

The Approach to the Second World War

"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." (Neville Chamberlain)

Overview

1. In 1931 the German and Austrian governments began negotiations to create a customs union. The French protested that this would breach the Treaty of Versailles. The
2. In 1932 Chancellor Brüning announced that Germany could pay no more instalments of its war reparations.

Hitler's Foreign Policy Aims

Hitler personally controlled foreign policy, formulating strategy and tactics. His aims were set out in *Mein Kampf*, the Secret Book and the *Hossbach Memorandum*.^{*} They were:

1. To re-establish Germany's position in world affairs: ending the humiliations attending the Treaty of Versailles. This would involve the defeat of France and the recovery of pre-1918 boundaries of Germany
2. To complete the work of Chancellor Bismarck by uniting all ethnic Germans in a "Greater Germany" - a goal made possible by the break up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
3. The conquest for Germany of *Lebensraum*.^{*} Hitler believed that this space needed to be acquired in the east as far as the Ural Mountains, so as to secure for Germany the Ukrainian "bread basket" and open up vast territories for German colonisation. Hitler found justification for such conquests in:
 - (a) his notions of German racial superiority over the Slavic peoples who inhabited the lands he coveted.
 - (b) He saw the Bolsheviks who now controlled Russia as the vanguard of the world Jewish conspiracy.
4. To establish German military dominance of Europe:
 - (c) Control of the East would be the foundation for Germany's economic and military domination of Europe.
 - (d) The "Jewish Problem", which threatened German racial integrity, needed to be solved.

Most of these goals were not possible without war, and Hitler was clearly aware of this.

5. Rearming of Germany, begun in secret in 1933, was made public in March 1935 when he announced
 - (a) the creation of an air force;
 - (b) the reintroduction of conscription to provide the manpower for thirty-six new divisions in the army.

6. In June 1933 he concluded the Anglo-German Naval Agreement with the British that allowed a German naval build-up of up to thirty-five percent of Britain's surface naval strength and up to forty-five percent of its tonnage in submarines.
This agreement between Britain and Germany to renegotiate the terms of the Treaty of Versailles without reference to France made the French much more cautious and less determined in confronting Germany, since they did not feel that they could rely upon British backing.
7. In June 1933 Germany defaulted on all its foreign debts.
8. In October 1933 Hitler withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations.
9. On March 7, 1936, he moved German forces into the demilitarised *Rhineland*. Neither the British nor the French defended the Treaty of Versailles.
10. By 1936 Hitler was spending 10.2 billion marks on rearmament, and Goering was placed in charge of a *Four-Year Plan* to prepare the German economy for war. On Nov. 5, 1937, Hitler gathered his general staff and admonished them to be prepared for war in the east no later than 1942 or 1943. This is recorded in the *Hossbach Memorandum*.
11. As a cover for his true intentions during the first years of power, Hitler frequently expressed his desire for peace. As evidence of his pacific intentions he signed, in January 1934, a ten-year nonaggression pact with Poland.
12. In July 1934 Hitler encouraged the Nazi party in Austria to attempt an overthrow of the government of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß. Dollfuß was successfully assassinated, but Mussolini rushed Italian troops to the Austrian border and forced Hitler to abandon the Austrian Nazis.
13. His agreement with the Japanese in 1936, the *Anti-Comintern Pact*, was directed towards portraying Nazi Germany as the West's last bulwark against Bolshevik expansion.
14. In the same year, Hitler and Mussolini cooperated in aiding General Francisco Franco's rebel Nationalist forces in the Spanish Civil War.
15. In March 1938, Hitler annexed Austria to the Reich, (known as the *Anschluss**). Britain and France did nothing to stop this further violation of the treaties. [See below]
16. Hitler then claimed that the Czechs were persecuting the German minority in the Sudetenland. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, held a succession of meetings with Hitler and persuaded the Czechs to yield to his demands. [See below]
17. On March 15, 1939, Hitler broke up Czechoslovakia, taking over the West, Bohemian and Moravia.
18. A few days later, he took Memel from Lithuania.
19. Britain and France warned Hitler that a similar attack upon Poland would lead to a general war.
20. In late May 1939, Hitler signed his *Pact of Steel* with Mussolini.
21. Hitler then surprised the world with the *German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact* of August 24, 1939. Secret clauses detailed the division of Eastern Europe between Germany and the USSR.
22. On Sept. 1st 1939, Hitler launched his invasion of Poland.
23. On Sept. 3rd, Britain and France declared war on Germany.

The Austrian Crises

1. In May 1932, Engelbert Dollfuß formed a Christian Socialist government with a majority of one seat in the *Nationalrat*, the Austrian Parliament. The Christian Socialist Party was opposed by the Marxists and the Nazis. Dollfuß decided to replace parliamentary government with a more authoritarian system.
2. In March 1933 an argument arose over the voting procedure. The leading officials of the Nationalrat resigned. Dollfuß declared that parliament was unworkable, and afterwards ruled by emergency decree, founding the Fatherland Front to unite all conservative factions.
3. Dollfuß, who relied upon the Austrian Fascist party, the *Heimwehr*, turned to Mussolini for support when, on February 12th, 1934, civil war broke out. After four days of fighting, Dollfuß was victorious.
4. An authoritarian constitution was imposed. Elected assemblies were replaced by advisory bodies. "Republic" was removed from the official name of the state.
5. On July 25, 1934, Nazis seized the chancellery in an attempted coup. They killed Dollfuß, but the plotters were compelled to surrender, and their leaders executed. When Mussolini rushed four divisions to the Brenner Pass, Hitler disowned his Austrian followers.
6. Kurt von Schuschnigg became chancellor on the death of Dollfuß. He wished to restore the Habsburgs, but dare not.
7. He negotiate an agreement with Hitler on July 11th, 1936, by which Germany promised to respect Austrian sovereignty, and in return Austria acknowledged itself to be "a German state."
8. In January 1938 the Austrian police discovered a Nazi conspiracy. Schuschnigg went to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden on Feb. 12th. He was confronted with threats of military intervention and was forced to agree to:
 - (a) a general amnesty for the accused Nazis;
 - (b) to include leading Nazis in his Cabinet;
 - (c) to give the Ministry of the Interior to *Arthur Seyss-Inquart*, a Nazis.
9. Schuschnigg decided to pre-empt Hitler by announcing that a plebiscite would be held on March 13th to decide on Austrian independence.
10. Hitler noted that:
 - (a) Neither Mussolini nor the British would oppose the union of Austria with Germany.
 - (b) The French Government was preoccupied with a political crisis.
11. On March 11th, 1938, Hitler demanded:
 - (a) the postponement of the plebiscite;
 - (b) the resignation of Schuschnigg.
12. Schuschnigg resigned.
13. Hitler and the German Army entered Austria on March 12th. A Nazi government was set up headed by Arthur Seyss-Inquart.
14. The Anschluss was proclaimed and Hitler entered Vienna in triumph on March 14th. Austria was effectively absorbed into the Reich.
15. France and Great Britain protested, but accepted the fait accompli.
16. A plebiscite was held on April 10th throughout "Greater Germany," resulting in a vote of more than 99% in favour of Hitler.
17. Immediately after the invasion, the Nazis arrested the leaders of the Austrian political

parties. Many Austrians, especially the Jews, went into exile.

The Sudetenland Crisis

1. About three million people in the Sudeten Mountains of Czechoslovakia were of German origin. Many were Nazis led by *Konrad Henlein*.
2. Already, before the achievement of the *Anschluß*, Hitler had denounced the Czechs for alleged persecution of this minority, and demanded their incorporation into the Reich.
3. The incorporation of the Sudeten Mountains, with their strong defences, into the Reich, would leave the rest of Czechoslovakia defenceless against attack from Germany.
4. In April, Hitler ordered Keitel to prepare for the invasion of Czechoslovakia by October, even if the French should intervene. He was prepared for a war with France.
5. Chamberlain warned Germany against military intervention, while at the same time urging Czech president Benêš to compromise with Henlein. Hitler, however, was encouraging Henlein to avoid coming to an agreement.
6. Hitler made inflammatory speeches demanding that the Germans of the Sudetenland be reunited with their homeland. A war scare developed.
7. The Czechoslovaks were relying on their defensive alliances with France and the USSR. The USSR was committed to the defence of Czechoslovakia if France intervened. Stalin indicated his willingness to cooperate with France and Great Britain and called for a conference, but his offer was ignored by Western leaders.
8. In mid-September, Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, held a meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden. As a result they agreed that:
 - (a) Hitler would take no military action without further talks.
 - (b) Chamberlain would try to persuade the French to accept the results of a plebiscite* in the Sudetenland.
9. The French premier, Edouard Daladier, and his foreign minister, Georges Bonnet, visited London, and agreed that all of the *Sudetenland* with more than 50% Germans be handed over to Germany. The Czech government, not consulted, at first rejected the proposal, but was pressured to accept it.
10. On September 22nd, Chamberlain met Hitler at Godesberg. There he discovered that Hitler had increased his demands. He now wanted in addition:
 - (a) the Sudetenland occupied by the German army;
 - (b) Czechs and Slovaks evacuated from the area by September 28th.Chamberlain agreed to present these new demands to the Czechs.
11. The British cabinet, the French and the Czechs rejected these demands.
12. On the 23rd September, the Czechoslovaks ordered a general mobilisation of their army, and on the next day, the French did the same.
13. Chamberlain proposed a four-power conference to avoid war, and Hitler agreed. On September 29th, Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini met in Munich. Mussolini introduced a written plan which had secretly been drawn up by the German Foreign Office:
 - (a) The German army was to occupy the Sudetenland by October 10th.
 - (b) An international commission would decide the future of other disputed areas. This was accepted by all the parties. The Czech Government was informed by Britain

and France that it had the choice of resisting Germany alone or submitting to the agreement. The Czechoslovak government chose to accept the Munich Agreement.

14. Chamberlain and Hitler also signed an agreement declaring their desire to resolve all their differences through peaceful consultations. Chamberlain and Daladier returned home to cheering crowds who were relieved that the war scare was over. Chamberlain announced that he had achieved "*peace with honour.*"
15. It was afterwards reported that Hitler was angered by the result, feeling that he had been cheated of his war.
16. When German troops marched into the Sudetenland, Poland seized the disputed Teschen district.
17. In October the Nazis encouraged the Slovak minority in Czechoslovakia to set up autonomous governments.
18. In November, Hitler offered Hungary the area north of the Danube taken from it in 1919.
19. On March 13, 1939, the Gestapo kidnapped the Slovak leader, Monsignor Jozef Tiso, took him to Berlin, and demanded that he declare Slovak independence in order to break up the country. When Tiso returned to Bratislava, he told the Slovak Diet that the only alternative to being taken over by Germany was to do as they were ordered. They submitted to Hitler's will.
20. In Prague, President Emil Hacha now governed only the rump* regions of Bohemia and Moravia. Hacha was summoned to Berlin and made to request that Bohemia and Moravia be incorporated into the Reich. The country he had promised at Munich not to take by force no longer existed. On the next day, March 16, the German Army occupied Bohemia and Moravia.
21. The Skoda armaments works was now at the disposal of the German war machine, and the boundaries of the Reich had been consolidated.

Reasons for the Signing of the Munich Pact

1. Britain needed time to rearm. R. A. B. Butler, a junior minister at the time, testified that the British Chiefs of Staff had warned Chamberlain that Britain was not ready for war:
 - (a) which might involve Italy in the Mediterranean and Japan in the Far East;
 - (b) that Britain's air defences were not ready, and France's were primitive. (Everyone exaggerated the strength of the Luftwaffe);
 - (c) that the 2,500 mile long Czech frontier with Germany, created after the Anschluß, could not be defended.

In the UK, the year following the Munich Agreement was used for intensive preparation for war, e.g. rearmament, the manufacture of fighter aircraft and training of pilots, the building of radar stations along the coast, the development of civil defence preparations, etc. It has been argued by defenders of Chamberlain's policies that this justified the Agreement. However, opponents argue that Germany made better use of the intervening year. (See below)
2. The French Army had no plans for invading Germany.
3. Although the USSR claimed readiness to honour its alliance with Czechoslovakia:
 - (a) The ways open to them were few without transit rights across Poland or Rumania, which the Poles and Rumanians refused.

- (b) In view of Stalin's 1937 purge of his entire officer corps, it was unlikely the Red Army would be effective.
 - (c) The USSR was engaged against Japanese forces on the Manchurian border.
 - (d) The Czechs themselves were nervous of Russian intervention. Czech General Jan Syrový said, "We don't want the Russians in here, as we shall never get them out."
4. Despite their protestations of principle, Czechoslovakian borders had been drawn by the Allies at Paris without any regard for the self-determination of Germans or Hungarians, many of whom were included in the new state, where they were treated as second-class citizens. Thus even if Hitler would have to be dealt with, the Czechoslovak issue was not a good enough casus belli with which to justify a general war.
 5. The League of Nations was not capable of dealing with the crisis, as the USA had never joined it, and Germany, Italy and Japan had already left it.

The Significance of the Munich Pact

1. It is not clear whether, for the Allies, the Munich Pact was:
 - (a) An attempt to right some of the wrongs of the Treaties of Versailles, Saint Germain and Neuilly, and so create a more stable and peaceful Europe;
 - (b) An attempt to buy time to prepare for war against the Axis Powers.
2. The most diverse judgements have been made about the wisdom of the Munich agreement:
 - (a) Popular opinion in Britain and France was expressed in the receptions the leaders received upon returning home.
 - (b) Winston Churchill regarded Munich as an unmitigated defeat.
3. It gave Britain time to rearm, so that she was able to withstand Hitler alone in the Battle of Britain, until such time as the Axis drove the USSR and USA to action in self-defence.
4. It gave the Germans more than it secured for the British and French:
 - (a) The acquisition of Czechoslovakia gave Germany.
 - (i) Skoda: the second most important armaments works in Europe;
 - (ii) The thirty-five best equipped divisions in Europe (the Czech Army);
 - (iii) A strong defensive border, in the Sudeten Mountains, without a shot being fired;
 - (iv) A potential Soviet air base situated between Berlin, Vienna and Munich.
 - (b) Germany rearmed during 1938-9 more efficiently than Britain and France. At the time of Munich, the Germans lacked the tanks for a Blitzkrieg against France.
 - (c) With more resolution, Poland might have been involved on the Allied side.
 - (d) With more resolution, the leadership of the German Army might have moved against Hitler.
5. The US supported Chamberlain at Munich. Roosevelt's comment to him afterwards was "Good man." Afterwards, when appeasement had to be given up, and its disadvantages had become obvious, they tended to dissociate themselves from it, stressing their own lack of responsibility for what had happened there.

The Polish Crisis

1. After the destruction of Czechoslovakia there was a lot of speculation about the next victim Hitler would choose: Romania with its oil reserves, the Ukraine, Poland, or even

- the Netherlands, which suffered an invasion scare in January.
2. On March 17th 1939, Chamberlain attacked Hitler's untruthfulness and evident intention of dominating the continent by force.
 3. Three days later Hitler demanded a "corridor across the [Polish] Corridor" to East Prussia and restoration of Danzig to Germany.
 4. On the 22nd March, he forced Lithuania to hand over Memel to Germany.
 5. On March 31st, the British announced their support for Poland.
 6. Mussolini occupied Albania on April 7th.
 7. Hitler who reacted to the British guarantee with the oath, "I'll cook them a stew they'll choke on!" renounced his 1934 pact with Poland and the Anglo-German Naval Treaty on the 28th. Germany and Italy then turned their Axis into a military alliance known as the **Pact of Steel** on May 22.
 8. Unable to defend Poland without Soviet help, in the late spring of 1939, the British and French approached Stalin with a request for collaboration against Hitler. It was too late.
 9. Stalin decided that:
 - (a) the Western powers would leave most of the defence of Poland to the USSR;
 - (b) war might generate rebellion at home;
 - (c) He was not ready for the inevitable war with Germany;
 - (d) With Britain's guarantee to Poland, Hitler could only safely take that country at the cost of war with the British and French. Thus Hitler would need the USSR as an ally.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact]

1. Since 1938, secret contacts between Berlin and Moscow had been maintained.
2. On May 3rd, Stalin replaced his Jewish Foreign Minister, Litvinov, with Vyacheslav Molotov, sending a signal to Berlin that Stalin was prepared to deal with the Nazis.
3. On August 23rd 1939, Ribbentrop and Molotov signed the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in Moscow. This ten-year nonaggression pact contained secret clauses:
 - (a) Poland was to be partitioned between the USSR and Germany, along the Curzon Line.
 - (b) Hitler conceded the USSR a free hand in the countries which had been part of the Tsarist Empire: Finland, the Baltic states, and Moldova.
4. From Hitler's point of view, this treaty would:

Allow him to invade Poland with out fear of having to fight a war on two fronts. Thus it fulfilled the same function as the Schlieffen Plan in the First World War, enabling Hitler to dispose of France before having to deal with the USSR.
5. From Stalin's point of view, this treaty would:
 - (a) Take the pressure off him in Europe, so that he could deal with the Japanese in Manchuria;
 - (b) Give him time to prepare for the inevitable war against Hitler's Germany;
 - (c) Allow him to recover the Russian lands lost in 1919 by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

The Approach to War

1. On 25th August, Chamberlain concluded a full alliance with Poland.

2. Hitler delayed his planned invasion of Poland for a week in the hope of reaching an agreement on British neutrality, with guarantees of security for the British Empire.
3. Hitler then demanded that a Polish representative go to Berlin on August 30th to settle the issue of Danzig and the Polish Corridor immediately.
4. When the ultimatum expired, the German army staged a border provocation, a mock attack on the German border by Germans in Polish uniforms, and invaded Poland on September 1st 1939.
5. The British and French declared war on Germany.

The Failure of Collective Security

After the First World War the Great Powers had sought to achieve security from aggression, and to avoid another war by means of:

1. The peace settlements drawn up at Paris;
2. The League of Nations;
3. Various Treaties (later dismissively called "pieces of paper").

The Failure of the League of Nations: The Work of the League

1. The League had some successes:
 - (a) In a quarrel between Sweden and Finland over the Aaland Islands in 1920, the League ruled in favour of Finland. Sweden accepted the verdict of the court.
 - (b) When Poland and Lithuania both claimed Vilna, the League was overruled by the Conference of Ambassadors.
 - (c) When Poland and Germany quarrelled over Upper Silesia in 1921, the League partitioned it.
 - (d) When Greece invaded Bulgaria in 1925 after shooting incidents on the frontier, the League ordered a withdrawal and fined Greece.
 - (e) When Turkey claimed Mosul the League decided in favour of Iraq (a British mandated territory).
 - (f) A quarrel between Peru and Colombia was settled.
 - (g) A quarrel between Bolivia and Paraguay was settled.
 - (h) Much good work was done by the commissions and councils, e.g.
 - (i) The International Labour Office persuaded many states to enforce a maximum working day and week and minimum wages for workers, and to introduce sickness and unemployment benefit and old age pensions.
 - (ii) The Refugee Organisation helped half a million Central European prisoners marooned in Russia to return home.
 - (iii) The Health Organisation successfully combated a typhus epidemic in Russia, which might have spread to the rest of Europe.
 - (iv) The Mandates Commission successfully supervised the administration of the Saar and, after a plebiscite, its return to Germany.
2. But its failures were more obvious and important:
 - (a) When Mussolini bombarded and then invaded Corfu in response to a shooting on the Albanian-Greek border, he threatened to leave the League if it ruled against him, and the Conference of Ambassadors intervened and ordered Greece to pay a fine.
 - (b) When the League condemned the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the

Japanese simply withdrew from the League, and nothing was done to force her to comply. The Japanese subsequently ignored the League in their attacks upon China.

- (c) The World Disarmament Conference (1932-33) failed when Hitler walked out.
- (d) The League condemned the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and applied economic sanctions. But these excluded the products crucially important to waging a war: coal, oil, iron and steel, and were ignored by non-member states. The League was seen to be ineffective.
- (e) After 1935 the League was not taken seriously as a means of settling international disputes or deterring aggression. It had become irrelevant.
Thus when the British wished to monitor and prevent intervention in the Spanish Civil War, they set up an ad hoc* body, the Non-Intervention Committee, which itself proved a vehicle for appeasement.

Reasons for the Failure of the League

1. It was linked closely with the treaties of the Peace of Paris. This gave it the air of an organisation of the victorious powers. The defeated powers were not allowed to become members for some time.
2. In March 1920 the isolationist Republican-dominated US Congress refused to ratify membership of the League. Having worked so hard to set it up, Wilson was unable to join the League, so the League lost the financial and psychological benefit which would have accrued from US membership. This made the League look like an Anglo-French enterprise.
3. The Conference of Ambassadors twice overruled the League:
 - (a) over the Polish and Lithuanian claims to Vilna;
 - (b) over Mussolini's invasion of Corfu.
4. There were problems with the Covenant:
 - (a) It was difficult to achieve the unanimous decisions required;
 - (b) There was no military force of the League, which had to rely upon individual nations to supply troops in the event of military sanctions being decided upon.
5. States tended to seek security independently of the League by signing mutual non-aggression pacts. This undermined confidence in the effectiveness of the League.
6. Economic problems after 1929 encouraged the growth of bellicose* nationalist regimes which sought to achieve autarchy and divert attention from internal problems by foreign adventures.
7. There was a tendency for the main members of the League to appease powerful aggressor states. This began early, in 1923 with the appeasement of Mussolini over Corfu. It became apparent with the appeasement of Japan over the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and impossible to ignore over the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. Aggressor states were able to ignore the League because its leading states were not prepared to enforce its decisions by serious economic sanctions* or by the use of force.

The "Pieces of Paper"

The most important of these included:

1. The Franco-Polish Pact (1921)

2. **The Washington Conference** (1921-2):
 - (a) limited the Japanese navy to three-fifths those of Britain and the USA;
 - (b) allowed Japan to keep all German islands in the North Pacific;
 - (c) The Allies agreed to build no new naval bases near Japan.
 3. The Genoa Conference (1922) Lloyd George sought to:
 - (a) improve Franco-German relations;
 - (b) re-establish relations with Russia.
 - (c) The French refused compromise, so the Germans and Russians withdrew and signed:
 4. The **Treaty of Rapallo** (1922) between Germany and Russia, by which Russia agreed to allow the Germans secretly to evade some of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, e.g. to maintain an air force on Russian soil.
 5. The Franco-Czechoslovak Pact (1924).
 6. **The Locarno Treaties** (1925) The most important was that by which France, Belgium, and Germany would respect their common frontiers. Britain and Italy would assist any state attacked. No guarantee was given to the states on Germany's eastern frontiers.
 7. The Franco-Rumanian Pact (1926)
 8. The Franco-Rumanian Pact (1927)
 9. The **Kellog-Briand Pact** (1928) Originally a Franco-American pact renouncing war, it was signed by 65 states renouncing war as an instrument of policy (including Japan, Italy, Germany and the USSR).
 10. The German-Polish Pact (1934): a ten-year non-aggression pact.
 11. The **Rome-Berlin Axis** (1936) between Germany and Italy.
 12. The **Anti-Comintern Pact** (1936) between Germany, Italy and Japan.
 13. The **Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact** (1939) between the USSR and Germany, outwardly a ten-year non-aggression pact, but with a secret protocol on the division of eastern Europe.
- They failed to keep the peace because no one was prepared to back them up or keep their word if it meant war. This was a consequence of the horrors of the First World War.

Appeasement

1. "Appeasement" is the policy of meeting threats of force with compromise or concessions, rather than meeting force with force.
2. It is an important topic, because the revisionist historian A. J. P. Taylor argued that the passive response of world leaders to Hitler's policies and actions encouraged his expansionism, led him to miscalculate, and so precipitated the war.
3. In dealing with this topic we should always bear in mind the distorting effects of hindsight,* that is, of looking at events in the past in the light of what happened afterwards. We know that the policies of the Western Allies led to the worst war in history, but at the time when such policies were formulated and carried out, those concerned did not know what was still at that time in the future, and the future was unknown to them. To understand their motives, we must:
 - (a) consider what lay in their recent past, upon which their judgements would be made;
 - (b) discount what lay in their future (which we know, but which they did not).

4. The tendency of the Great Powers to appease aggression from any quarter had been apparent since the end of the First World War. The main examples of appeasement include:
 - (a) Kemal's rejection of the Treaty of Sevres and its renegotiation (1920-2);
 - (b) Mussolini's bombardment and occupation of Corfu (1923);
 - (c) the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931);
 - (d) the reintroduction of conscription and rearmament in Germany (1933);
 - (d) the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (1935);
 - (e) the German remilitarization of the Rhineland (1936);
 - (e) the ignoring of German/Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War (1936-9);
 - (f) the Anschluss (1938);
 - (g) the demand for the Sudetenland (1938);
 - (h) the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia (1939).

An Analysis of Motives

General factors

1. The First World War had been the largest man-made catastrophe in human history. In some countries virtually an entire generation of men had been killed. The repeat of such a disaster must be avoided at all costs.
2. It was believed that the next world war would be even worse than the first, because of the development of bombers, and of incendiary, gas and explosive bombs. **"The bomber will always get through"** *Stanley Baldwin*. Immediately upon the declaration of war death would rain down upon capital cities, annihilating them within hours. Civilisation would probably be destroyed. These fears are evident in the fiction of the day, with titles like *The Gas War of 1940*, *The Poison War*, *The Black Death*, *The Shape of Things to Come*, *War on Women* and *Air Reprisal*. This belief was based upon the application of imagination to the memory of the strategic bombing of the First World War. In fact no air force was capable of sustained offensive long-range bombing until 1939.
3. A basic moral principle is that it is always right, if forced to choose between evils, to choose the lesser. In view of the points made above, war would almost never actually be the lesser evil.
4. This was assisted by Hitler's always proceeding one step at a time, while disclaiming in advance future aggressive moves, and so disarming his opponents.
5. As a reaction to the First World War, pacifism, the belief that violence is always morally wrong, was prevalent e.g. among "Christian Socialists". This was illustrated by the "King and Country" debate in the Oxford Union (the debating society of Oxford University, oldest debating society in the world).
6. Among western politicians there was considerable sympathy for the view that the treaties at the end of the First World War had been unfair to the defeated powers, and in particular that the Treaty of Versailles had been unjust to Germany. In particular some of its provisions were intolerable violations of national sovereignty (a basic concept of modern political life), e.g. the demilitarisation of the Rhineland. By removing such limitations of national sovereignty, Hitler was removing reasonable causes of German discontent, and so making Europe a safer place and war less likely.
7. There was a lack of unity among the other powers, e.g. French distrust of the British

following the Anglo-German naval agreement, which effectively broke up the Stresa Front.

8. Fear of Communism, and therefore of the USSR, led to the belief that a strong Germany under an anti-Communist Hitler was desirable, since it would form a strong buffer against the spread of communism from the east. e.g. This probably led to failure to cooperate with Stalin during the Munich Crisis.
9. Economic co-operation was much desired as being in the interests of all. This would not happen if hostile relations developed between the main trading nations.
10. Due to the Depression, western governments were under pressure to improve the standard of living of the people rather than rearm. As a consequence, they were not prepared for war and needed to rearm first.
11. In view of the unpopularity of war at this time it would have been electorally difficult for democratic leaders to act in an apparently reckless or aggressive way in standing up to the dictators if war might result.

Reasons Peculiar to Great Britain and France

1. There was a tendency to overestimate the effect of German rearmament, particularly the power of the Luftwaffe, during the key years 1933-37.
2. A European war would expose the Empires of both countries in the Far East to possible attack from a newly aggressive Japan. Neither Britain nor France could really afford to fight a war in both areas.

Reasons Peculiar to Britain

1. During the crucial years Chamberlain felt that he could trust Hitler.
2. The British did not feel confident in the ability of France to withstand another war, and were reluctant to give the French the impression that they would back them up, to prevent the French from taking precipitate action and involving them in an unnecessary war.
3. The British lacked confidence in US support in the event of a war. Chamberlain said that: "The Power that had the greatest strength was the United States of America, but he would be a rash man who based his calculations on hope from that quarter."
4. Paul Kennedy argues that appeasement had been a traditional policy of British governments since the 1860s, due to
 - (a) the application of morality to foreign policy, leading to a preference to settling disputes by negotiation, and the disapproval of resort to force;
 - (b) disruption of trade threatened Britain more than her protectionist* rivals;
 - (c) Britain's overseas commitments were perceived as out of phase with its resources. Britain was overstretched;
 - (d) The British electorate disliked wars, particularly expensive ones, so peace was usually seen as in the national interest.

Reasons Peculiar to France

1. The social fabric of France was in a state of disintegration following the effects of the depression. This led to:
 - (a) Political polarisation to the left (Communism) and the right (fascism);
 - (b) Strikes and industrial unrest;

- (c) Weak and frequently changing governments;
 - (d) reluctance to spend money on rearmament, resulting in unprepared military forces.
2. Due to her geographical position it could be expected that another war would be particularly costly for France in every way, as had the First World War.
 3. The High Command overwhelmingly favoured a low-risk defensive strategy unsuitable for anything other than the defence of the homeland.
 4. Following the betrayal of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, the French did not trust the British to support any pre-emptive action they might take.

Reasons Peculiar to the USA

1. Traditional isolationism had reasserted itself as a reaction to American involvement in the First World War.
2. After the depression there was a perceived need for America to concentrate on rebuilding its economy.
3. The US army was small, e.g. smaller than the Czech army, due to traditional US beliefs that standing armies are agencies of royal oppression, and that the USA should be defended by an armed citizenry.
4. The USA was preoccupied with the business of intervening in Caribbean, Central and South American states, and in the Western Pacific, building up its hegemony over those regions. Europe could wait, its powers exhausting themselves in war in the meantime.

Historiography of the Causes of the Second World War

1. The conventional view is that the war was due entirely to Hitler's plans to dominate Europe and expand Germany, and his aggressive policies. Some, e.g. William Shirer (in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*) suggested that Hitler had a detailed timetable for war.
2. In 1961 the British historian *A. J. P. Taylor* challenged this with a "*revisionist*"* view by suggesting that:
 - (a) Hitler's "ideology" was nothing more than the sort of nationalist sentiments "which echo the conversation of any Austrian café or German beer-house";
 - (b) that Hitler's ends and means resembled those of any "traditional German statesman";
 - (c) that the war came about because Britain and France dithered between appeasement and resistance, leading Hitler to miscalculate and bring war about by accident in September 1939.
Taylor's thesis makes Hitler's responsibility for the war an error of judgement rather than a willful crime.
3. Fischer's theses on the causes of World War I are important in assessing Taylor's view, for, if Germany at that earlier time was bent on European and world hegemony, then a case could be made for a continuity in German foreign policy from at least the 1890s to 1945. Supporters of this approach compare Hitler's use of foreign policy to crush domestic dissent with similar practices by the Kaiser and Bismarck.

But others object that there could be no continuity between the traditional imperialism of

- the Kaiser's Reich and the fanatical racism of the Nazi Reich. Hitler was not trying to preserve traditional elites but to destroy them.
3. **Alan Bullock** proposed a synthesis of the conventional and revisionist views: Hitler had clear long-term aims, but was a flexible opportunist concerning how to achieve them.
 4. Soviet writers attempted to draw a causal chain between the development of capitalism and Fascism.
 5. T. W. Mason exposed a German economic crisis in 1937. The recovery of the economy in the mid 1930s, together with rearmament, had created an increased demand for the import of fuel, food and raw materials. Germany did not have the exports or foreign exchange to pay for them. (This problem was mentioned at the Hossbach Meeting). Conquest of new territories enabled the Germans to
 - (a) seize new resources;
 - (b) utilize foreign labour;
 - (c) compel countries to trade at a favourable rate of exchange against the mark. This suggests that the timing of the Second World War was partly a function of economic pressures. However, Hitler regarded himself as the master of economic forces, not their servant.
 6. E. M. Robertson considers that revenge played a large role, making Hitler's actions sometimes difficult to explain rationally.
 7. In the 1970s and 1980s:
 - (a) Conscious of US over-extension in the world American historians came to appreciate the plight of Britain in the 1930s.
 - (b) The publication of British and French documents of the 1930s enabled historians to understand the reasons for appeasement better.

Glossary

- ad hoc*: especially set up or chosen for a particular purpose at a particular time under particular circumstances
- Anschluss*: the union of Germany and Austria
- appeasement*: offering conciliation in the face of aggression fait accompli: a situation already brought about
- hindsight*: the fallacy of seeking to understand and explain the motives of politicians in the light of events which happened subsequently, of which they were not aware at the time that they made their decisions
- Lebensraum*: living space
- memorandum*: a note of a meeting kept for the record within an organization, and therefore not for public knowledge
- revisionist*: a radically fresh view of a historical problem which had hitherto had a generally accepted explanation

Bibliography

Adamthwaite, A. P., *The Making of the Second World War*, Allen & Unwin (London, 1977)

- Baumant, M., *The Origins of the Second World War*, Yale University Press (New Haven, 1978)
- Bell, Philip, "Hitler's War? The Origins of the Second World War", in *Themes in Modern European History*, ed. Paul Hayes, Routledge (London & New York, 1992)
- Bloncourt, P., *The Embattled Peace 1919-1939*, Faber (London, 1968)
- Bullock, Alan, "Hitler and the Origins of the Second World War," in *The Origins of the Second World War*, Esmonde M. Robertson (ed.), Macmillan Student Editions, Macmillan (London, 1971)
- Carr, W., *Arms, Autarky and Aggression*, Arnold (London, 1972)
- Gehl, J., *Austria, Germany and the Anschluss*, new ed., Greenwood (Westport Conn., 1970)
- Henig, R., *The Origins of the Second World War*, Methuen, (London, 1985)
- Kennedy, Paul, *Strategy and Diplomacy 1870-1945*, Fontana (London, 1984)
- Marks, S., *The Illusion of Peace, 1918-1933*, Macmillan (London, 1977)
- Overy, Richard, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Seminar Studies in History, Longman (London & New York,)
- Robbins, K., *Munich, 1938*, Cassell (London, 1968)
- Stone, R., *The Drift to War*, Heinemann (London, 1975)
- Taylor, A. J. P., *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin (London, 1964)
- The Origins of the Second World War*, ed. Esmonde M. Robertson, Macmillan Student Editions, Macmillan (London, 1971)
- The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered: The A. J. P Taylor Debate After Twenty-Five Years*, ed. G. Martel, (London, 1986)
- Thorne, C., *The Approach to War 1938-1939*, Macmillan (London, 1967)
- Wolfson, R., *From Peace to War: European Relations 1919-39*, Arnold (London, 1985)

The Second World War represented a repurposed, albeit temporary, redirection of the international economy for military and industrial purposes. The Soviet Union had made itself into the world's third leading heavy industrial power behind the USA and Germany and its emphasis was emphatically military. If one accepts the default definition of globalization as an increase in cross-border flows of goods and services, capital and labour, then the mobilization for war initiated a sort of militarized, non-market globalization process that remarkably bears many of the hallmarks of the post-1980s World War Two began in September 1939 when Britain and France declared war on Germany following Germany's invasion of Poland. Although the outbreak of war was triggered by Germany's invasion of Poland, the causes of World War 2 are more complex. Loading Treaty of Versailles. In 1919, Lloyd George of England, Orlando of Italy, Clemenceau of France and Woodrow Wilson from the US met to discuss how Germany was to be made to pay for the damage world war one had caused. Loading... The second was called the Anti-Comintern Pact and allied Germany with Japan. Hitler's next step was to begin taking back the land that had been taken away from Germany. In March 1938, German troops marched into Austria.