

## 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

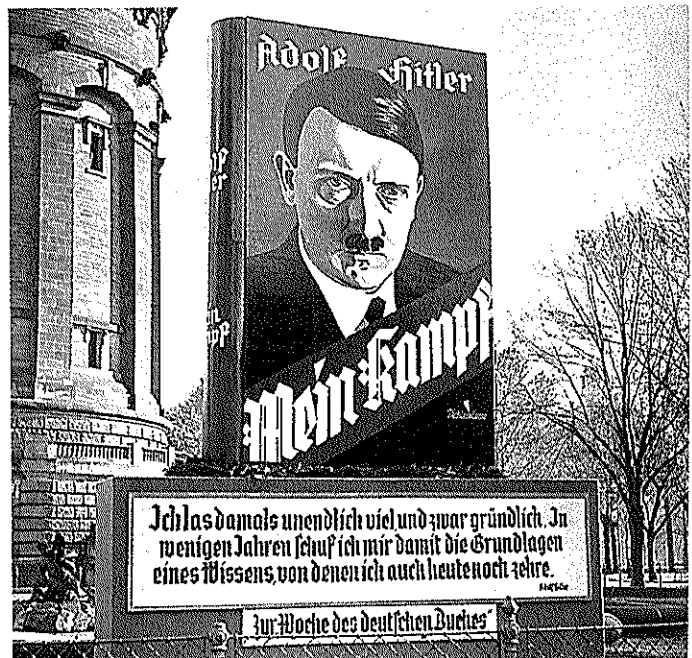
1. What were Hitler's aims?
2. What methods did Hitler use to achieve his aims?
3. How did other powers react to his measures?
4. How successful was Hitler in achieving his aims?
5. Why was he successful?

### 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



**SOURCE 20.2** Extract from *Mein Kampf*

*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.*

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



**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 . . .*

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

### 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*

### 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.



## 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-racking 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

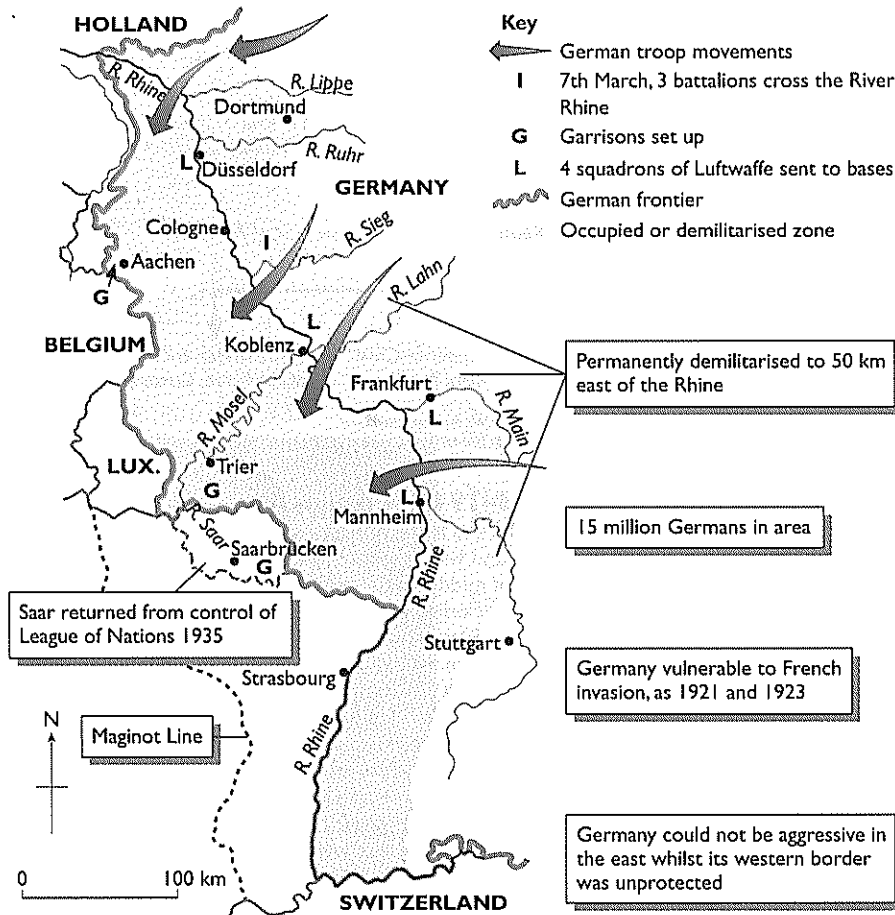
From 1933 to 1935 Hitler's approach was cautious, as Germany was in a weak position compared to its potential opponents. By 1935 Hitler felt secure enough to announce in public Germany's rearmament. He also sensed in parts of Europe a mood of reluctance to risk war in defence of a possibly unjust and 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 5 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

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.
  - 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 provanance, 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)

**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.

**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, 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 FACILITATION 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. . . .

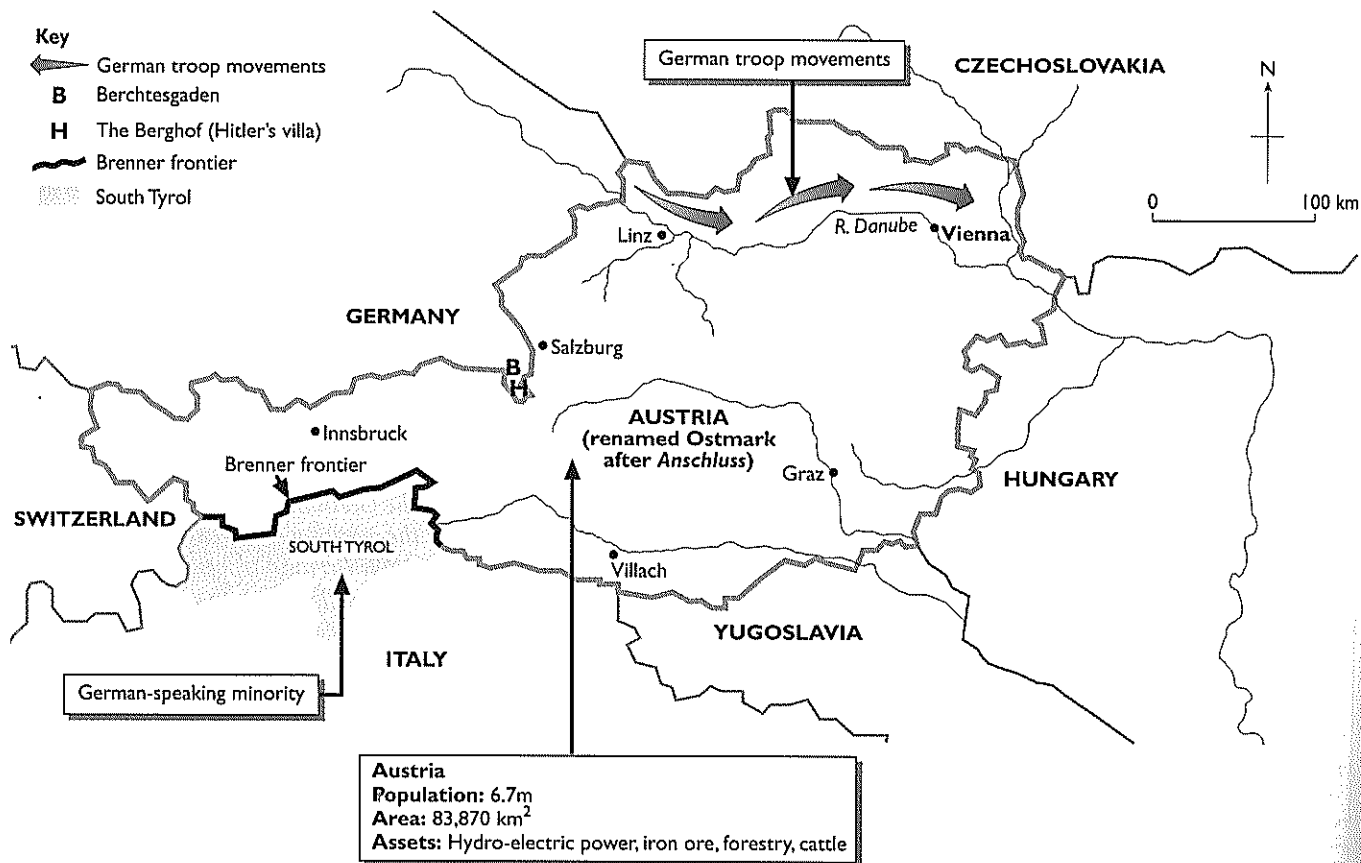
We have no territorial claims to make in Europe. Above all, we are aware that all the tensions resulting either from erroneous territorial provisions or from the disproportion between the size of the population and its Lebensraum can never be solved by wars in Europe. However, we do hope that human insight 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 gravest 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 beliefs 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.

**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**

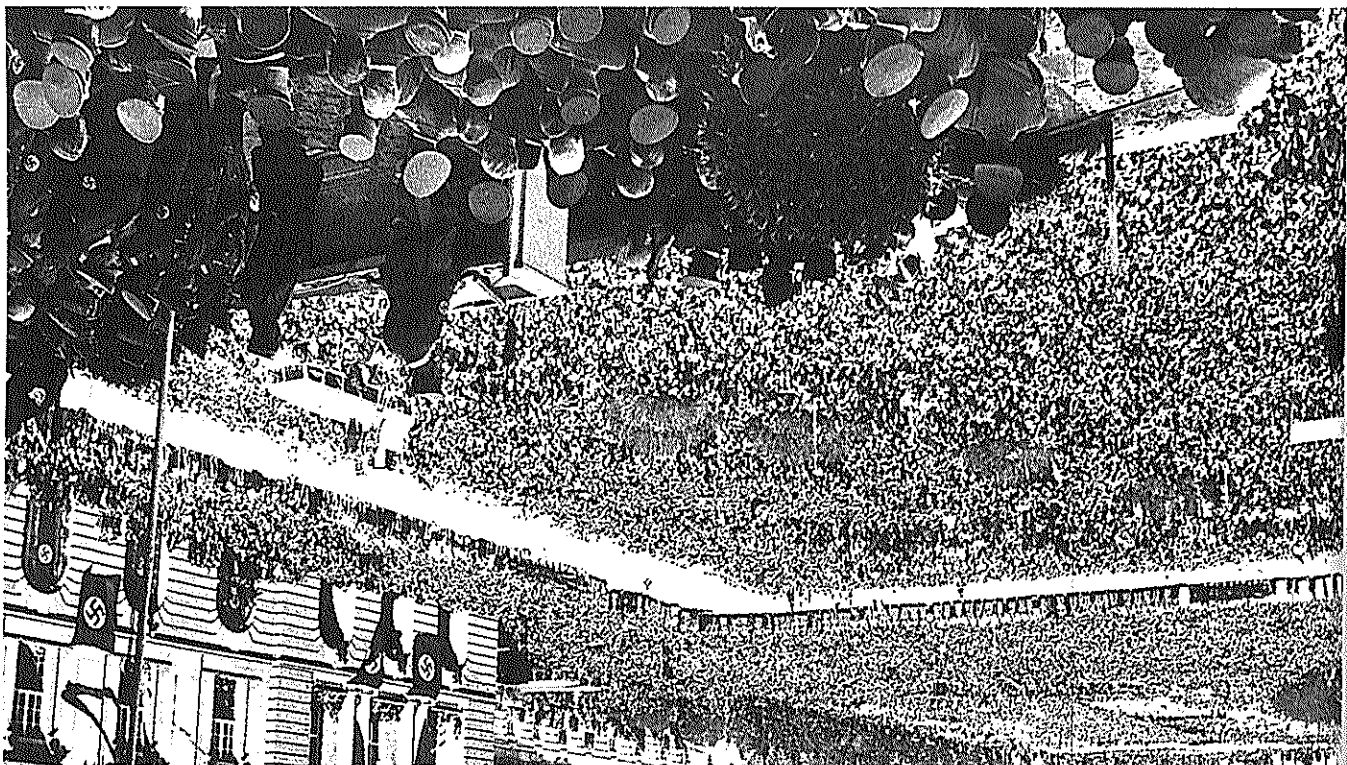
Schuschnigg, alarmed at growing Nazi power, called a plebiscite on Austrian independence, hoping for popular support against *Anschluss* and to undermine Hitler's position. The plebiscite asked for approval of the statement: 'With Schuschnigg for Austria, we want a free and a German Austria, an independent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

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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?

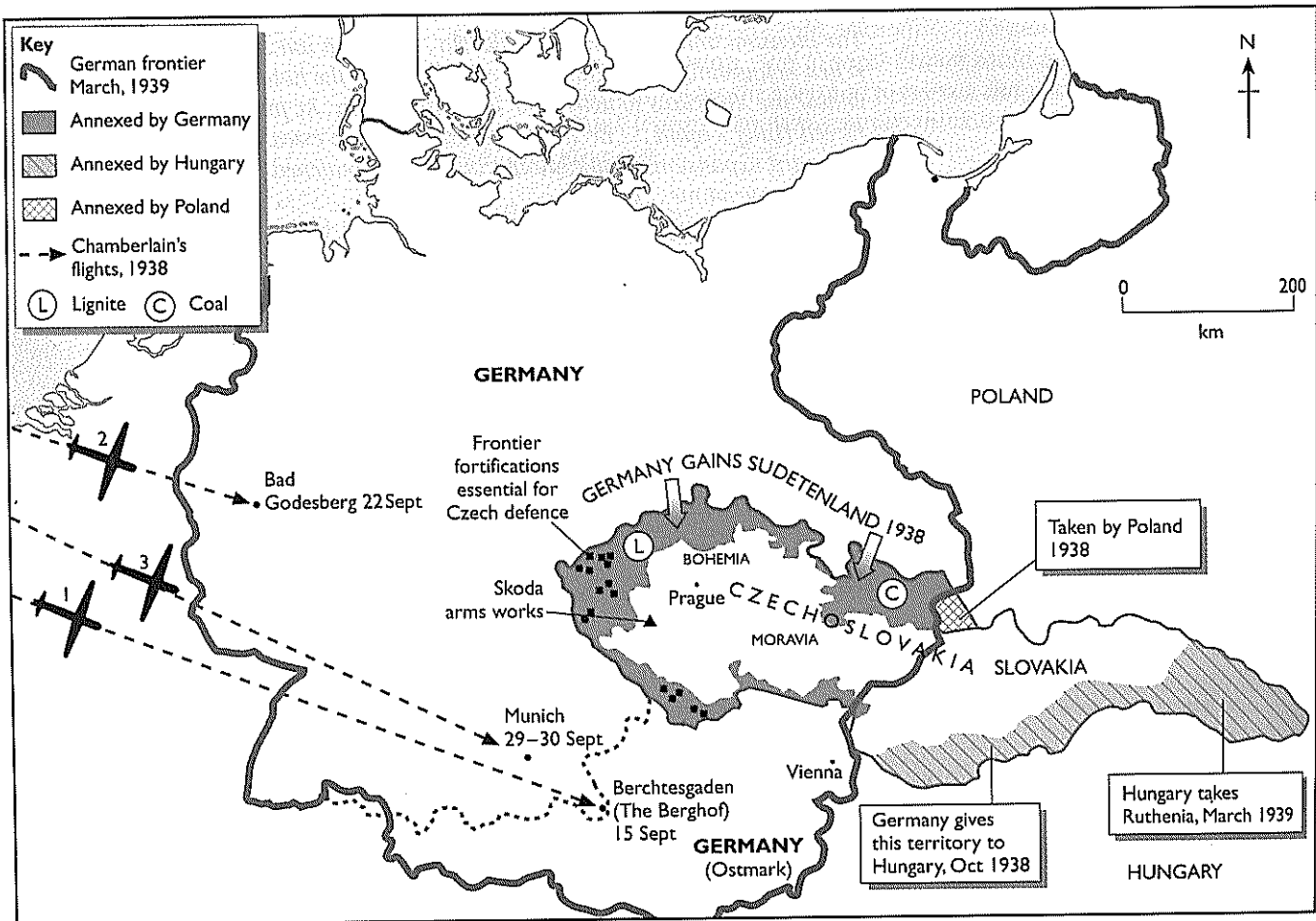
## Czechoslovakia: September 1938–March 1939

### 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

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

**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 ONE: 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

**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  
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## 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 1933. 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.

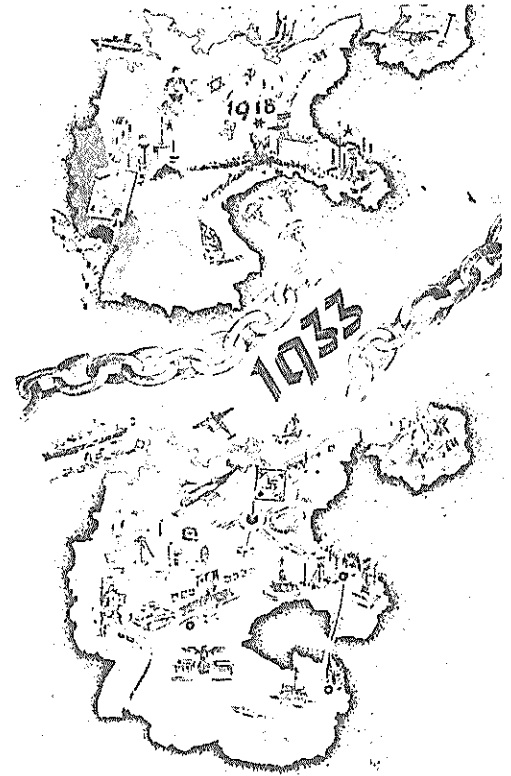
Of course, this summary is far too schematic (simplified): Hitler did not have a master plan, but he did have a clear view of his overall aims. His policy, both diplomatic and economic, was largely based on the above assumptions and then modified in the light of circumstances. Thus, whereas in *Mein 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.

## **G** 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

- 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.
- 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

- 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		
<i>Lebensraum</i>		
World conquest		

- 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

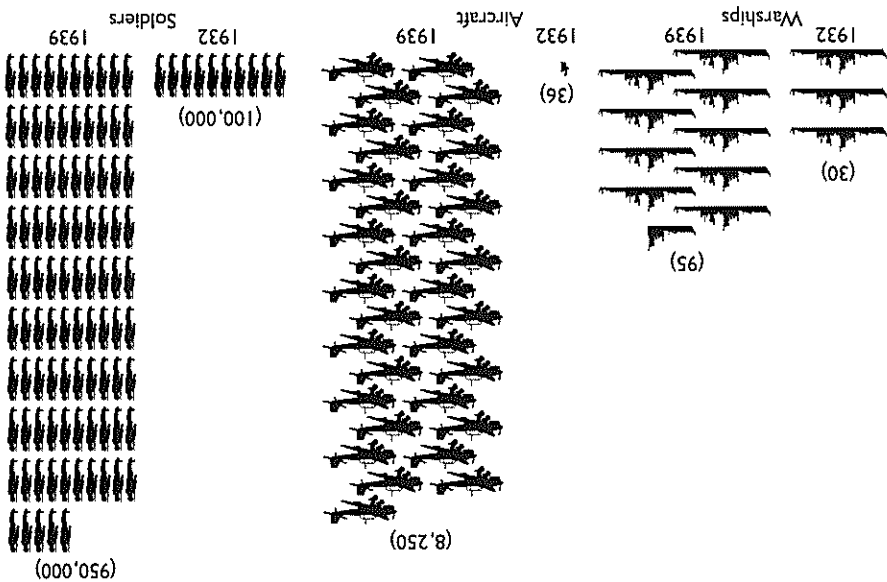
**SOURCE 20.47** Size of the German army (in battalions)

	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

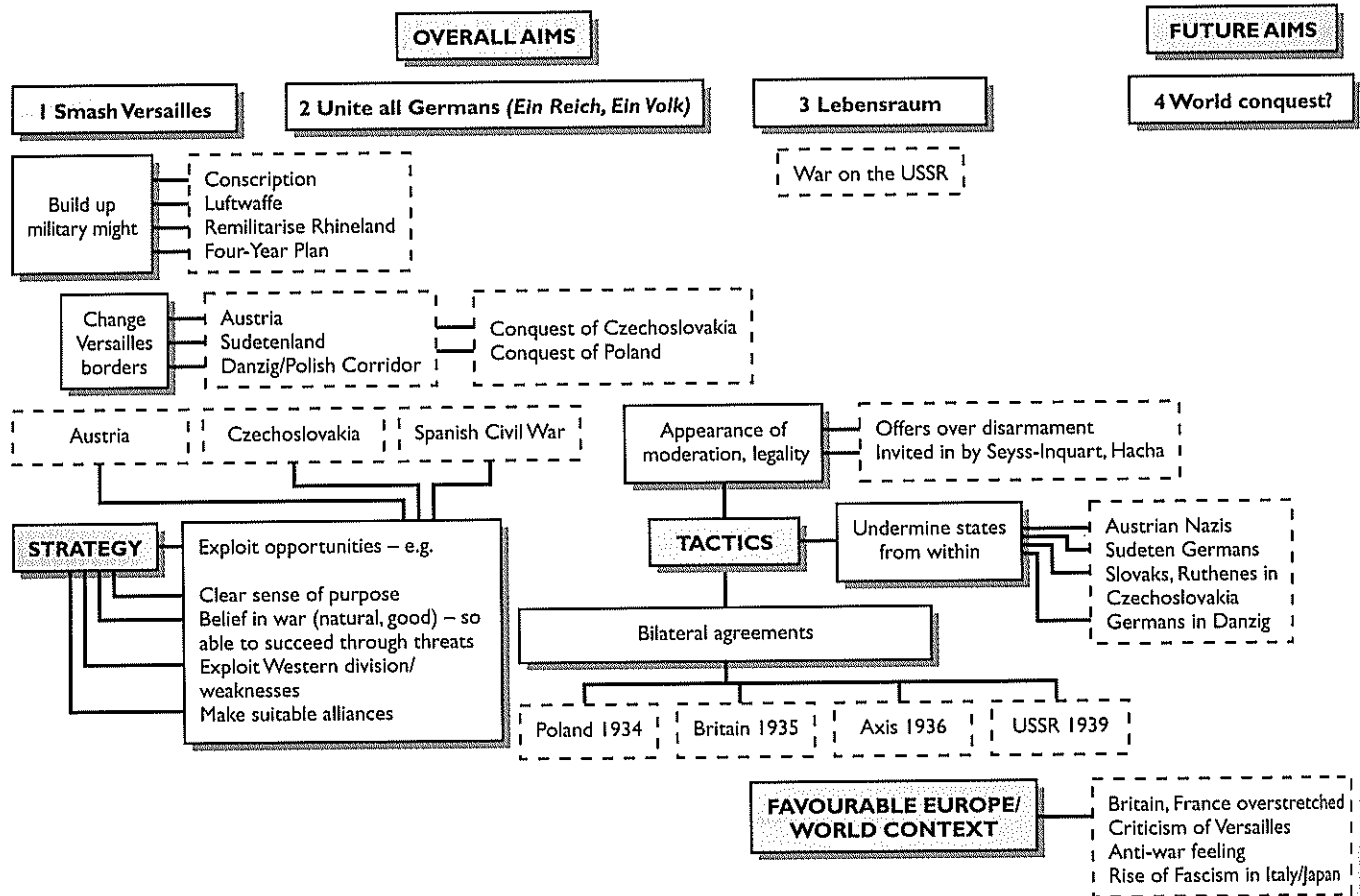


**20K The changing balance of power in the 1930s**

<b>Germany's potential</b>	<p>Britain, France: some tension over how to react to Italy's invasion of Abyssinia</p> <p>1935</p> <p>Stresa Front: Britain, France v. Germany, Italy</p> <p>1936</p> <p>Axis: 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>Germany and Italy (Pact of Steel) v. Britain, France, Poland (Nazi-Soviet Pact)</p>	<b>Diplomatic alliances</b>	<p>Events exploited by Germany</p> <p>Italian invasion of Abyssinia</p> <p>Spanish Civil War</p>	<b>Growth of German power</b>
<b>Germany's potential</b>	<p>Britain, France: some tension over how to react to Italy's invasion of Abyssinia</p> <p>1935</p> <p>Stresa Front: Britain, France v. Germany, Italy</p> <p>1936</p> <p>Axis: 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>Germany and Italy (Pact of Steel) v. Britain, France, Poland (Nazi-Soviet Pact)</p>	<b>Diplomatic alliances</b>	<p>Events exploited by Germany</p> <p>Italian invasion of Abyssinia</p> <p>Spanish Civil War</p>	<b>Growth of German power</b>

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

20L Hitler's foreign policy: a summary



**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
<b>Hitler's approach</b>	Appearing reasonable; right on his side							
	Stirring up, exploiting internal unrest							
	Improvising							
	Good timing							
	Using intimidation, threats							
	Other methods							
<b>Context</b>	Potential opponents divided							
	Opponents weak							
	Other factors							