relative strength would decrease in relation to the rearmament which would by then have been carried out by the rest of the world . . . Nobody knew today what the situation would be in the years 1943-45. One thing only was certain, that we could wait no longer . . . If the Führer was still living, it was his unalterable resolve to solve Germany's problem of space at the latest by 1943-45. The necessity for action before 1943-45 would arise in cases II and III.

Case II: if internal strife in France should develop into such a domestic crisis as to absorb the French army completely and render it incapable of use for war against Germany, then the time for action against the Czechs had come.

Case III: if France is so embroiled by a war with another state that she cannot 'proceed' against Germany.

For the improvement of our political and military position our first objective, in the event of being embroiled in war, must be to overthrow Czechoslovakia and Austria simultaneously in order to remove the threat from our flank in any possible operation against the West . . .

The Hossbach Memorandum

This controversial document was a record of a three-hour meeting in the Reich Chancellery on 5 November 1937 attended by Hitler and military leaders Hermann Goering (air), Werner von Fritsch (army), Erich Raeder (navy), Werner von Blomberg (defence) and Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath. Tension with Hjalmar Schacht, who was critical of excessive rearmament, was at its peak, and Hitler tried to convince his listeners of the need for a more aggressive approach in foreign policy. Hitler's speech was recorded by Colonel Friedrich Hossbach five days later, from notes made at the time (he took the official minutes of the meeting). Blomberg filed the document without showing it to Hitler. The original disappeared, but various copies were used at the Nuremberg trials as evidence of planned Nazi aggression.

In his speech Hitler argued that Germany needed to solve her space problems by 1943-5. He did not though refer specifically to war with the USSR. The speech was poorly received by his cautious audience and within three months most had been replaced. Most historians consider the memorandum does indicate how Hitler was moving towards implementing his longer-term programme.

Thinking Further

What other sources might be available to a historian to analyse Hitler's aims in foreign policy?

ACTIVITY

- 1 How, in *Mein Kampf* and the *Zweite Buch* (Second Book), does Hitler justify German expansionism?
- 2 Which country is Hitler most hostile to? Why?
- 3 What change in his attitude to Britain occurs between *Mein Kampf* and the Hossbach Memorandum?
- 4 Why, in the Hossbach Memorandum, does Hitler argue that war for *Lebensraum* is required by the mid 1940s?
- 5 Which source do you consider most valuable in seeking to understand Hitler's foreign policy? Refer to background and content.

On pages 382-92 we will look at the key events in Hitler's foreign policy until 1939. In many ways, this proved to be a remarkably successful period for him. But first we are going to look at the context in which Hitler was able to pursue his aims.

B How did the situation in Europe in the 1930s help Hitler?

How some of Germany's potential opponents viewed each other

SOURCE 20.6 American Secretary of State Henry Morgenthau

The French are a bankrupt, fourth rate power.

SOURCE 20.7 French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier in 1939 told the American Ambassador

[He] fully expected to be betrayed by the British ... he considered Chamberlain a desiccated [dried-up] stick; the King a moron ... England had become so feeble and senile [old and decrepit] that the British would give away every possession of their friends rather than stand up to Germany and Italy.

SOURCE 20.8 British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain

[France] never kept a secret for more than half an hour, nor a government for more than nine months.

ACTIVITY

- Read Sources 20.6-8 and study Chart 20A. List the contemporary factors that might
 - help Hitler
 - prove to be a problem
 in his aim of revising the Versailles settlement.
- You are going to assess how the international context favoured or hindered Hitler's plans for German expansion. First study the map of inter-war Europe in Chart 20A and the quotations from Hitler in Source 2 on page 371. Now work out which country a spokesperson for Hitler could be describing in the comments below.

1 Contrary to what many consider, I believe it is our potential ally. We can dominate the continent; it can, for the moment, dominate the seas and keep its empire.

5 This state defies nature. It's a mess of nationalities, and includes Germans ruled by Slavs. Intolerable. It's jutting into the heart of Germany, and is allied to our enemies. We must destroy it.

2 It should be hostile to France, and should be our ally. Our ideological links with it reinforce it as our natural ally.

6 This Slav state cuts Germany in two. We must liberate our Germans who live there, and then turn it into a client state.

3 Our greatest enemy; it is an inferior nation, ruled by Jewish Marxists, and it holds land that Germany needs for our living space.

3

7 We must get revenge for its victory in the last war. It is our major enemy in Europe, and will never accept our rightful dominant position in Europe until it is put in its place.

4 It should never have been cut off from Germany in the first place. It is as German as Bavaria and must form part of the new Germany.

4

7

20A Europe in 1933: Germany's opportunity or restriction?

France

- Very concerned at possible German threat; had wanted harsh Versailles terms but did not get independent Rhineland nor US guarantee of its borders. Built Maginot Line (defensive fortifications)
- After 1919 treated Germany badly, but this just increased France's own insecurity. In 1923 had invaded the Ruhr, but this backfired; afterwards it was reluctant to intervene again
- Saw military preponderance and COLLECTIVE SECURITY as central to its defence
- Concerned to develop links with countries on Germany's eastern borders; alliances with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia
- Wary of Russia, its previous anti-German ally, since Russia was now the communist USSR
- Politically divided; a series of weak governments
- Major economic problems
- In 1935 made defensive alliance with Czechoslovakia, and later with the USSR

Britain

- British Empire at its largest, but resources overstretched; afraid of expansionist Japan in east, as well as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy
- Strong determination to avoid another war; overall policy to Germany was more pragmatic than France's
- Politicians and public divided. Many considered Versailles unfair, and supported the 'redress of legitimate grievances'
- Some saw eastern Europe as proper German sphere, which would furthermore divert Germany's attention from British maritime and imperial concerns
- Many on the Right hostile to the communist dictator Stalin; sympathised with Hitler

Italy

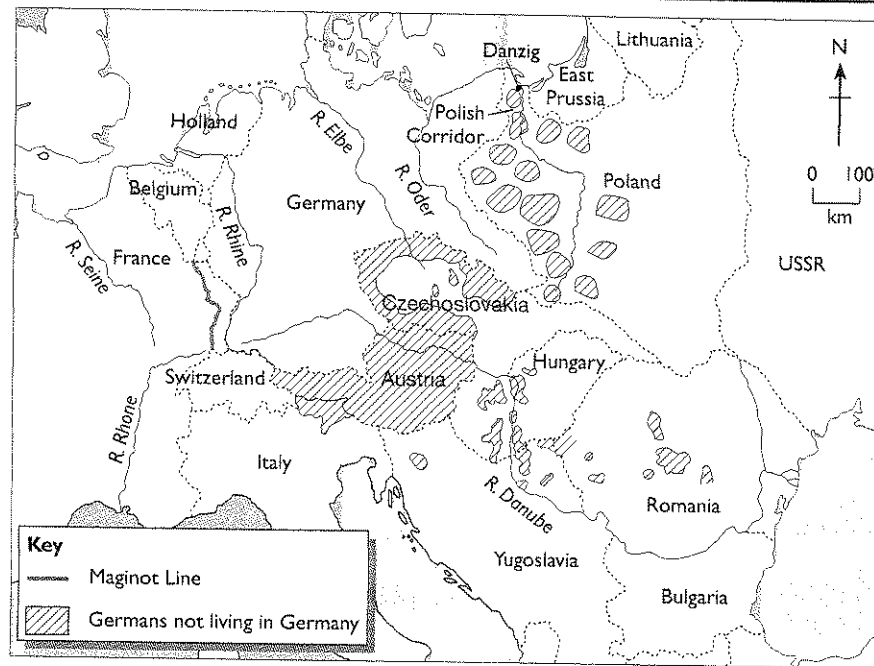
- Fascist government, but initially Mussolini did not have good relations with Hitler
- Concerned to uphold BRENNER frontier and defend Austrian independence
- Looking to expand in Mediterranean
- In 1935 invaded Abyssinia, which led to a quarrel with Britain and France, and revealed the weakness of League of Nations

USSR

- Communist USSR aroused great suspicion in the West but its main concern was economic development
- Since 1922 Rapallo Pact, had economic (and secret military) links with Germany
- Made defensive alliances in 1935 with France and Czechoslovakia, but weakened by Stalin's purge of the military 1936-8

Austria

- A German state, but had not become part of a united Germany
- By 1919 no longer a great power
- Anschluss forbidden at Versailles, but many Austrians favoured it



Poland

- A newly recreated state surrounded by potential enemies, the USSR and Germany
- Contained large German minorities
- By 1933 had developed a strong army
- Ruled by dictatorial nationalist government

Danzig

- Population 95 per cent German but administered by League of Nations

Czechoslovakia

- New Slav state; formerly ruled by Germans as part of Austro-Hungarian Empire
- Contained ethnic minorities, including 300,000 Sudeten Germans
- Successful democratic government
- In 1935 signed mutual assistance pacts with France and the USSR

Belgium

- Since 1920 had had military co-operation pact with France
- In August 1936 withdrew from French pact, declaring its neutrality
- Weak link in French security system?

Maginot Line

- French defensive barrier along western border
- Variable level of fortifications depending on terrain
- Constructed 1929-38
- Stopped at Belgian border, but Franco-Belgian agreement for French troops to move to Belgian-German/Dutch border if need be

South-east Europe

- Host of quarrelling small states, with many national minorities
- Area ripe for German economic expansion; governments keen to sell surplus agricultural products and to buy industrial goods

Japan

- Expansionist military government; possible threat to the USSR and the empires of Britain and France
- Potential ally for Fascist regimes
- In 1931 invaded Manchuria in China; League of Nations took no effective action
- In 1937 invaded the rest of China

USA

- Isolationist; in 1920 Senate failed to ratify the Treaty of Versailles

League of Nations

- International body set up to preserve peace and prevent aggression. Power to call for economic sanctions and military action by member states
- Members should submit disputes to League before taking up arms
- USA, USSR (until 1934) not members. Germany joined in 1926

Disarmament

- Major conference eventually met December 1932 but little happened

Little Entente

- France built up a series of alliances with powers (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania) that had gained from the Versailles settlement to defend the status quo against revisionist powers

General situation

- World trade slump dissolved international solidarity and fostered attitude of national insularity (narrowmindedness)
- Memories of horrors of the First World War so strong that many people and statesmen determined to avoid another war

ACTIVITY

Divide into groups. Each group should research one of the periods/events below and report back.

- 1933-5
- The Rhineland, 1936
- Austria, 1938
- Czechoslovakia, 1938-9
- The Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939
- Germany's relations with its allies

Offstage

Oct 1935 *Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia helps Hitler, since it diverts attention away from Germany; it moves Mussolini closer to Germany, and shows the feebleness of the League of Nations. It encourages Hitler to become more assertive*



C Key events and personnel in Hitler's foreign policy 1933-9

■ 20B Key steps in Hitler's foreign policy in 1933-9

- Oct 1933** Withdraws Germany from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations: Hitler resents the discrimination against Germany over armaments and dislikes the MULTILATERAL nature of the League of Nations, created at Versailles; but also makes conciliatory noises
- Jan 1934** Makes Non-Aggression Pact with Poland. A surprise move, given Germany's hostility to, and territorial claims on, Poland, but Hitler does not feel able yet to challenge Poland, and the agreement weakens the French security system
- Jul 1934** Austrian Nazis assassinate Chancellor Dolfuss in an attempt to unite Austria with Germany (*Anschluss*). Mussolini sends troops to the Brenner frontier and the attempt fails. Hitler has great influence over Austrian Nazis but disclaims any responsibility
- Jan 1935** As laid down at Versailles, plebiscite held in Saarland. Vote is overwhelmingly (90 per cent) in favour of rejoining Germany. Triumph for Hitler
- Mar 1935** One weekend Hitler announces Germany has a military air force; the next weekend he announces Germany will introduce conscription to build up an army of 750,000. Britain, France and Italy do nothing except denounce Germany and threaten action over further changes to the status quo
- Jun 1935** Germany makes Naval Agreement with Britain limiting its navy to 35 per cent of that of Britain. This bilateral agreement to modify the Versailles terms breaks the Stresa Front against Germany. Hitler hopes it will lead to a broader agreement with Britain
- Mar 1936** A force of 20,000 German troops marches into the demilitarised Rhineland. Hitler has rejected the advice of his generals and gambles on no French military reaction. Prepared to withdraw if opposed, but troops enter without challenge. Key turning point, since it emboldens Hitler
- July 1936** Hitler sends aid to General Franco's uprising in Spain
- Nov 1936** Axis and Anti-Comintern Pact. Hitler makes alliances with Italy and Japan. Hitler increases his military assistance to Franco in Spanish Civil War by sending the Condor Legion (including 5,000 men, 117 planes, 48 tanks). Germany gains military experience, economic concessions and closer links with Mussolini, who has also sent military aid
- Nov 1937** 'Hossbach Meeting': Hitler tells his generals of the need to increase rearmament to prepare for major war in mid 1940s
- Mar 1938** Hitler encourages Nazis' pressure in Austria. Chancellor Schuschnigg goes to Berlin to try to sort out the crisis, but is bullied into accepting new Nazi ministers. Schuschnigg calls a plebiscite on *Anschluss*. Hitler pressurises the government to postpone this, and to call for German intervention. German army invades and is well received. Hitler annexes Austria
- May 1938** Hitler encourages Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia to cause unrest. Czech government prepares for war
- Sept 1938** Chamberlain meets Hitler and arranges for transfer of Sudetenland to Germany. At second meeting, Hitler insists on immediate transfer, and prepares for war. Then he agrees to attend a conference at Munich where Sudetenland given to Germany by 10 October. Great triumph for Germany, though Hitler is disappointed, as he had hoped to attack and fully dismember Czechoslovakia
- Mar 1939** Hitler bullies Czechs into agreeing to German take-over of Bohemia-Moravia and German PROTECTORATE over Slovakia
- May 1939** Pact of Steel with Italy. Military support to be provided if either power at war
- Aug 1939** In response to Anglo-French guarantee of Poland and their attempt to make an agreement with the USSR, Ribbentrop signs the Nazi-Soviet Pact with USSR: ten years of non-aggression, and secret carve-up of Poland and Baltic states
- Sept 1939** Tension over Danzig escalates. Germany invades Poland on 1 September. Britain and France declare war. The USSR invades Poland from the east and Poland is crushed

Count Konstantin von Neurath 1873-1956: Foreign Minister 1932-8

A conservative aristocrat and career diplomat, Neurath became Foreign Minister under Papen in June 1932. President Hindenburg insisted he remain in Hitler's government. On 31 January 1933 he joined the Nazi Party and the SS. As Foreign Minister, Neurath had to contend for influence with the committed Nazis Rosenberg and Ribbentrop. After the 'Hossbach' conference, he criticised Hitler's expansionist plans and was dismissed in February 1938.

He was given a series of token posts, including Minister without Portfolio. In March 1939 he became Reich Protector of Bohemia-Moravia. He was convicted at the Nuremberg trials, and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment.

Explain the significance of the personnel changes in the army and foreign ministry in 1938.

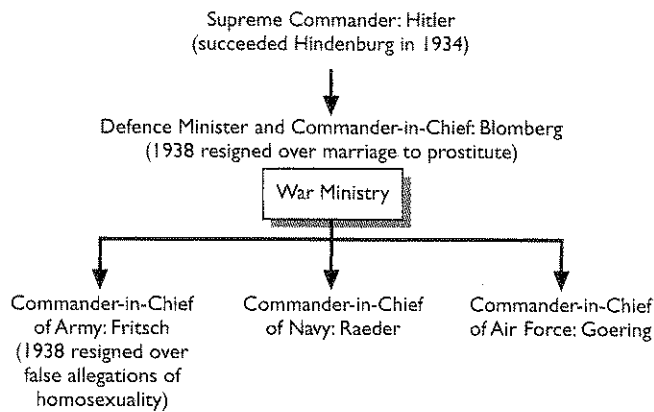
Who was involved in Hitler's diplomatic and military machine?

Many elements of continuity with the foreign policy of the Weimar governments can be seen in the early years of Hitler's regime. At first, Hitler used most of the Foreign Office personnel he inherited and Neurath remained Foreign Minister. Typically, however, alongside the official machinery there were various Nazi bodies (for example the Dienststelle (Bureau) Ribbentrop and Rosenberg's Foreign Affairs Department of the Nazi Party) and individuals to whom Hitler gave special missions.

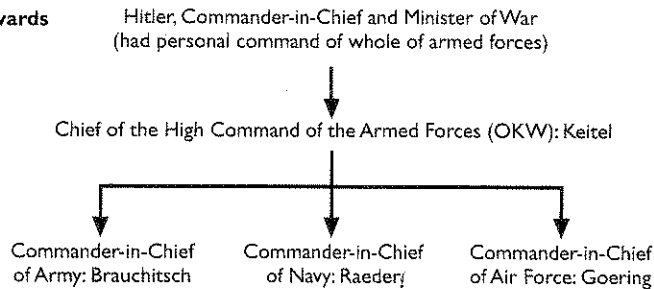
Once Hitler's regime had survived its period of vulnerability and his traditionally minded officials were becoming critical of his more ambitious plans, for example at the 'Hossbach' conference, Hitler made major changes in his military and diplomatic machines, increasing his own power and that of genuine Nazis. He set up a division of power at all levels below his own, as he had done in the political and economic spheres.

20C Hitler's increasing control of the army

a) 1934-7



b) 1938 onwards



Note: War Ministry abolished and replaced by Oberkommando (OKW), the High Command of the Armed Forces, headed by Hitler with day-to-day management by Keitel

Joachim von Ribbentrop 1893-1946: Foreign Minister, 1938-45

Ribbentrop was won over to the Nazis by the force of Hitler's personality and his vision for Germany. He was vain and domineering and was resented as an ambitious upstart, hence his nickname 'von Ribbensnob'. He was of middle-class origins and bought his noble status. He socialised amongst the German elite, including many Jews. However, Hitler was impressed by him, partly because he told Hitler what he wanted to hear.

From 1933, Hitler used him as an adviser on foreign policy. He set up the Bureau Ribbentrop as a rival to the Foreign Office. In 1934 Ribbentrop was made plenipotentiary for disarmament and an extraordinary ambassador. He had special powers and could bypass Neurath (Foreign Minister at the time) and go straight to Hitler.

In 1935 Ribbentrop negotiated the German-British naval agreement, and in August 1936 he was appointed ambassador to Britain. He hoped to arrange an alliance but was not helped by his arrogant, blustering behaviour, which included giving King George VI a Nazi salute. He became increasingly hostile to Britain, arguing that it was weak and would not resist German expansion. He was a strong supporter of the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. In February 1938 he replaced Neurath as Foreign Minister, a post he kept till 1945. During the war he lost influence, but he was found guilty of war crimes at Nuremberg and hanged in 1946.



D Why was Hitler able to smash the Versailles settlement?

We now focus on the four most important events in Hitler's foreign policy 1933-9.

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Explain how Hitler was able to remilitarise the Rhineland without Allied military intervention.
- 2 Explain the significance of this move.

SOURCE 20.9 Hitler's interpreter, Paul Schmidt, writing in 1949

More than once, even during the war, I heard Hitler say: 'The 48 hours after the march into the Rhineland were the most nerve-wracking in my life.' He always added, 'If the French had then marched into the Rhineland we would have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs, for the military resources at our disposal would have been completely inadequate for even moderate resistance.'

Remilitarisation of the Rhineland, March 1936

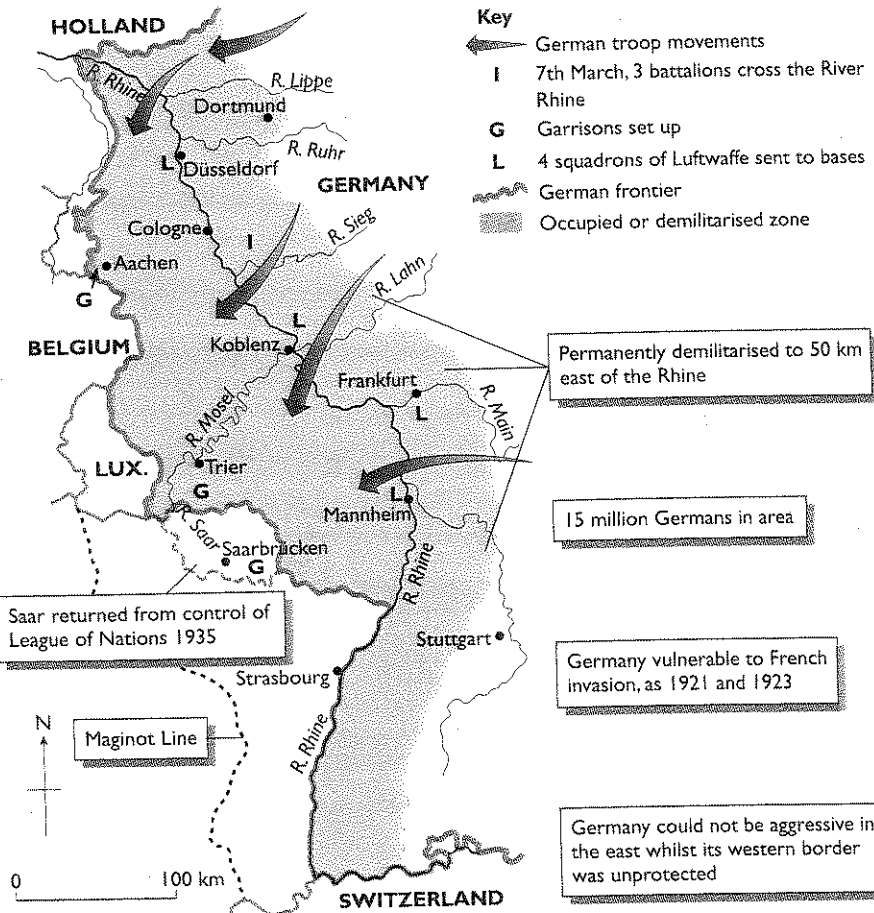
From 1933 to 1935 Hitler's approach was cautious, as Germany was in a weak position compared to its potential opponents. By 1935 Hitler felt secure enough to announce in public Germany's rearmament. He also sensed in parts of Europe a mood of reluctance to risk war in defence of a possibly unjust and outdated settlement. In 1936 Hitler raised the stakes higher by entering the Rhineland.

Why did the West not intervene?

In Britain, public opinion was hostile to military action. In January 1935 the British government decided that the Rhineland was not vital. It favoured negotiations, since Hitler offered a bulwark against Bolshevism. France was militarily too weak for offensive action. The French government had cut military expenditure by 17 per cent between 1930 and 1934 and had concentrated resources on building the defensive Maginot Line instead of modernising equipment. A general election was six weeks away and military action would be unpopular. In addition, Britain and France were quarrelling over their response to Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia. On 3 March the French government asked Britain for assurances of support over the Rhineland. Britain refused to give them.

20D The Rhineland 1936

The Rhineland was German territory run by the German government, but Germany did not exercise full SOVEREIGNTY, since under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles it was unable to fortify it



Hitler's aims

- To regain full control of the Rhineland
- To secure Germany's border against France, thus allowing greater assertion in the east

Timing

- Hitler originally planned to REMILITARISE the area in 1937, but in 1936 the international situation seemed favourable
- Domestically, Hitler needed to distract attention from economic problems caused by his increased rearmament programme
- He overrode the worries of generals and diplomats who considered it too risky

Events

- Hitler sent 14,000 lightly armed troops plus 22,000 local police into the Rhineland
- Most stayed on the east bank; only 3,000 went as far as the border near Aachen, Trier and Saarbrücken
- German troops had orders to withdraw if they met opposition. The French took no military action

Hitler's justification

The Rhineland was his own territory; he cited the 1935 French-Soviet alliance which he claimed broke the terms of Locarno; he offered non-aggression pacts

Permanently demilitarised to 50 km east of the Rhine

15 million Germans in area

Germany vulnerable to French invasion, as 1921 and 1923

Germany could not be aggressive in the east whilst its western border was unprotected

Saar returned from control of League of Nations 1935

Maginot Line

TAGS: HISTORY, POLITICS

Is it a clear 'lesson' from history that all dictators should be resisted before it is too late?

SOURCE ACTIVITY

(Marks are given in brackets.)

- 1 Explain the references in Source 20.10 to
 - a) the Rhine Pact
 - b) the 'Reich's western provinces'
 - c) Lebensraum. [6]
- 2 Why do you think Hitler dissolved the Reichstag? [2]
- 3 How does Hitler seek to justify his actions? [2]
- 4 What view does Hitler take of territorial changes in Europe? [5]
- 5 With reference to the provenance, content and tone of this speech, explain what you consider might be Hitler's purpose in making it. [5]
- 6 What qualities of Hitler as a politician and statesman does this address show? [5]

(Total: 25 marks)

Effects

Hitler's prestige, at home and abroad, soared. He dissolved the Reichstag on 7 March and on 29 March held a plebiscite asking the German people to approve his remilitarisation of the Rhineland. Ninety-nine per cent of the electorate voted; and of them 98.8 per cent voted in favour of Hitler's action. Abroad, other threatened regimes now distrusted British and especially French resolve. Some felt they would have to be conciliatory towards Germany. Germany, secure on its western border, now felt it was safer to expand in the east. Hitler began to construct a fortification line, the West Wall, on the French border. Resistance might have persuaded Hitler to withdraw or led to a minor war that Germany would have lost, but would probably not have caused a major war.

SOURCE 20.10 Hitler justifies his actions in a special address to the Reichstag on Saturday 7 March 1936

The German Government has continually emphasised during the negotiations of the last years its readiness to observe and fulfil all the obligations arising from the Rhine Pact so long as the other contracting parties were ready on their side to maintain the pact. This obvious and essential condition can no longer be regarded as being fulfilled by France. France has replied to Germany's repeated friendly offers and assurances of peace by infringing the Rhine Pact through a military alliance with the Soviet Union directed exclusively against Germany. In this manner, however, the Locarno Rhine Pact has lost its inner meaning and ceased in practice to exist. Consequently, Germany regards herself for her part as no longer bound by this dissolved Treaty. The German Government is now constrained to face the new situation created by this alliance, a situation which is rendered more acute by the fact that the Franco-Soviet Treaty has been supplemented by a Treaty of Alliance between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union exactly parallel in form. In accordance with the fundamental right of a nation to secure its frontiers and ensure its possibilities of defence, the German Government has today restored the full and unrestricted sovereignty of Germany in the demilitarised zone of the Rhineland.

In order, however, to avoid any misinterpretation of its intentions and to establish beyond doubt the purely defensive character of these measures, as well as to express its unalterable longing for a real PACIFICATION of Europe between states equal in rights and equally respected, the German Government declares itself ready to conclude new agreements for the creation of a system of peaceful security for Europe . . . In this historic hour when German troops are presently occupying their future garrisons of peace in the Reich's western provinces, we may all join together to stand by two sacred, inner vows:

First, to the oath that we shall never yield to any power or any force in restoring the honour of our Volk and would rather perish honourably from the gravest distress than ever capitulate. Secondly, to the vow that now more than ever we shall dedicate ourselves to achieving an understanding between the peoples of Europe . . . After three years, I believe that today the struggle for German equality of rights can be deemed concluded . . .

We have no territorial claims to make in Europe. Above all, we are aware that all the tensions resulting either from erroneous territorial provisions or from the disproportion between the size of the population and its Lebensraum can never be solved by wars in Europe. However, we do hope that human insight will help to alleviate the painfulness of this state of affairs and relieve tensions by means of a gradual evolutionary development marked by peaceful co-operation . . . I have come to the decision to dissolve the Reichstag so that the German Volk may pass its judgement on my leadership and that of my co-workers. In these three years, Germany has regained once more its honour, found once more a faith, overcome its greatest economic crisis, and ushered in a new cultural ascent. I believe I can say this as my conscience and God are my witnesses. I now ask the German Volk to strengthen me in my belief and to continue giving me, through the power of its will, power of my own to take a courageous stand at all times for its honour and freedom and to ensure its economic well-being; above all, to support me in my struggle for real peace.

ACTIVITY

- 1 'A wild gamble.' Explain whether you agree with this view of Hitler's action over the Rhineland.
- 2 'The West could and should have stopped Hitler's remilitarisation of the Rhineland.' Argue the pros and cons of this view.

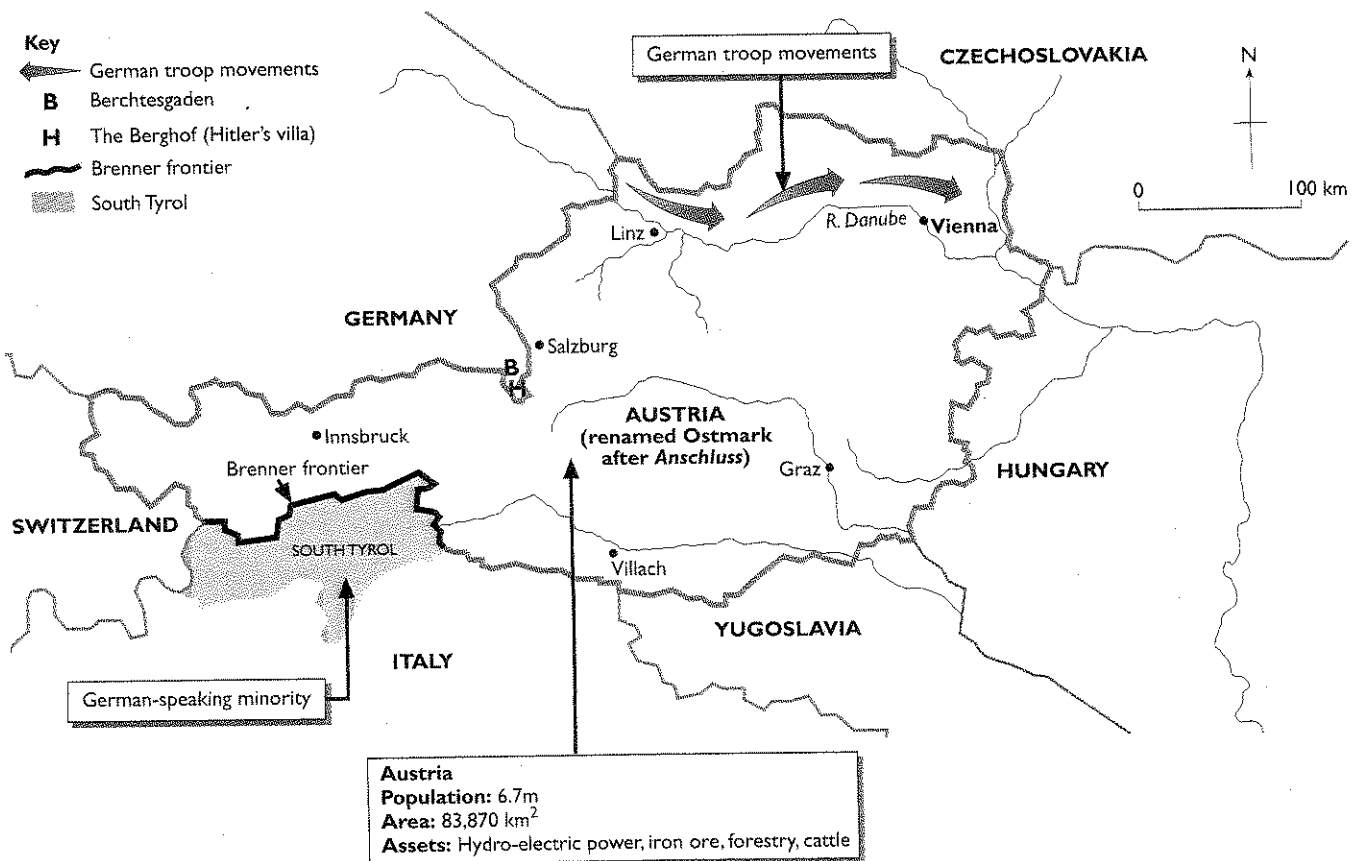
FOCUS ROUTE

Explain how and why Hitler was able to achieve *Anschluss* in March 1938.

Anschluss: the union of Austria with Germany

After his success in the Rhineland Hitler next turned his eyes to Austria. With his opponents far from united, Hitler saw opportunities to increase German influence in Austria. Versailles had banned *Anschluss*, although at the time the majority of Austrians probably favoured it. When the Nazis came to power, *Anschluss* seemed more possible but less attractive to many Austrians. An Austrian Nazi coup was suppressed in 1934 and Kurt von Schuschnigg established a right-wing government. In July 1936 an Austro-German Agreement saw Germany promising to respect Austrian independence, while Austria agreed to have a policy 'based always on the principle that Austria acknowledges herself to be a German state', and the National Opposition (Austrian pro-Nazis) would be given a role in government. By 1938 problems in the Austrian economy, still badly hit by the Depression, encouraged support for joining the more prosperous Germany. In 1937 Germany had sounded out opinion in Italy, Britain and France over closer German-Austrian links and had received indications that these countries would not resist German control of Austria.

20E Austria and its neighbours

**Italy**

In 1934 Italy had mobilised along the Brenner frontier to resist a possible German take-over of Austria. By November 1937 Mussolini, moving increasingly into Hitler's orbit, said he would not move against Germany over Austria

France

On 10 March 1938 Camille Chautemps' government fell, so there was no effective government during the crisis

Britain

The Foreign Minister Anthony Eden supported a strong line, but others thought the issue less important. The government gave no serious warning throughout the tension of winter-spring 1937-8

Key characters

Kurt von Schuschnigg – right-wing Austrian Chancellor
 Artur Seyss-Inquart – adviser to Schuschnigg but pro-Nazi; passed information to Hitler; became Austrian Chancellor and invited Nazis in
 Wilhelm Miklas – Austrian President
 Franz von Papen – German Ambassador in Vienna
 Hermann Goering – eager to gain Austria's economic resources; conveyed Hitler's demands to Austria via the telephone

Hitler favoured an evolutionary extension of German influence but encouraged Austrian Nazis to stir up trouble. This would provoke a reaction from the Austrian government to restore order, which could be used as an excuse for German intervention.

12 February 1938

Papen arranged for Schuschnigg to meet Hitler to discuss growing tension. Hitler bombarded him with a two-hour speech, insisting on German domination of Austria and demanding he immediately sign a document agreeing to this. Surrounded by German generals, the intimidated Schuschnigg signed a document appointing Seyss-Inquart as Interior Minister and agreeing to co-ordinate economic and military policy with Germany. Hitler was content with what he had achieved for the time being.

9 March 1938

Schuschnigg, alarmed at growing Nazi power, called a plebiscite on Austrian independence, hoping for popular support against *Anschluss* and to undermine Hitler's position. The plebiscite asked for approval of the statement: 'With Schuschnigg for Austria, we want a free and a German Austria, an independent and a social Austria, a Christian and a united Austria.'

11 March 1938

Hitler was furious but hesitant over what action to take. Goering argued for a tough line, and Hitler demanded the plebiscite be cancelled; otherwise, Germany would invade. Schuschnigg backed down. Goering pressed home the climb-down and demanded Schuschnigg's resignation as Chancellor. He agreed. President Miklas refused at first to appoint Seyss-Inquart to replace him, but eventually gave in. Goering then dictated by telephone the composition of a new Austrian government headed by Seyss-Inquart. Despite this, Hitler, wary of how much control he would have, decided to invade. Goering told Seyss-Inquart to request the entry of German troops. In a radio broadcast Schuschnigg told the Austrians not to resist.

12 March 1938

At dawn, German troops entered Austria. There was no resistance. In the afternoon, Hitler was well received by the Austrian crowds. Hitler decided to go further than just securing a SATELLITE GOVERNMENT and to absorb Austria into Germany. The new Austrian government issued a law on the Reunion of Austria with the German Reich, making Austria a province of Germany (*Ostmark*). Thousands were arrested. Jews were attacked. Hitler dissolved the Austrian Reichstag and held a plebiscite on 10 April, when 48.8 million (99 per cent of Germans and Austrians) voted 'yes' for union. In April, Britain recognised the enlarged Germany.

SOURCE 20.11 Austria welcomes the *Anschluss* in March 1938



Primary sources on the Anschluss

Sources 20.12-16, relating to a 24-hour period, reveal in fascinating detail Hitler's methods and suggest the general mood of the international community.

SOURCE 20.12 Schuschnigg's account of Hitler's remarks to him at their meeting, as described in his memoirs, *Austrian Requiem*, 1947

You have done everything to avoid a friendly policy ... The whole history of Austria is just one uninterrupted act of high treason ... I am absolutely determined to make an end of all this. The German Reich is one of the great powers, and nobody will raise his voice if it settles its border problems ...

I have a historic mission, and this mission I will fulfil because Providence has destined me to do so ... Who is not with me will be crushed ... I have made the greatest achievement in the history of Germany, greater than any other German. And not by force, mind you. I am carried along by the love of my people ... I am telling you that I am going to solve the so-called Austrian problem one way or the other ... I have only to give the order and your ridiculous defence mechanism will be blown to bits ...

Don't think for one moment that anybody on earth is going to thwart my decisions. Italy? I see eye to eye with Mussolini ... England? England will not move one finger for Austria. And France? France could have stopped Germany in the Rhineland, and we would have had to retreat. But now it is too late for France ... Think it over, Herr Schuschnigg, think it over well. I can only wait until this afternoon.

SOURCE 20.13 Britain's response on 11 March to Schuschnigg's request for advice, recorded in *British Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*

His Majesty's government cannot take responsibility for advising the Chancellor to take any course of action which might expose his country to dangers against which [it is] unable to guarantee protection.

SOURCE 20.14 Transcript (recorded in shorthand by Goering's Research Department) of the telephone call from Goering to his agent Wilhelm Keppler, the evening of 11 March 1938

Goering: 'The main thing is that Seyss-Inquart takes charge of all the functions of government now; that he secures the broadcasting facilities et cetera. And listen - Seyss is to send the following telegram to us. Take it down. "The provisional Austrian government, which after the resignation of the Schuschnigg cabinet sees its duty in the re-establishment of law and order in Austria, urgently asks the German Government to send German troops into Austria as quickly as possible."

SOURCE 20.15 Schuschnigg's description in his memoirs of what happened in the Austrian Chancellery, 11 March

Suddenly I noticed a number of young people in the hall again with that close-cropped haircut. One young man brushed past me without an apology. He turned around and looked me up and down with a purposely offensive, superior smile. Then he went on and slammed the door as if he were at home. I stared after him, and suddenly I realised: Invasion! Not at the borders as yet, but here, in the Chancellery: the Gestapo.

SOURCE 20.16 An interview with Hitler on 12 March by the journalist Ward Price of the *Daily Mail*

What injustice have we done to any country, whose interests have we violated, when we concur with the desire of the overwhelming majority of the Austrian population to be Germans? These people here are Germans ...

I assure you in all earnestness that, four days ago, I had no inkling of any of what was to happen today or that Austria was to become a German land, just as Bavaria or Saxony. I did this because I was deceived by Herr Schuschnigg, and deception is something I will not tolerate. When I shake hands and give my word on something, then I adhere to it.

SOURCE ACTIVITY

(Marks are given in brackets.)

- 1 With reference to its content and tone, explain what Source 20.12 shows about Hitler's views of Germany and his own role. [3]
- 2 To what extent does Source 20.13 justify Hitler's assessment of foreign reactions to Anschluss? [4]
- 3 What do Sources 20.12, 20.14 and 20.15 reveal about the methods used by the Nazi government to achieve Anschluss? [4]
- 4 With reference to their origins, discuss the value of Sources 20.12 and 20.14 as evidence about Hitler's methods. [4]
- 5 'A useful insight into Hitler's approach to foreign policy.' How far do you agree with this comment on Source 20.16? [4]
- 6 How well do these sources explain why Hitler achieved Anschluss without using force? [6]

(Total: 25 marks)

Historians' assessment of Hitler and the Anschluss

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SOURCE 20.17 Bullock, 'Hitler and the Origins of the Second World War', 1967; a lecture, reprinted in *Origins of the Second World War*, ed. M. Robertson, 1971, pp. 204–5

The Anschluss seems to me to provide, almost in caricature, a striking example of that extraordinary combination of consistency in aim, calculation and patience in preparation with opportunism, impulse and improvisation in execution which I regard as characteristic of Hitler's policy.

The aim in this case was never in doubt; the demand for the incorporation of Austria in the Reich appears on the first page of Mein Kampf...

No doubt the Anschluss is an exceptional case. On later occasions the plans were ready: dates by which both the Czech and Polish crises must be brought to a solution were fixed well in advance, and nothing like the same degree of improvisation was necessary. But in all the major crises of Hitler's career there is the same impression of confusion at the top, springing directly (as his generals and aides complained) from his own hesitations and indecision.

SOURCE 20.18 William Carr, *Arms, Autarky and Aggression*, 1972, p. 84

The invasion and annexation of Austria... was an unexpected development. When Schuschnigg... announced on 9th March the holding of a plebiscite to enable the Austrians to determine their own future, he precipitated a crisis which forced Hitler's hand... Because Anschluss was an essential preliminary to eastward expansion, Schuschnigg's initiative threatened to sabotage Hitler's whole programme...

When news arrived of the cancellation of the plebiscite Hitler was easily persuaded by Goering, the leading protagonist [advocate] of a violent solution, to exploit the advantage and oust Schuschnigg from power. Ribbentrop's confident assertion that Britain would not intervene played its part in the decision to force the pace of events...

... Only after receiving a tumultuous reception in Linz did he abandon the idea of a satellite government under Seyss-Inquart and decide on annexation.

SOURCE 20.19 I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, third edition, 1993, p. 119

In the actual Anschluss crisis which unfolded in March 1938 it was Goering rather than Hitler who pushed the pace along, probably because of his interest in seizing economic assets.

SOURCE 20.20 C. Thorne, *The Approach of War 1938–39*, 1973, p. 35

It was... the most improvised in its execution, an apparent lesson of the easy triumphs to be obtained by ruthless pressure and swift action in the face of a critical but passive Europe.

ACTIVITY

1 Read Sources 20.12 and 20.17–20 and identify how the following contributed to the German take-over of Austria:

- Hitler's long-term aims
- Hitler's use of intimidation
- the influence of other individuals
- economic factors
- the international context
- other factors.

2 Why does Bullock consider Anschluss such an important event?

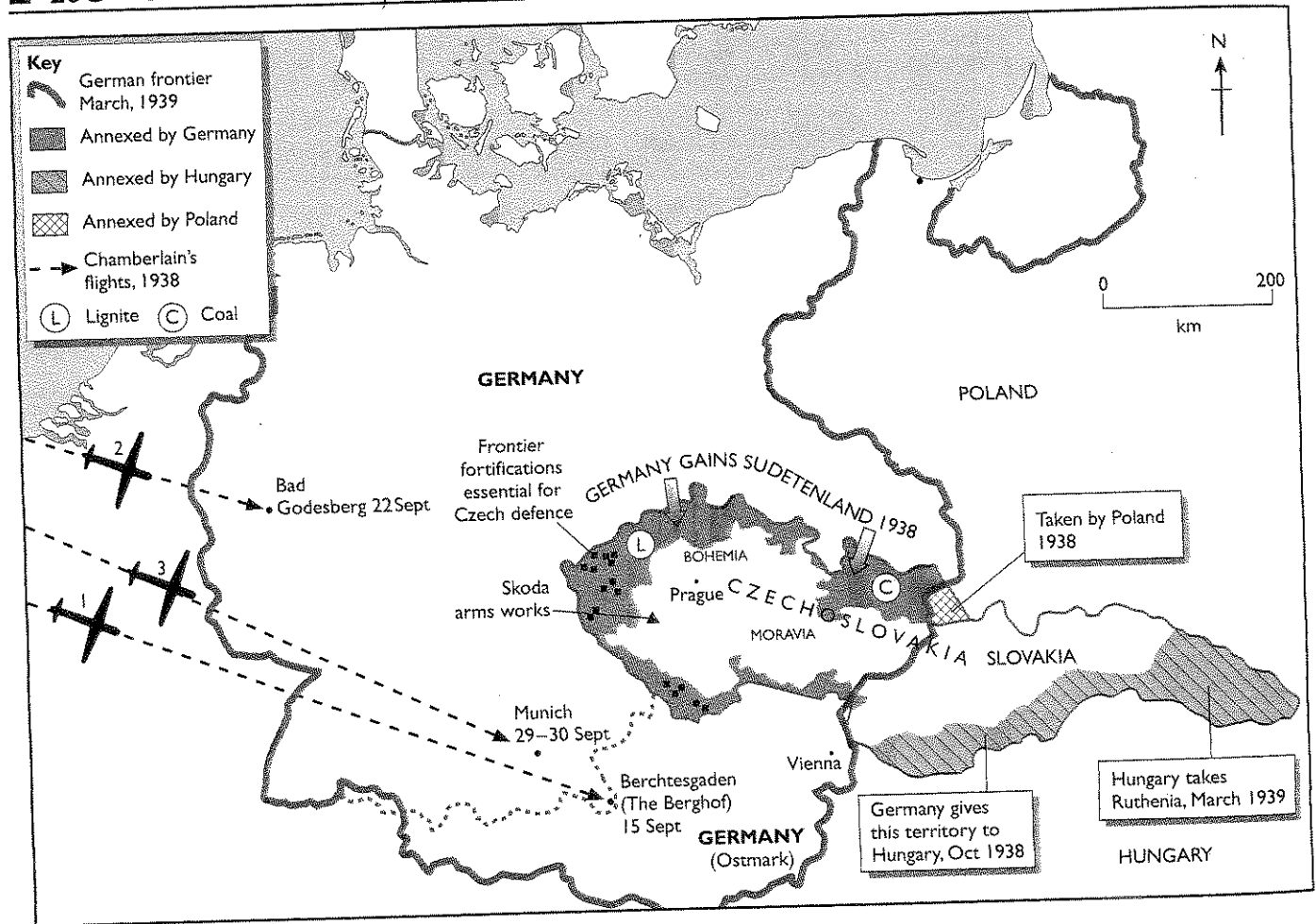
Czechoslovakia: September 1938–March 1939

FOCUS ROUTE

Explain how Hitler gained control of Czechoslovakia without war.

Hitler's attention turned to Czechoslovakia after his *Anschluss* triumph. This democratic state created by Versailles was to be dismembered by whatever means necessary. Czechoslovakia was a member of the League of Nations and had been allied to France since 1924 and to the Soviet Union since 1935. However, these two countries had no borders with Czechoslovakia, and Poland and Romania would not allow Soviet troops through their territory to assist Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia's other weakness lay in the large minorities within its population. There were 2 million Slovaks, Poles and Hungarians who wanted autonomy and 3 million Germans in the area known as the Sudetenland.

20G The destruction of Czechoslovakia



Hitler's strategy

- Use the argument of the Sudeten Germans' right to SELF-DETERMINATION in order to undermine the Czech state, then conquer it
- Threaten war to persuade the weak West to let him dismember Czechoslovakia

Key characters

- Eduard Benes, Czech Prime Minister
- Emil Hacha, Czech President
- Konrad Henlein, leader of the Sudeten German Party
- Bela Tuka, leader of the Slovaks

European context

- France: generally followed lead taken by Britain
- Britain: Prime Minister Chamberlain determined to avoid war and viewed Czechoslovakia as unimportant; he considered the transferring of the Sudetenland to Germany reasonable, and that it was Hitler's last territorial demand

■ 20H The destruction of Czechoslovakia in two moves

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MOVE ONE: 1938

1938

Early in 1938, Henlein complains at mistreatment of the German minority by Czechs. On 28 March Hitler tells Henlein to make demands that the Czech government cannot accept

20–22 May 1938

War scare. Czechs mobilise against feared German invasion. Hitler denies he is planning to invade. The lack of a German attack looks like a victory for Czechoslovakia over Hitler

30 May 1938

Hitler orders plans to smash Czechoslovakia by 1 October. Throughout summer, German propaganda campaign against Czechoslovakia

12 September 1938

Hitler attacks Czechoslovakia in a speech at Nuremberg. He hopes for a Sudeten German rising, but it does not occur. The French government urges Chamberlain to try to negotiate a settlement. Hitler agrees to the idea of a meeting

15 September 1938

Chamberlain flies to see Hitler at the Berghof, his house on the Obersalzberg, near Berchtesgaden. He agrees that Czechoslovakia should cede all areas over 50 per cent German. The British and French pressurise the Czechs to agree. Hitler hopes the Czechs will refuse, so they will be isolated

22 September 1938

Chamberlain succeeds in pressurising Benes to accept Hitler's demands. Confident that the crisis is over, Chamberlain meets Hitler at Bad Godesberg. Hitler now raises his demands; he wants the Sudetenland by 1 October. Talks break down. Major fear of war in Europe. Chamberlain persuades Mussolini to arrange conference at Munich. The views of the German generals and Goering, the lack of German public enthusiasm for war and Mussolini's views all help persuade Hitler to agree to attend the proposed conference

29–30 September 1938

Four Power Conference at Munich: Britain, France, Germany, Italy. (Czechoslovakia and the USSR are not invited.) Agree to the German occupation of the Sudetenland between 1 and 10 October, followed by plebiscites in mixed areas, and international guarantees of Czechoslovakia

German troops occupy the Sudetenland. Benes resigns and goes into exile. On 10 October Poles take Teschen district. The plebiscites agreement is ignored

Effects

- Czechoslovakia loses 41,000 sq km, including its richest industrial sites and its strongly fortified border; its communications system is disrupted. Czechoslovakia is no longer able to take on Germany militarily
- Germany gains major economic and military resources
- Hitler's domestic popularity increases and the plans of some generals to replace Hitler if he has a diplomatic setback are ruined. It boosts Hitler's confidence as the West appears feeble
- Generally, the USSR sees appeasement as evidence that the West will not stand up to Hitler, so it reinforces the Soviet idea of doing a separate deal with Germany. The French alliance system is broken and this classic example of appeasement, by encouraging further German expansion, contributes greatly to the Second World War

MOVE TWO: THE FINAL DESTRUCTION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA: 1939

1 October 1938

The German army draws up fresh plans for attacking Czechoslovakia. Hitler encourages Poles, Romanians and Hungarians to demand pieces of Czechoslovakia, and Slovaks to demand autonomy

February 1939

Hitler meets Bela Tuka, the Slovak leader, and tells him to demand Slovakia's complete separation from Czechoslovakia. President Hacha declares MARTIAL LAW to try to stop the break-up of Czechoslovakia. He dismisses the Slovak government, and sends troops into Slovakia to crush unrest stirred up by the Nazis

13 March 1939

Hitler demands Slovakia declare its independence or it will be taken over by Hungary. Next day, the Slovak government complies

14 March 1939

President Hacha, in desperation, goes to Berlin to see Hitler. Hitler keeps him waiting till 1.15 a.m. whilst he finishes watching a film. Hitler demands Hacha agree to split Czechoslovakia otherwise German troops will enter Czechoslovakia within a few hours. At 4 a.m. Hacha gives in. Bohemia–Moravia to become a German protectorate, while Slovakia to remain nominally independent

15 March 1939

German troops march into Prague; Bohemia–Moravia is incorporated into the Reich

16 March 1939

Slovakia asks for German protection; German troops are sent to establish the satellite state of Slovakia. The Hungarians take over Ruthenia

Effects

- Germany makes major economic gains, especially Skoda armaments works
- Hitler has for the first time conquered non-German territory
- The West's belief in Hitler's moderation is weakened. Britain resolves to resist further German moves

WHY WAS HITLER'S FOREIGN POLICY SO SUCCESSFUL 1933–9?

Primary sources on the crisis over the Sudetenland, 1938

SOURCE 20.21 After a conference with his generals on 28 May, Hitler signed a new plan on 30 May

Political assumptions: It is my unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future. It is the business of the political leadership to await or bring about the suitable moment from a political and military point of view.

An unavoidable development of events within Czechoslovakia, or other political events in Europe providing a suddenly favourable opportunity which may never recur, may cause me to take action.

The proper choice and determined exploitation of a favourable moment is the surest guarantee of success. To this end preparations are to be made immediately...

Most favourable from a military as well as a political point of view would be lightning action as the result of an incident, which would subject Germany to unbearable provocation and which, in the eyes of at least part of world opinion, affords the moral justification for military measures.

SOURCE 20.22 Hitler speaking at the Nuremberg Nazi Party rally, 12 September 1938

Czechoslovakia... is a democratic state, founded on democratic lines by forcing other nationalities without asking them into a structure manufactured at Versailles. As good democrats they began to oppress and mishandle the majority of the inhabitants... Among the nationalities being suppressed in this State are 3,500,000 Germans... These Germans are the creatures of God... That conditions in this nation are unbearable is generally known. Three and a half million were robbed in the name of a certain Mr Wilson [US President] of their right to self-determination. Economically these people were deliberately ruined and afterwards handed over to a slow process of extermination. The misery of the Sudeten Germans is without end.

SOURCE 20.23 German Foreign Office record of Hitler's meeting with the Hungarian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister on 21 September 1938

He, the Führer, was determined to settle the Czech question even at risk of a world war. Germany demanded the entire German area. He was convinced that neither England nor France would intervene. It was Hungary's last opportunity to join in...

In his opinion the best thing would be to destroy Czechoslovakia. In the long run it was quite impossible to tolerate the existence of this aircraft carrier in the heart of Europe. In [the Führer's] opinion action taken by the Army would provide the only satisfactory solution. There was, however, the danger of the Czechs submitting to every demand.

SOURCE 20.24 Weizsäcker, State Secretary in the German Foreign Ministry, wrote in his diary, 9 October 1938

... We appeared to have won the game when Chamberlain announced his visit to the Obersalzberg in order to preserve peace. This represented a rejection of Czechoslovakia's crisis politics. One could have reached an agreement without difficulty, on the basis of English mediation, about how the Sudetenland was to be split off and transferred to us in a peaceful manner.

However, we were dominated by the determination to have a war of revenge and destruction against Czechoslovakia. Thus, we conducted the second phase of discussions with Chamberlain in Bad Godesberg in such a way that, despite our basic agreement, what had been decided was bound to fail. The group who wanted war, namely Ribbentrop and the SS, had nearly succeeded in prompting the Führer to attack. Among numerous similar statements made by the Führer in my presence during the night of 27-28 September was one to the effect that he would now annihilate Czechoslovakia. Ribbentrop and I were the sole witnesses of these words: they were not designed to have an effect on a third party.

Thus, the assumption that the Führer was intending a huge bluff is incorrect. His resentment stemming from 22 May, when the English accused him of pulling back, led him on to the path of war. I have not quite managed to establish what influences then finally decided him to issue invitations to the four power meeting in Munich on 28 September and thereby to leave the path of war. Naturally one can find 100 different reasons for this change of course...

Two factors were probably decisive: (a) His observation that our people regarded the approach of war with a silent obstructiveness and were far from enthusiastic (Dr Goebbels said that loudly to the Führer at table in the Reich Chancellery over the heads of all those present), and (b) Mussolini's appeal at the last moment, i.e. on the morning of the 28th, when the mobilisation was planned for 2 p.m. The idea of a four power conference was first mentioned in my presence by the Führer and received general and warm approval with the exception of those referred to above. Herr von Ribbentrop was still working against the agreement on the evening of the 28th and on the 29th, since he obviously considered war to be the best solution.

SOURCE ACTIVITY

(Marks are given in brackets.)

- 1 What light does Source 20.21 shed on Hitler's foreign policy methods? [3]
- 2 Study Sources 20.22-24. What reasons does Hitler give for wanting war against Czechoslovakia? [3]
- 3 With reference to the origins and tone of Source 20.22, what can be inferred about Hitler's purpose in making this speech? [4]
- 4 What aspects of Hitler's strategy are revealed in Source 20.23? [3]
- 5 With reference to the provenance, content and style of Source 20.24, assess its value as evidence for the nature of German foreign policy in 1938. [7]

(Total: 20 marks)

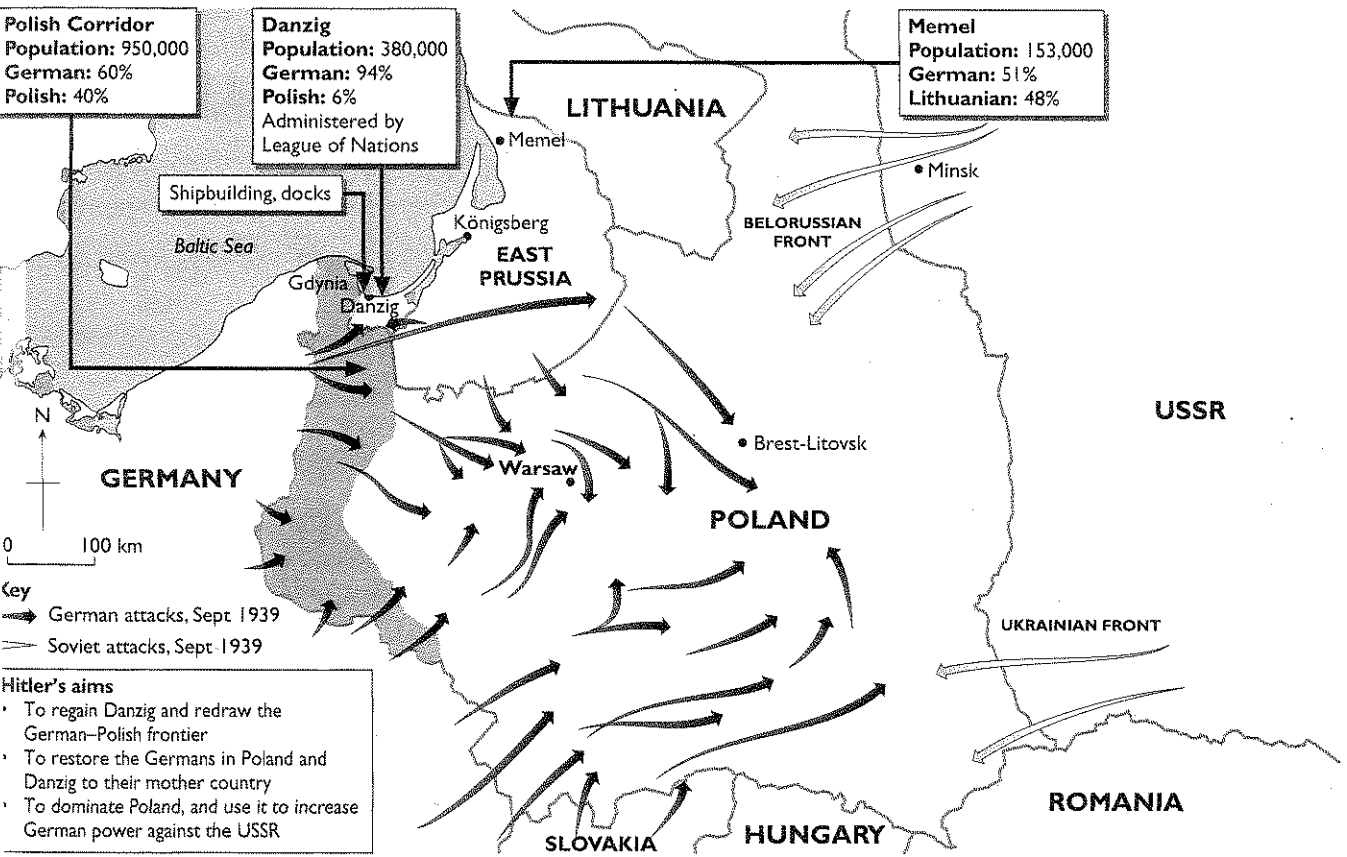
FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Explain Hitler's policy towards Poland in 1939.
- 2 Assess how successful it was.

Poland and the outbreak of war, September 1939

Poland was the next target for Hitler. He had negotiated a Non-Aggression Pact with Poland in 1934 but had no qualms about breaking it. In March 1939 Germany demanded that Lithuania return Memel (lost in 1919). On 23 March, Lithuania was forced to agree, and Germany annexed Memel. Hitler continued to pressurise Poland. He claimed Germans were being mistreated and demanded the return of Danzig, together with a rail-and-road route through the corridor to East Prussia. Negotiations were possible, but Poland took a hard line, especially after 31 March 1939 when Chamberlain, convinced now that Hitler could not be trusted, announced a British guarantee of Poland. This was intended to be the first part of a comprehensive security system in the east. (Britain later extended her guarantee to Greece and Romania.) Hitler was furious because the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland reduced his chances of bullying Poland into submission.

20I Poland 1939



20J Key events

Apr 1939 Hitler orders a plan to be drawn up to attack Poland
lay Hitler signs Pact of Steel with Italy to give mutual assistance if either side is at war

3 May Hitler decides on war against Poland; he still considers Britain and France will not intervene. He develops contacts with the USSR over a possible alliance to counter Anglo-French-Soviet talks

2 Aug Hitler addresses his generals; he says he has always been right; the international situation is favourable; it will be less so in two or three years; his only fear is last minute mediation plans, as at Munich in 1938

3 Aug Ribbentrop goes to Moscow with full authority to negotiate an agreement. The Nazi-Soviet Pact publicly stipulates non-aggression for ten years and makes economic agreements. In secret PROTOCOLS, each agrees to help the other if there is war against Poland; they share out spheres of influence in eastern Europe. On the same day, Hitler orders the attack for 26 August, then postpones it until 1 September, since on

25 August Britain RATIFIES its guarantee to Poland, and Mussolini says Italy is not ready to fight. There is possibly a chance of negotiations, but they ultimately fail. Hitler is probably set on invading

31 Aug SS troops, dressed as Polish soldiers, 'attack' a German border radio post, leaving behind dead concentration camp prisoners in Polish uniforms. This 'Polish' provocation is used to justify war

1 Sept Germany invades Poland

3 Sept Britain and France declare war after the expiry of an ultimatum for Germany to withdraw. Hitler is caught by surprise; his intended local war is turning into a far broader war. But, despite declaring war, Britain and France are unable to take any real action to help Poland

17 Sept The USSR invades Poland from the east: Poland is crushed. Hitler is dissuaded by his generals from immediately turning west to smash France; he launches the western war in May 1940

The Nazi-Soviet Pact

This agreement between Germany and the USSR was, on the face of it, an amazing about turn, since Hitler had always stressed that the Soviet Union was his main enemy, ruled by Jewish Bolsheviks and inferior Slavs and occupying Germany's *Lebensraum*. But in many ways it was a master stroke, as it left Poland isolated, ruined attempts by the West to bring the USSR into a formal alliance against Germany, and thus avoided the danger of a war on two major fronts. Germany gained vital raw materials from the Soviet Union that relieved her domestic economic problems and helped her rearmament drive. Hitler was prepared to break the agreement whenever he wanted.

SOURCE 20.25 Hitler's speech to his commanders, 22 August 1939. This version is based on notes taken by Admiral Canaris, since no official minutes were kept

It was clear to me that a conflict with Poland had to come sooner or later. I had already made this decision in the spring, but I thought that I would first turn against the West in a few years, and only after that against the East. But the sequence of these things cannot be fixed. Nor should one close one's eyes to threatening situations. I wanted first of all to establish a tolerable relationship with Poland in order to fight first against the West. But this plan, which appealed to me, could not be executed, as fundamental points had changed. It became clear to me that, in the event of a conflict with the West, Poland would attack us. Poland is striving for access to the sea. The further development appeared after the occupation of the Memel Territory and it became clear to me that in certain circumstances a conflict with Poland might come at an inopportune [unfavourable] moment. I give as reasons for this conclusion, first of all two personal factors: My own personality and that of Mussolini. Essentially all depends on me, on my existence, because of my political talents. Furthermore, the fact [is] that probably no one will ever again have the confidence of the whole German people as I have. There will probably never again in the future be a man with more authority than I have. My existence is therefore a factor of great value. But I can be eliminated at any time by a criminal or a lunatic. The second personal factor is the DUCE. His existence is also decisive. If anything happens to him, Italy's loyalty to the alliance will no longer be certain. It is easy for us to make decisions. We have nothing to lose; we have everything to gain. Because of our restrictions our economic situation is such that we can only hold out for a few more years. Goering can confirm this. We have no other choice, we must act. Our opponents will be risking a great deal and can gain only a little. Our enemies have leaders who are below the average. No personalities. No masters, no men of action.

Besides the personal factors, the political situation is favourable for us: in the Mediterranean, rivalry between Italy, France and England; in the Far East, tension between Japan and England; in the Middle East, tension which causes alarm in the Mohammedan world. All these favourable circumstances will no longer prevail in two or three years' time. No one knows how much longer I shall live. Therefore, better a conflict now.

The creation of Greater Germany was a great achievement politically, but militarily it was doubtful, since it was achieved by bluff on the part of the political leaders. It is necessary to test the military machine. If at all possible, not in a general reckoning, but by the accomplishment of individual tasks.

The relationship with Poland has become unbearable. My Polish policy hitherto was contrary to the views of the people. My proposals to Poland were frustrated by England's intervention. Poland changed her attitude towards us. A permanent state of tension is intolerable. The power of initiative cannot be allowed to pass to others. The present moment is more favourable than in two or three years' time. An attempt on my life or Mussolini's could change that situation to our disadvantage. One cannot for ever face one another with rifles cocked. The probability is still great that the West will not intervene. We must take the risk with ruthless determination.

The enemy had another hope, that Russia would become our enemy after the conquest of Poland. The enemy did not reckon with my great strength of purpose.

Our enemies are little worms; I came to know them in Munich. I brought about the change towards Russia gradually. The day after tomorrow von Ribbentrop will conclude the treaty. Now Poland is in the position in which I wanted her. We need not be afraid of a blockade. The East will supply us with grain, cattle, coal, lead and zinc. It is a mighty aim, which demands great efforts. I am only afraid that at the last moment some swine or other will yet submit to me a plan for mediation.

The political objective goes further. A start has been made on the destruction of England's hegemony [domination]. The way will be open for the soldiers after I have made the political preparations . . .

SOURCE 20.26 Hitler's second address later that day

No shrinking back from anything. Everyone must hold the view that we have been determined to fight the Western Powers right from the start. A life and death struggle. Germany has won every war when she was united. An inflexible, unflinching bearing, above all on the part of superiors, firm confidence, belief in victory overcoming the past by becoming accustomed to the heaviest burdens. A long period of peace would not do us any good. It is therefore necessary to be prepared for anything. A manly bearing. It is not machines that fight each other, but men. We have better men as regards quality. Spiritual factors are decisive.

On the opposite side they are weaker men. The nation collapsed in 1918 because the spiritual prerequisites [requirements] were insufficient . . . The destruction of Poland has priority. The aim is to eliminate active forces, not to reach a definite line. Even if war breaks out in the West, the destruction of Poland remains the priority. A quick decision in view of the season.

I shall give a propagandist reason for starting the war, no matter whether it is plausible or not. The victor will not be asked afterwards whether he told the truth or not. When starting and waging war it is not right that matters, but victory.

Close your hearts to pity. Act brutally. Eighty million people must obtain what is their right. Their existence must be made secure. The stronger man is right. The greatest harshness. Swiftly in making decisions is necessary. Firm faith in the German soldier. Crises are due solely to leaders having lost their nerve.

SOURCE 20.27 This cartoon was published in the *Daily Mail* on 6 September 1939. Hitler is speaking to Mars, the god of war

ACTIVITY

- 1 Referring to the provenance and contents of Sources 20.25 and 20.26, comment on their value as evidence for the following areas:
 - a) Hitler's planning of foreign policy
 - b) his views of and policy towards Poland
 - c) his views on peace and war
 - d) his attitude to war with the West and to its timing
 - e) the requirements for military success
 - f) the importance of leadership.
- 2 A. J. P. Taylor described the Polish question as 'the most justified of German grievances'.
 - a) Do you agree with this comment?
 - b) Why, then, did the West declare war over this issue?
- 3 Study Source 20.27. Explain the point it is making.



"THERE'S SOME MISTAKE, IT WAS YOUR SMALL BROTHER I SENT FOR."

E How did the major powers react to Hitler's foreign policy 1933-9?

Europe in the 1930s was divided into three broad ideological camps: liberal democracies, headed by Britain and France, a growing number of dictatorships of the Right, most notably Fascist Italy, and thirdly the communist regime in the Soviet Union, headquarters of the Comintern. However, although ideology was a considerable factor in diplomacy, it was by no means the sole determinant, as all states were prepared to be pragmatic to further their national interests. The 1930s saw a series of agreements based far more on self-interest than ideology. Here we examine sources that illustrate the changing attitudes of Hitler's potential opponents and suggest reasons why Hitler was able to smash the Versailles settlement without major opposition until September 1939.

ACTIVITY

Referring to the sources, and your own knowledge, explain how the views and policies of major European countries helped Hitler achieve his aims during 1936-9.

Democratic Britain

SOURCE 20.28 Lord Lothian, British politician, March 1936

The Germans ... are only going into their own back garden.

SOURCE 20.29 Stanley Baldwin, British Prime Minister, 1936

We all know the German desire, as he has come out with it in his book, to move East; and if he moves East, I shall not break my heart ... If there is any fighting in Europe to be done, I should like to see the Bolsheviks and the Nazis doing it.

SOURCE 20.30 Lord Halifax, a member of the British Cabinet and Foreign Secretary 1938-40, to Hitler, November 1937

He [Halifax] must emphasise once more in the name of HM government that the possibility of change of the existing situation was not excluded, but that changes should only take place upon the basis of reasonable agreements reasonably reached.

SOURCE 20.31 A July 1938 cartoon by David Lowe: 'What's Czechoslovakia to me, anyway?'



SOURCE 20.32 The British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's diary, 20 March 1938

You have only to look at the map to see that nothing France or we could do could possibly save Czechoslovakia from being overrun by the Germans, if they wanted to do it. The Austrian frontier is practically open . . . Russia is 100 miles away. Therefore we could not help Czechoslovakia – she would simply be a pretext for going to war with Germany.

SOURCE 20.33 Chamberlain broadcasts to the nation, 27 September 1938

How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing . . .

After my visits to Germany I have realised vividly how Herr Hitler feels that he must champion the other Germans, and his indignation that grievances have not been met before this. He told me privately, and last night he repeated publicly, that after this Sudeten German question is settled, that is the end of Germany's territorial claims in Europe.

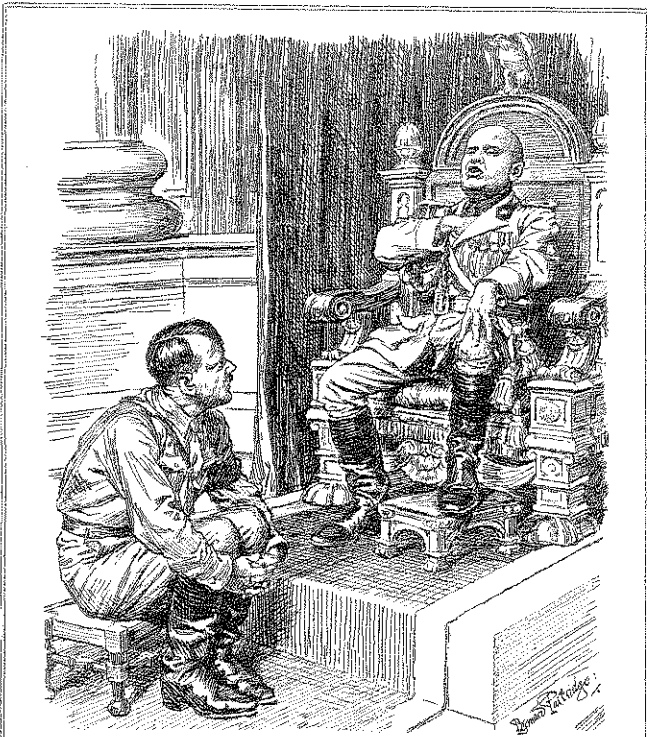
SOURCE 20.34 Earl de la Warr, member of the British Cabinet, March 1939, quoted in the *Daily Herald*, 17 March 1939

This action of the Nazi regime has torn to shreds the last semblance of an excuse for their policy. Hitherto there has always been some attempt to justify their actions in terms either of the reincorporation of those of German race or destroying some part of the Versailles Treaty they felt unjust. But today this veil . . . is no longer deemed necessary and aggression stands forth, naked and arrogant.

Fascist Italy

SOURCE 20.35 A *Punch* cartoon published 20 June 1934

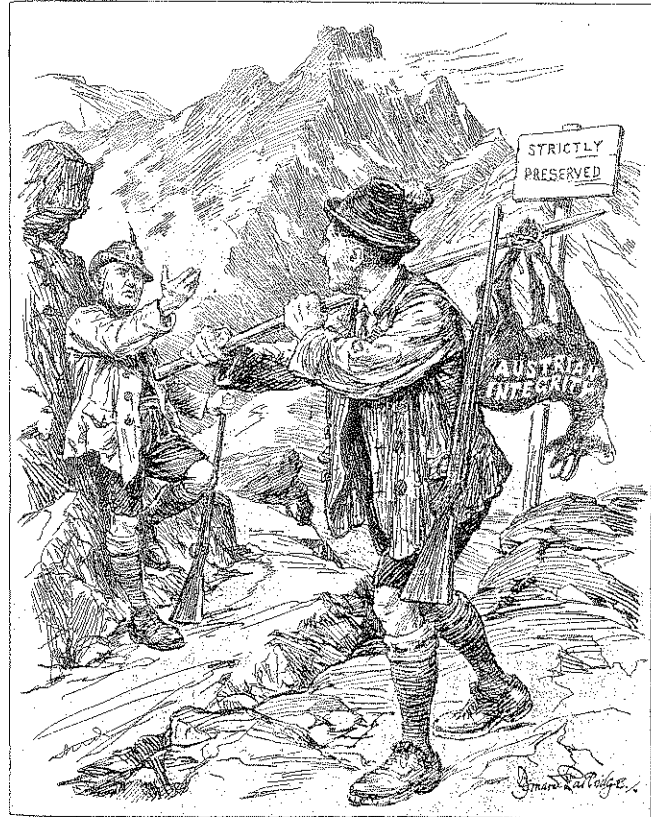
SOURCE 20.36 This *Punch* cartoon appeared on 23 February 1938



CONSULTING THE ORACLE.

(As recorded by Mr. Punch's magic microphones.)

HERR HITLER. "WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR GERMANY?"
SIGNOR MUSSOLINI. "TELL HER SHE MUST BE CAREFUL TO KEEP ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF ITALY."
HERR HITLER. "AND HOW CAN SHE MAKE SURE OF DOING THAT?"
SIGNOR MUSSOLINI. "BY KEEPING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF AUSTRIA."



GOOD HUNTING

Mussolini. "All right, Adolf—I never heard a shot"

FOCUS ROUTE

Draw up two lists of points suggesting that Hitler was

- a) a master planner
- b) an opportunist.

■ Learning trouble spot

Hitler and Britain

Popular perceptions of the Second World War can be misleading. There is a patriotic assumption that Britain was the most heroic resister of Germany and did more than other countries, including the USSR, to defeat Hitler. The idea that Hitler wanted an alliance with Britain jars against this popular view, but nevertheless he did. Hitler, wrongly, believed that Britain would accept German domination of Europe in return for the maintenance of its empire. Hitler was quite prepared, at least until the mid 1940s, for Britain to retain its empire (he actually admired the British Empire and his favourite film was the imperialist tale *The Lives of the Bengal Lancers*). He anticipated that once Germany had achieved *Lebensraum* in Europe there would be a struggle against the United States for world supremacy, in which Britain might be an ally, though more likely an opponent.

The hostility felt amongst the British elite for the Soviet Union and the traditional Anglo-French rivalry reinforced Hitler in his belief in the possibility of an Anglo-German alliance. However, Hitler did not grasp Britain's determination to prevent any one power dominating Europe, which meant Britain would never accept the realisation of Hitler's full programme. On the other hand, the following factors suggest that Hitler's view of the possibility of co-operation with Britain was not totally unrealistic:

- Popular hostility in Britain to war and criticism of the Treaty of Versailles as untenable
- Britain's quarrel with France over Italy's actions in Abyssinia
- Britain's distrust of the Soviet Union as a possible ally against Nazi Germany
- Britain's acceptance of the bilateral Naval Agreement of 1935 with Germany.

F Was Hitler a master planner or an opportunist?

Since the 1960s a fierce historical debate has been waged over the nature of Hitler's foreign policy. Some historians, most notably Hugh Trevor-Roper, argue that Hitler had a clear vision that involved a master plan for war, and that he controlled the events that culminated in his desired war in 1939. Thus the ideas expressed in *Mein Kampf* and the *Zweite Buch (Hitler's Secret Book)* are the key to understanding German foreign policy after 1935. Others, such as A. J. P. Taylor, argue that he had no clear aims and was essentially a pragmatist (opportunist). His views in *Mein Kampf* and elsewhere were largely daydreams. Events took the course they did because of circumstances, not according to the clear intentions of Hitler. These two contrasting viewpoints have been seen as the intentionalist and structuralist schools (see pages 206-7). A similar debate, as we have seen, exists over the Holocaust.

Most historians now follow Bullock's compromise position: that Hitler did have a clear overall view, but within this he was prepared to be flexible. A fuller understanding of German foreign policy also requires a consideration of the influence of earlier German foreign policy traditions and a range of domestic factors, especially economic pressures.

Did Hitler plan for world war in 1939?

Right from the beginning Hitler prepared Germany for war, as he considered this inevitable. He believed that nations, like animals, competed for survival and that Germany was in a life-and-death struggle with Jewish Bolshevism. He originally intended this major conflict, which would decide the future of Europe, to begin in 1943-5. This date appeared frequently in his writings and speeches. Although the Four-Year Plan of 1936 was intended to get Germany ready for war in four years' time, policy was not dictated by this date. He was prepared for a minor war before 1940, and did not envisage the final war for world control against the United States would come before 1943. By this time Germany would be strengthened by its European conquests and its own rearmament would be at a peak, whereas its opponents, although they would eventually be militarily stronger, would not yet have completed their rearmament.

Hitler's views on the timing of war can be summarised as follows:

- 1935-6: make Germany strong enough to resist possible French/Polish attack
- 1937-40: be strong enough, if conditions were right, to conquer Czechoslovakia and absorb Austria, to adjust the border with Poland and intimidate other eastern countries to make concessions. War with France would be a possibility
- By 1943-5: be strong enough, having exploited eastern Europe, to seize *Lebensraum* from the USSR
- Later, with Germany at maximum strength, take on the USA (and possibly Britain) for world domination.

Of course, this summary is far too schematic (simplified): Hitler did not have a master plan, but he did have a clear view of his overall aims. His policy, both diplomatic and economic, was largely based on the above assumptions and then modified in the light of circumstances. Thus, whereas in *Mein Kampf* Hitler spoke of being allied with Britain to fight the USSR, in September 1939 he was allied with the USSR and fighting Britain! He was not planning a general war in 1939, but having decided war with Poland was necessary rather than the alternatives of war against the USSR or France, he embarked on what he considered would be a limited war against an isolated Poland. When Britain and France unexpectedly declared war, he switched to knocking out the West, before attacking the USSR.

ACTIVITY

Study Sources 20.43 and 20.44.

- a) Pick out parts of these speeches that might be used to portray Hitler as a master planner.
- b) Pick out parts that might be used to portray him as an opportunist.

SOURCE 20.43 Hitler gives an overview of his foreign policy 1933–9 in a secret speech to senior officers, 10 February 1939

All our actions during 1938 represent only the logical extension of the decisions which began to be realised in 1933. It is not the case that during this year of 1938 – let us say – a particular action occurred which was not previously envisaged. On the contrary, all the individual decisions which have been realised since 1933 are not the result of momentary considerations but represent the implementation of a previously existing plan, though perhaps not exactly according to the schedule which was envisaged. For example, in 1933 I was not exactly certain when the withdrawal from the League of Nations would occur. However, it was clear that this withdrawal had to be the first step towards Germany's revival. And it was further clear that we would have to choose the first appropriate moment. We could see from the start that the next step would have to be rearmament without the permission of foreign countries, but naturally we could not gauge the exact speed and extent of this rearmament right from the start. It was also further obvious that, after a certain period of rearmament, Germany would have to take the daring step of proclaiming to the world its freedom from restrictions on rearmament. At the beginning, naturally one could not foresee the right moment for this step. Finally, it was further clear that every further step must first involve the remilitarisation of the Rhineland. The date for this was in fact envisaged as being one year later: I did not think I would carry it out until 1937. The circumstances at the time made it seem appropriate to carry it out as early as 1936. It was also quite obvious that the Austrian and the Czech problems would have to be solved in order to further strengthen Germany's political and, in particular, her strategic position . . . to start with, I was not quite sure whether both problems ought to be or could be solved simultaneously or whether one should deal first with the question of Czechoslovakia or with the Austrian question. There was no doubt that these questions would have to be solved and so all these decisions were not ideas which were realised at the moment of their conception, but were long-made plans which I was determined to realise the moment I thought the circumstances at the time would be favourable.

SOURCE 20.44 Hitler addressing his generals in November 1939

The next step was Bohemia, Moravia, and Poland. It was clear to me from the first moment that I could not be satisfied with the Sudeten territory. That was only a partial solution. The decision to march into Bohemia was made. Then followed the establishment of the protectorate and with that the basis for the conquest of Poland was laid. I was not quite clear at that time whether I would start first against the east and then against the west or vice versa. By the pressure of events it came first to the fight against Poland. One might accuse me of wanting to fight and fight again. In struggle I see the fate of all beings. Nobody can avoid fighting if he does not want to go under.

ACTIVITY

Debate: 'Master Planner' or 'Improviser'? Which is the more accurate view of Hitler and his foreign policy? Key issues to consider:

- Views in *Mein Kampf*
- Hossbach Memorandum
- Hitler's views on Germany's needs
- Clear views on Germany's need for racial superiority
- His improvisations
- Planning
- Exploiting circumstances outside his control, e.g. Abyssinia, Spanish Civil War
- His actions in relation to the plans, with reference to various contingencies.

Other issues to consider might be:

- Did he have plans but no master plan?
- The extent to which one can improvise within an overall plan
- The extent to which in foreign policy in particular no one leader can be in full control, as Hitler realised.

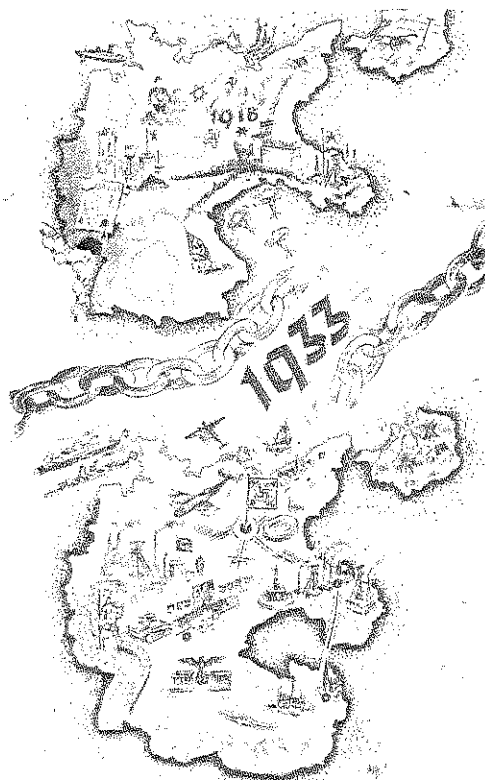


Review: Why was Hitler's foreign policy so successful 1933-9?

Before answering this question, you need to assess how successful Hitler's foreign policy actually was. You can then explain the success he had in the light of his aims and strategy, Germany's strength, the actions of other countries and the overall international context.

How successful was Hitler?

The following activity will help you address this question.



SOURCE 20.45

A cartoon published in the *Westfälische Landeszeitung*, a German newspaper, in 1939. It shows two maps of Germany: the top one is Weimar Germany, the bottom Nazi Germany

ACTIVITY

- 1 Study Source 20.45. List the changes between Germany in 1919 and in January 1939. Refer to as many of the marked features as possible.
- 2 Study the following table, which shows the statistics of Hitler's gains. How useful is this in assessing the success of Hitler's foreign policy?

Territorial gains	Area (sq km)	Population	Nationality	Assets
Saar	2,000	818,000	98% German	Coal
Austria	84,000	6,700,000	German	Hydro-electric power, iron ore, forestry, cattle, fruit
Sudetenland	29,000	3,561,000	74% German 26% Czech	Coal, copper, lignite, textiles, chemicals, steel works
Bohemia-Moravia	49,000	7,485,000	97% Czech 3% German	Steel works, coal, engineering, weapons factories
Polish corridor	18,000	950,000	60% German 40% Polish	Farming, forestry
Danzig	1,920	380,000	94% German 6% Polish	Shipbuilding, dockyards
Memel	2,660	153,000	51% German 48% Lithuanian	Farming, forestry, fishing, shipbuilding

- 3 Now copy and complete the following assessment chart on the extent to which Hitler achieved his foreign policy aims in 1933-9. You may consider that Hitler had not achieved some of these aims fully by 1939, but did he plan to by then? This might affect your final assessment of his success.

Aim	Extent fulfilled (0-5)	Evidence and assessment
Smash Versailles		
Unite all Germans in one Reich		
Lebensraum		
World conquest		

- 4 List any mistakes Hitler made or setbacks he suffered during 1933-9.

ACTIVITY

Use Sources 20.46–9 and Chart 20K to explain how the balance of power shifted towards Germany during the 1930s.

Why was Hitler successful?

SOURCE 20.46 Military expenditure as a percentage of Gross National Product, Germany and Britain

	Germany	Britain
1932	1	1
1933	3	3
1934	6	3
1935	8	2
1936	13	5
1937	13	7
1938	17	8

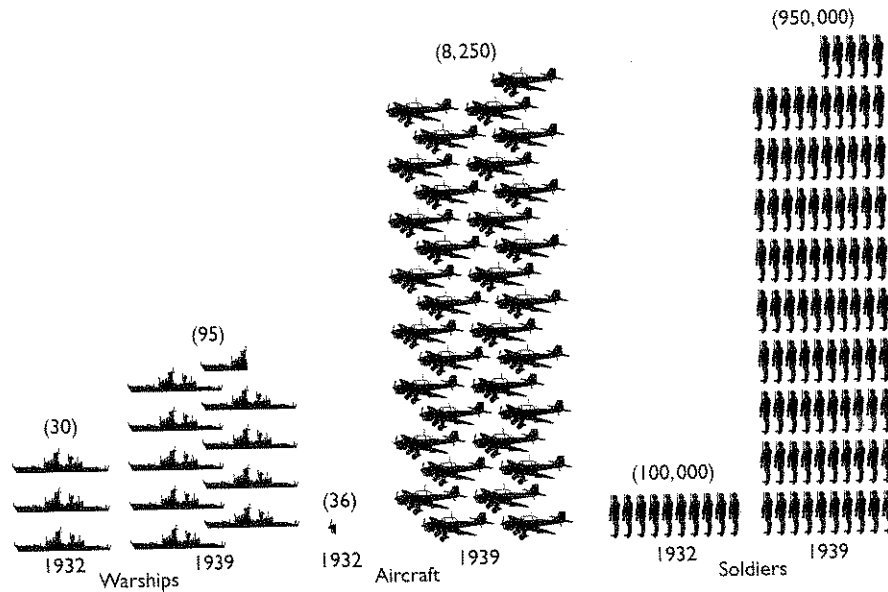
SOURCE 20.47 Size of the German army (in battalions)

	Infantry	Artillery	Panzer
1933	84	24	
1934	166	95	6
1935	287	116	12
1936	334	148	16
1937	352	187	24
1938	476	228	34

SOURCE 20.48 Military expenditure (billions of marks)

1932	0.8
1933	3.5
1934	4.1
1935	9.5
1936	10.8
1937	16.5
1938	17.2

SOURCE 20.49 Growth of the German military 1932–9

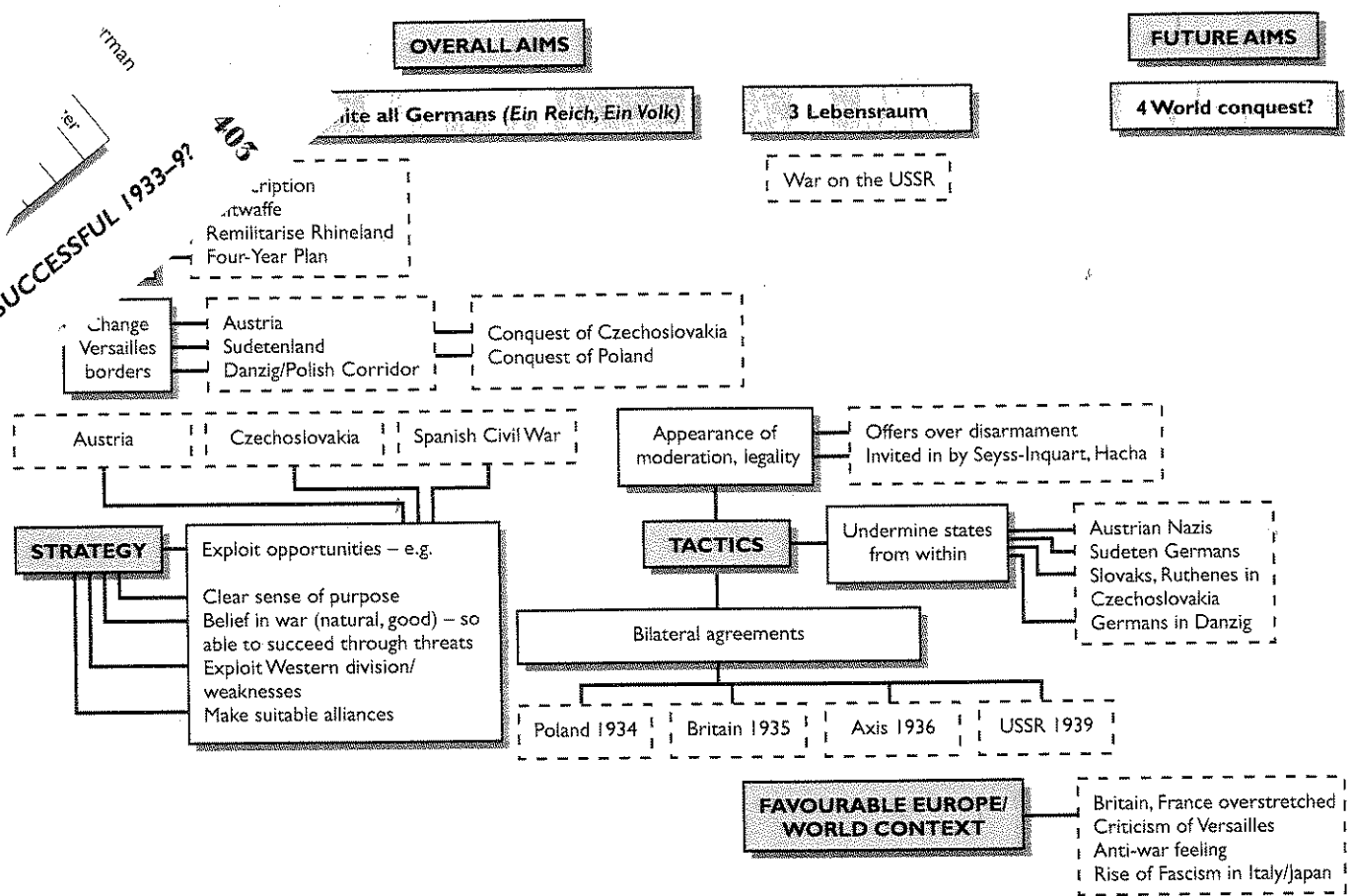


20K The changing balance of power in the 1930s

Germany's potential opponents	Diplomatic alliances	Events exploited by Germany	Growth of German power
<p>Britain, France: some tension over how to react to Italy's invasion of Abyssinia</p> <p>Britain suspicious of USSR, fails to co-operate fully</p> <p>Pacifist feeling strong in Britain. France politically divided</p>	<p>(Background: Versailles 1919, Locarno 1925)</p> <p>1935</p> <p>Stresa Front: Britain France Italy } v. Germany</p> <p>Czech–Russian–French pacts</p> <p>1936</p> <p>Britain, France v. Germany, Italy and Japan (Anti-Comintern Pact)</p> <p>1938</p> <p>Munich: Britain, France, Italy, Germany</p> <p>1939</p> <p>Britain France Poland } v. Germany and Italy (Pact of Steel) Germany and USSR (Nazi-Soviet Pact)</p>	<p>Italian invasion of Abyssinia</p> <p>Spanish Civil War</p>	<p>Economic growth</p> <p>Rearmament</p> <p>Rhineland remilitarised</p> <p>Austria annexed</p> <p>Sudetenland annexed</p> <p>Bohemia annexed</p>

WHY SO SUCCESSFUL 1933-9?

WHY WAS HITLER'S FOREIGN



ACTIVITY

Copy and complete the following assessment chart with examples of the factors contributing to the success of Hitler's foreign policy. (You could either just put a tick in the relevant box or a cross if the opposite applies, or you could write a brief comment.)

	Reason for success	Rearmament 1935	Rhineland 1936	Anschluss 1938	Sudetenland 1938	Czechoslovakia 1939	Nazi-Soviet Pact 1939	Poland 1939
Hitler's approach	Appearing reasonable; right on his side							
	Stirring up, exploiting internal unrest							
	Improvising							
	Good timing							
	Using intimidation, threats							
	Other methods							
Context	Potential opponents divided							
	Opponents weak							
	Other factors							

ACTIVITY

Make notes to prepare for the essay: 'Why was Hitler's foreign policy so successful 1933–9?'

- 1 First, do not just take the question at face value. Challenge any assumptions in the question. Was his foreign policy so successful? How might you assess this? You need to establish the criteria:
 - Did he achieve his aims?
 - Did his policy strengthen the position of Germany – territorially, economically, militarily, diplomatically?
 - Was his foreign policy popular at home?
- 2 Hitler might score highly on these grounds, but you might also want to consider:
 - Did he increase external opposition to Germany?
 - Did he lead Germany into world war?
 - Were his policies in the long-term interest of Germany?
- 3 You might order your material around the following points:
 - a) Hitler's strategy and ability
 - Appearance of reasonableness
 - Exploitation of internal unrest in other countries
 - Improvisation
 - Sense of timing
 - Gradual escalation of demands
 - Ruthlessness stemming from his conviction of the rightness of his cause and from his ideological vision
 - b) Germany's inherent might
 - Expanding economic resources
 - Growing military might
 - Developing political unity
 - c) Context in which he was operating
 - Weak opponents
 - Britain overstretched, desperate to avoid war
 - France internally divided, with a series of weak governments
 - d) Broader international context
 - Weak, newly established regimes in eastern Europe
 - Growing assertiveness of Mussolini; Italy's closer links with Germany and move away from Britain and France
 - Soviet Union's priority of building up its own strength and avoiding a risky war with Germany
 - Western powers' distrust of the USSR
 - Western powers' fear of expansionist Japan
 - Weak League of Nations
 - Versailles increasingly criticised
 - Widespread determination to prevent another war and support for appeasement.

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 20: Why was Hitler's foreign policy so successful 1933–9?

- 1 Foreign policy was a major preoccupation for Hitler.
- 2 Hitler wanted to make Germany great by smashing Versailles, uniting all Germans and expanding in the east for *Lebensraum*.
- 3 The changing international context of the 1930s gave Hitler considerable opportunities for expansion.
- 4 Hitler proved skilful initially in appearing more reasonable than he was and in exploiting the West's appeasement policies.
- 5 For four years he had a series of major foreign policy successes: remilitarising the Rhineland, gaining Austria and destroying Czechoslovakia, without military opposition.
- 6 Hitler showed his flexibility in 1939 by making an alliance with the Soviet Union, which he considered his greatest opponent.
- 7 It was only with his invasion of Poland that Hitler, to his surprise, provoked Britain and France into declaring war.
- 8 There has been considerable debate over Hitler's responsibility for the Second World War.
- 9 Some historians argue that domestic factors were a major influence in causing the war (see Chapter 12).
- 10 Some historians argue that Hitler planned the war in advance, others that he was essentially an opportunist, with no clear plan. Probably the most convincing view is that he combined flexibility in his strategy with consistency of aims.