

of unemployment in Germany (see graph); the more unemployed there were, the more successful the Nazis were in elections. In the end, Hitler was able to come to power legally; a group of conservative politicians, including the President, General von Hindenburg, concluded that Hitler would be useful to have on their side. They believed that they would be able to control him. Thus, Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, democratically, in January 1933. He was now able to pursue his long-term ambitions.

It could be argued that Hitler had to pursue certain aggressive foreign policy objectives, as such aims had brought him to power. His attack on the Treaty of Versailles and those who had signed it meant that many Germans believed he and the Nazis would restore Germany's international prestige through crushing the treaty. In addition, Hitler had been brought to power with the assistance of other right-wing parties in the Weimar Republic; much of this support was gained because of the Nazis' stated foreign policy ambitions.

Between 1933 and 1934, Hitler consolidated his control in Germany. He gained the tacit cooperation of the army and the industrialists, who both believed Hitler would bring in a massive programme of rearmament. The Nazi regime was **totalitarian**, and the rights of its citizens were subordinate to the state. Ultimately, this meant that the Nazis could gear domestic policy to meet the needs of its expansionist foreign policy. Military conscription and rearmament, meanwhile, could relieve mass unemployment.

To access worksheet 6.1 on Adolf Hitler, please visit www.pearsonbacconline.com and follow the on-screen instructions.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review questions

- 1 From what you have read so far, what evidence is there that Hitler had a long-term plan that would lead to a general European war?
- 2 To what extent should a) German moderates and b) foreign governments have been aware of the potential danger of Hitler?
- 3 How far do you agree that the Nazis' popularity was due to the economic crisis in Germany?

Hitler and the short-term causes of World War II (1933–38)

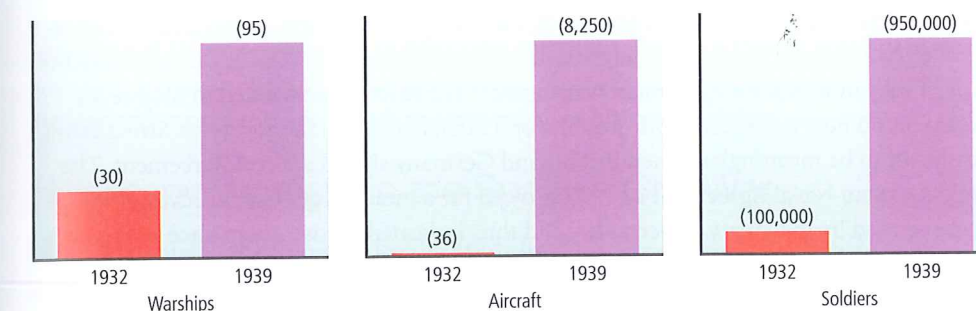
As we have seen, there is evidence in the longer term that Hitler had a consistent ambition to control 'race and space' – the Nazis wanted racial purity and *Lebensraum*. These themes are consistent in his speeches, writing and policy statements throughout the 1920s, and then, once in power, appear to be consistent in the direction Hitler steered Germany through the 1930s. It would seem that neither of these objectives could be obtained *without* war.

Revising the Treaty of Versailles

Between 1933 and 1935, Hitler set about revising the Treaty of Versailles, a process that led to tension in Europe and placed pressure on the League of Nations. Hitler began by attacking reparations. Although repayment of reparations had been suspended before Hitler came to power, in 1933 he announced that the Nazis would not resume payments. The declaration was good propaganda, but was not a major cause of international friction, as most powers had already accepted this. What did increase tension was Hitler's intention to rearm Germany. As we have seen, Hitler manipulated the reluctance of France towards embracing general disarmament to justify Germany's withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference in 1933. German military spending in the year 1934–35 increased fivefold when compared to that of 1933–34. Historian Ted Townley writes in *Hitler and the Road to War*,

'For whatever final purpose, Hitler worked at this time to create a German economy that would provide total industrial backing for the German military.'

GERMAN MILITARY EXPENDITURE	
Fiscal period	Million marks
1933–34	750
1934–35	4,093
1935–36	5,492
1936–37	10,271
1937–38	10,963
1938–39	17,247



German armed forces in 1932 and 1939.

Hitler again showed his contempt for the Versailles settlement when he withdrew Germany from the League of Nations in 1933. Leaving the League, plus open rearmament, had put Germany on a new path. The Weimar Republic had attempted to work with the international community and the League to rehabilitate Germany. Hitler's new course, by contrast, alarmed the other powers, who were still suffering the effects of the Depression and therefore had limited means to respond.

Germany's rearmament can be seen as the fundamental first step in facilitating Hitler's expansionist foreign policy. Hitler's next step was to sign the ten-year 'Non-Aggression Pact' with Poland in January 1934. Although Germany resented Poland on account of the 'Polish corridor' separating Germany from East Prussia, Hitler had gone ahead with this agreement to secure his eastern border. Some historians, for example William Shirer in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, regard this agreement as evidence of Hitler's plan to dominate Europe. The terms of the pact not only secured Germany's eastern border with Poland, it also undermined the French alliance system in Eastern Europe – the Little Entente – as it directly countered the Franco-Polish Alliance of 1925. To some extent, it also gave the impression to the international community that Hitler's intentions were ultimately peaceful.

Hitler's attention then turned to Austria. One of Hitler's stated objectives was to unify Austria with Germany, a policy outlined at some length in *Mein Kampf*. However, unification was forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles, and any attempt to achieve this might lead to confrontation with the European powers. Yet there were pro-Nazi groups in Austria, and in 1934 they murdered the Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss and attempted to seize power in a coup. Initially, Hitler saw the coup as an opportunity to obtain his goal of *Anschluss*, but was deterred when the Austrian government crushed the coup and Mussolini sent troops to the border with Austria to warn Germany off.

Some historians have focused on this episode as evidence of Hitler's 'improvisation' in foreign policy, and argue that it suggests he did not have a long-term plan. Others, however, argue that Hitler was not yet ready to pursue his expansionist ambitions. He was still developing the Nazi state within Germany.

Hitler was able to use the pro-German Saar plebiscite in 1935 as very positive propaganda. The Treaty of Versailles had set down that there would be self-determination in the Saar by a public vote or plebiscite. The plebiscite was held in 1935, and the result was overwhelming: 9–1 in favour of reuniting with Germany. With the Saar plebiscite acting as a boost to his 'popular mandate', Hitler announced he would introduce compulsory military service in Germany. This step, again, was a violation of the Treaty of Versailles. At the same time he announced the increase of his armaments programme. Hitler now declared the existence of an army of more than 500,000 men, and had admitted the existence of an air force. The other powers were deeply concerned, but continued to hope that a revision of Versailles would satisfy the more moderate elements of German society.

The European response

In a collective response to Hitler's attacks on the Treaty of Versailles, in particular German rearmament, Britain, France and Italy joined together in the 'Stresa Front' (named after the town in Italy in which the agreement was signed). The three powers failed to finalize an agreement on *how* the Stresa Front would stop Hitler, and within a month the Stresa Front was shown to be meaningless when Britain and Germany signed a Naval Agreement. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935 allowed for a much larger German Navy than was permitted by the Treaty of Versailles, and thus indicated British acceptance of German rearmament. The British had not consulted the French in signing the agreement and were pursuing self-interest, as the agreement was an attempt by Britain to limit German naval expansion. It was another passive victory for Hitler, as Britain had in effect condoned or at least accepted German naval rearmament. It also revealed that Hitler's aggression was successfully intimidating the other European powers.

Hitler was then able to manipulate the new international situation that had resulted from the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935. Abyssinia was a member of the League of Nations, and the invasion led to the breakdown of relations between Italy, Britain and France. Italy ultimately left the League and, with its humiliation at the hands of a key member state, the League was left impotent. Hitler's expansionist plans, with his rearmed Germany, could enter their next phase.

ToK Time

Consider the extent to which you are personally interested in politics. Are you interested in the politics of your own nation, or are you more interested in the politics of other nations? What political issues do think are important or engaging? Do you agree with the policies of mainstream political parties or do you hold more independent or radical views?

In pairs discuss why politics is important, and why young people often feel remote from current political parties. What are the topics that are most important to you, and what knowledge issues are there in attempting to find answers to political problems?

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review questions

- 1 Which of Hitler's aims, as set down in *Mein Kampf*, had he achieved by 1935?
- 2 Based on Hitler's stated long-term ambitions, what would his next objectives be?
- 3 How far do you agree that Germany was the *only* country causing tension in Europe in the first half of the 1930s?

Class discussion

Based on the evidence in this chapter and the previous chapter, to what extent do you agree that events in the 1920s and early 1930s made a general war in Europe likely?

German remilitarization of the Rhineland

Up until 1936, Hitler had been rather cautious. He had capitalized on the international understanding that his aims were to redress the 'wrongs' meted out to Germany at Versailles. Yet there had also been clear indications that his objectives were more extreme. In 1936 Hitler turned his attention to Germany's western border. Versailles had made the Rhineland a demilitarized zone to help secure the border between Germany and France. France deemed this provision as a key element in its security, and thus any attempt to

remilitarize the area was potentially highly provocative. By this point, Hitler's army had grown, he had the backing of the more extreme nationalists in Germany, and he had the advantage of the divisions between the European 'defenders' of the settlement. Hitler bided his time until it was clear that Italy was going to be victorious in Abyssinia.

Nevertheless, some of Hitler's senior generals were concerned that France would take military action to defend the demilitarized zone; these included his commander-in-chief, Werner von Blomberg. Hitler assured them that he would pull out at the first sign of a French military response. The Germans sent 10,000 troops and 23,000 armed police into the Rhineland in March 1936. There was no response from the French or the British. In France, there was division over how to react, and no support from the British, who generally were against resistance. Some contemporaries, such as Winston Churchill, argued that this had been a crucial point at which Hitler could and should have been stopped. Not only was the German force relatively small, but stopping Germany at this point would have undermined Hitler's position both politically and militarily. Nevertheless, you will read later in this chapter that the reality of the situation for Britain and France was complicated. Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland, and moved on to his next objective.

Hitler's involvement in the Spanish Civil War

Hitler had entered the Rhineland while Mussolini was occupying international attention in Africa. When the League criticized Italian action in Abyssinia, however, Italy and Germany grew closer together. With the outbreak of a civil war in Spain in 1936 (see Chapter 12), both Germany and Italy sent support to Franco's forces. Germany's involvement in the Spanish Civil War was more limited than Italy's; for example, there were never more than 10,000 Germans fighting in Spain, whereas Italy had seven times that number. Hitler's motives for getting involved were not simply to benefit from another right-wing government in power in Europe, but also to test out Germany's new and improved armed forces. The nature of the German involvement in Spain is further evidence to support the argument that Hitler was preparing his forces for the realities of war in Europe. Infamously, at Guernica in northern Spain on 26 April 1937, the bombers of Hitler's Condor Legion tested out the effectiveness of civilian aerial bombing. It was an ominous indication of what was to come.

Rome–Berlin Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact

A treaty of friendship between Germany and Italy was concluded in October 1936, and in November Mussolini first suggested the idea of a Rome–Berlin Axis around which the other European countries would revolve. Hitler broadened his alliance base when Germany signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan in November 1936. In 1937 Italy joined the pact. The Nazi Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, believed Japan could be used as a force to counter Britain and Russia in Asia. The intention was that, by using Japan to apply pressure in Asia, Hitler would meet less resistance to his expansionist aims in Europe.

The Anti-Comintern Pact

The Communist International (Comintern) was an international organization set up in the Soviet Union in 1919 with the aim of spreading world revolution. In November 1936, Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, which was later joined by Mussolini. This pact was directed against the Comintern in general, and the Soviet Union in particular. In case of an attack by the Soviet Union against Germany or Japan, the two countries agreed to consult on what measures to take 'to safeguard their common interests'. They also agreed that neither of them would make any political treaties with the Soviet Union, and Germany also agreed to recognize Manchukuo. When Italy joined the pact, the alliance of what would become known as the Axis powers was now formed.



A photograph of the destroyed city of Guernica. Hitler's Condor Legion bombed the city in April 1937.

The Hossbach Memorandum

In August 1936 Hitler launched the 'Four Year Plan' designed to prepare the German economy for war by 1940. Then on 5 November 1937, he called a meeting in the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. This meeting was to result in the now infamous 'Hossbach Memorandum'. Present at the meeting were the key military men of Hitler's Germany. According to the minute-taker, Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, Hitler opened the meeting by suggesting that the subject for discussion was of the utmost importance, indeed too important for a wider discussion in the Reichstag. Hitler, Hossbach wrote, then went on to add that in the event of his death, the points he made at the meeting regarding Germany's long-term policy should be regarded as his 'last will and testament'. Hitler proceeded by stating that the key aim of German policy was to secure and preserve the racial community and to enlarge it. He then addressed the questions of when and how. Hitler suggested that after the period 1943–45, the international situation would not be favourable to German ambitions; the re-equipping and organization of the armed forces was nearly complete, and any delay could result in 'their obsolescence'. The meeting considered scenarios in which France would be less of a threat, e.g. domestic problems or a war with another nation, and the necessity of Germany seizing the initiative to take territory (e.g. Czechoslovakia and Austria). The second part of the conference focused on 'concrete questions of armament.'

This meeting has been seen by some historians as evidence of Hitler planning a general war, while others have questioned its importance. Many historians have agreed with the conclusions of Anthony P. Adamthwaite about the Hossbach Memorandum: '...there is no reason why the memorandum should not be accepted as a guide to Hitler's ideas on foreign policy. The Hossbach Memorandum confirms the continuity of Hitler's thinking: the primacy of force in world politics, conquest of living space in the east, anti-Bolshevism, hostility to France. Hitler's warlike intentions were now explicit' (Anthony Adamthwaite, *The Making of the Second World War*, 1989).

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review and research questions

- 1 What key aims does Hitler set down for German foreign policy during the Hossbach meeting?
- 2 Hitler did not seem interested in retaining the minutes of this meeting (none were taken). Is this significant?
- 3 Compare and contrast the nature and importance of the Hossbach meeting in November 1937 to the German War Council meeting in December 1912.
- 4 Read through a copy of the Hossbach Memorandum at The Avalon Project (see Internet links section at the back of this book). Would you identify any other points that suggest Hitler is planning for a general war?

The Hossbach Memorandum was used at the Nuremberg War Trials (a series of Allied war trials in 1945–46) as evidence of Nazi Germany's planning for war. However, A.J.P. Taylor has questioned its importance. Taylor points out that the memorandum is a copy of a copy, and even the original had been written from memory days after the conference. He suggests that historians have misunderstood what the meeting was really about; it was not, in his view, a war planning meeting at all. Its true purpose was an internal political device to get rid of Hitler's Minister for Economics, Hjalmar Schacht, who was opposed to the cost of proposed rearmament.

- 5 In pairs evaluate the value and limitations of the Hossbach document as evidence for historians looking at the causes of World War II.

For some historians, it is not the meeting itself that is the evidence of Hitler's war planning, but what happened as a result of the meeting. In *The Monopoly of Violence – Why Europeans Hate Going to War*, James Sheehan initially seems to agree with Taylor's view of the meeting, but he goes on to point out that the *purpose* of the meeting was to root out those high up in the military who would not support Hitler's foreign policy ambitions:

On November 5, 1937, Hitler summoned his foreign minister and the leaders of the army, navy and air force to the newly completed Chancellery for a discussion of his long-range objectives. The four-hour meeting, of which a summary prepared by Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, the Führer's adjutant, was not, as historians have sometimes claimed, a road map for war. But it did clearly formulate Hitler's central goal, which was 'to make secure and to preserve the racial community and enlarge it.' This, he insisted, was a question of space. Three of Hitler's listeners – the war minister, Field Marshal von Blomberg, the commander of the army, General von Fritsch and the foreign minister, Baron von Neurath – expressed some misgivings about these ambitions. Within a few months, they had all been replaced by more pliable subordinates.

From James Sheehan, *The Monopoly of Violence: Why Europeans Hate Going to War*, 2008

Anschluss

In March 1938, Hitler sent troops into Austria. Where he had been resisted in 1934, four years later he encountered no military resistance. Italy was now an ally, and Britain, under the leadership of Chamberlain, argued that the Versailles Treaty had been wrong to enforce a separation of Germany and Austria. Hitler had seized his opportunity when the Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg had called for a referendum over the issue of *Anschluss*. Hitler's excuse for sending in troops was to ensure the vote was conducted peacefully. With his forces in place, the vote was overwhelmingly in favour – 99.75 per cent. Hitler was now strengthened not only by the Austrian armed forces, but also by the country's rich deposits of gold and iron ore. Tension in Europe increased as Hitler prepared his next move.

The takeover of Czechoslovakia

Hitler's actions had clearly threatened peace in Europe. In pursuit of his long-term aims, it is apparent that he was methodically revising the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, so his next action was to regain the Sudetenland. The Czechoslovakian leader, Edvard Beneš, was fully aware of the imminent threat to his country, and appealed for help from Britain and France. France, bound by a treaty obligation, agreed to defend Czechoslovakia if it were invaded by Germany, although it was reluctant to do so. Britain then agreed to support the French. In May 1938, Hitler increased the tension by declaring that he would fight for the Sudetenland if he had to.

This was a bold threat from Hitler, as the Czechs had a modernized army, with state-of-the-art armaments. They also had guarantees of support from Britain, France and the USSR. However, central to their defences was the Sudetenland, a heavily fortified region containing key industries and railways. Hitler had initiated a crisis throughout Europe; there was a genuine fear that a war was coming.

On 15 September 1938, Chamberlain attempted to resolve the crisis by meeting with Hitler. At his initial meeting, it seemed as though Hitler wanted a compromise too – he moderated his demands, asking for only parts of the Sudetenland, and only those if a plebiscite showed that the people wanted to be part of Germany. However, at a second meeting on 22 September Hitler increased his demands; he now wanted *all* the Sudetenland. Britain

i The Sudetenland
The Sudetenland was territory ceded to Czechoslovakia at the end of World War I. Its inhabitants were mainly ethnic Germans (three million of them) and the territory consisted of the border territories of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia.

Map of Europe showing Hitler's gains up to August 1939.



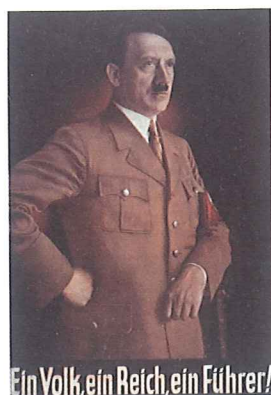
responded by mobilizing its navy; war seemed imminent. A final meeting was held on 29 September. Britain, France and Italy decided to agree to Hitler's 'ultimatum', and give Germany the Sudetenland; this was known as the Munich Agreement. The three powers did not consult with Beneš and the Czechs, nor with the Soviets. Hitler had again achieved his objective by threatening force.

Although Chamberlain declared that the agreement meant 'peace in our time', he had at the same stroke authorized a massive increase in arms spending. Hitler's policies had led to a renewed arms race in Europe. On 15 March 1939, Germany marched in and occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia. The Munich Agreement was shattered. Hitler had taken over a sovereign territory, and the pursuit of his foreign policy objectives meant that war in Europe was inevitable.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Research activity

Research different newspaper reports on the Munich Agreement from the time. How was this crisis viewed?



'One People, One Nation, One Leader!' A poster of Hitler, 1938.

Hitler and the immediate causes of World War II (1939)

Hitler's actions put Europe on the brink of war. He was the aggressor; Britain and France had sought only peace. It was clear that Poland would be Hitler's next target. Britain and France had failed to respond to the occupation of Czechoslovakia, but now warned Germany that an attack on Poland would mean war. The policy of appeasement they had pursued throughout the 1930s was at an end. Britain and France attempted to back this threat up with an agreement with the USSR. During the summer of 1939, however, Stalin was also meeting with the German Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop. On 24 August 1939, Germany pulled off one of the most controversial agreements in modern history, the Nazi–Soviet Pact. Essentially, the two ideological enemies agreed not to attack one another, and secretly they agreed to divide Poland between them. Although Hitler had signed an

agreement with the country he intended to invade, this was a short-term strategic triumph as it would allow Germany to invade Poland without the risk of a two-front war, and gain a launch pad for the later goal of conquering the USSR.

Why did Germany sign an agreement with the USSR?

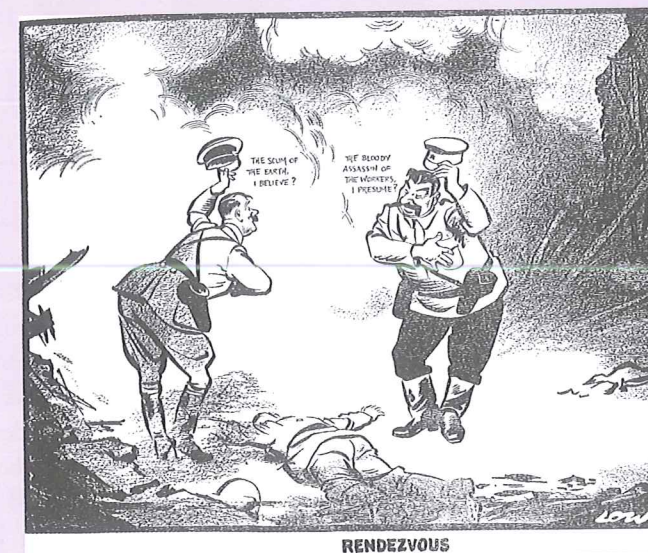
Hitler wanted to avoid a war on two fronts. He did not believe that Britain and France would intervene to defend Poland once he had a pact with Stalin. The economic aid which the USSR would give Germany as a part of the pact would negate the impact of any Anglo-French blockade. Hitler still intended to invade the USSR at a later date – this agreement gave him time to deal with the West first.

Why did the USSR sign an agreement with Germany?

The pact meant that the USSR would not have to get involved in a war in the West. This was important as it faced a threat in the East from Japan, and the Soviet Army had been weakened through Stalin's purges. It gave Stalin time to prepare for war, and there was always the hope that Germany and the West would weaken each other in the war and the USSR would be left as the strongest nation. As part of the deal, Stalin got half of Poland and the opportunity to take over Finland and the Baltic States. Germany was still the USSR's major trading partner.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Cartoon analysis



Question

What is the message of the Low cartoon of 1939?

The invasion of Poland

The most immediate cause of World War II was the conflict over the independence of Poland. If you refer back to Chapter 4, you will see how the Allied powers had created an independent Polish state that was given a land 'corridor' to the sea through territory that was formerly German. The important German port of Danzig was to be a 'free city' under League of Nations supervision, which meant the Poles could use it. Both sides knew that this solution would be a cause of future tension, and the Germans never accepted it. Soon after Hitler came to power, the National Socialists won a majority in the city's government.

Yet Poland was not only threatened by a resurgent Germany; the Soviets had also laid claim to the newly independent Polish territory. Poland had been given more territory in the east than it had before the peace settlements. In 1920, the Red Army (Soviet Army) had invaded

Stalin's purges

In 1934, Stalin launched what became known as the 'purges'. During the purges Stalin arrested, tortured, killed or sent to the gulag hundreds of party officials and military officers over a four-year period. They were accused of working with Trotsky and/or the capitalist states against the USSR. They were often forced to endure highly publicized 'show trials', where they were made to confess to their crimes. Stalin's aim was to eliminate possible threats to his leadership and to terrorize the masses into obedience. The purges were largely successful in achieving these aims.

'Rendezvous', a David Low cartoon, 20 September 1939. Hitler is addressing Stalin, 'The scum of the earth, I believe?' Stalin greets Hitler with 'The bloody assassin of the workers, I presume?'