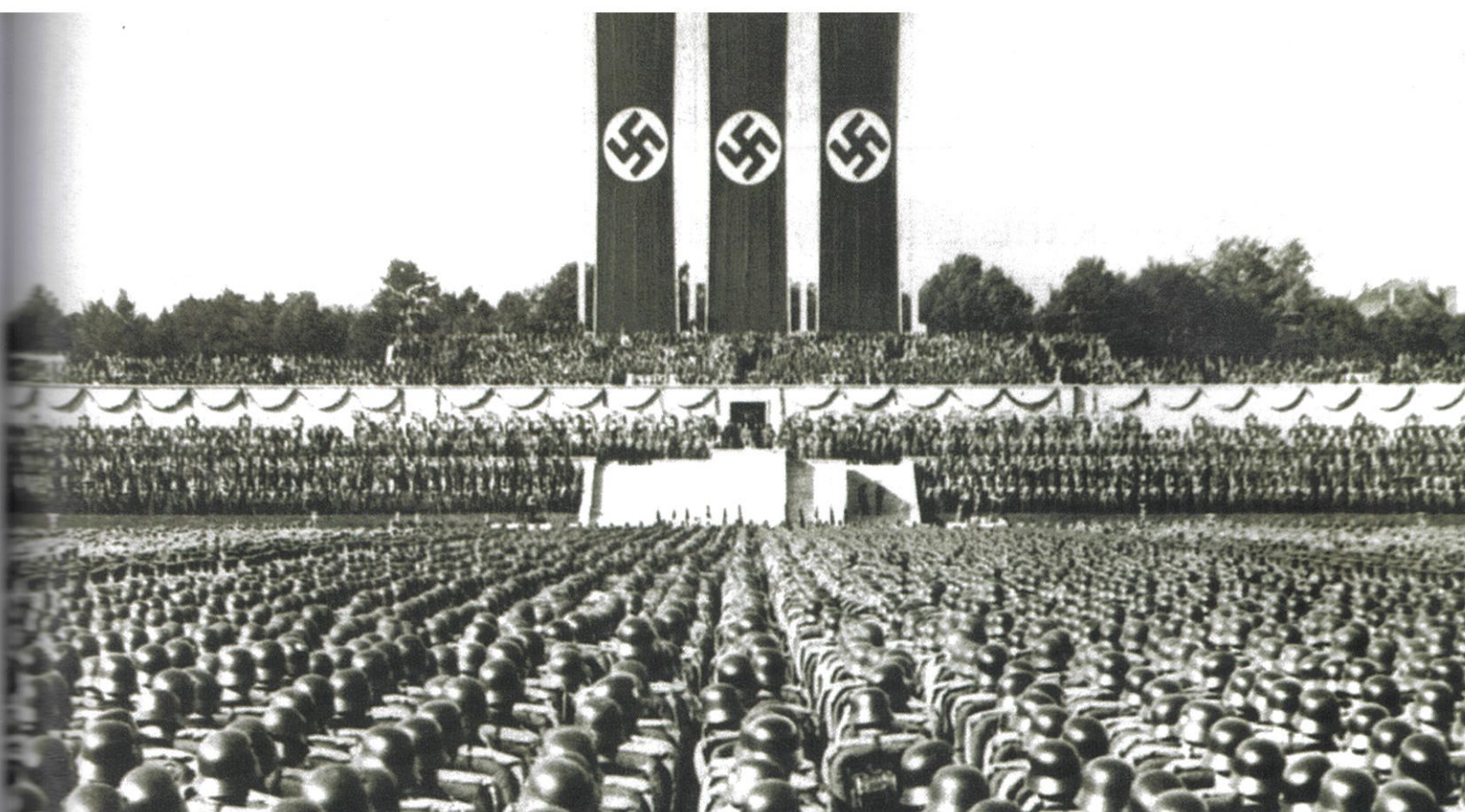




› Chapter 3, Key Question 3:

How far was Hitler's foreign policy to blame for the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939?

FOCUS POINTS

This chapter will help you to answer these questions:

- What were the long-term consequences of the Treaty of Versailles?
- What were the consequences of the failures of the League of Nations in the 1930s?
- Was the policy of appeasement justified?
- How important was the Nazi-Soviet Pact?
- Why did Britain and France declare war on Germany in September 1939?

3.0 What is this enquiry about?

In this chapter, you will investigate the foreign policy introduced by Nazi leader Adolf Hitler in the 1930s. What were his aims? What was his strategy for achieving those aims? You will learn about **militarism** and nationalism in Germany, and the responses of other countries to German aggression. You will find out why those responses could not prevent war breaking out in Europe by 1939.

Hitler turned his government into a dictatorship and Germany into a **totalitarian** society. Hitler pursued an aggressive foreign policy after 1935. The two main European countries opposing Germany were Britain and France – both democracies. Leaders in democracies must take account of popular opinion otherwise they are likely to be removed from power at the next election. So, it is important to understand events in the 1930s from the perspective of the decision-makers at the time.

It is also important to understand Germany's relationship with other countries, especially Italy. During the late 1930s, Germany and Italy gradually drew closer together and the Rome–Berlin Axis was agreed in 1936. The nationalistic and militaristic nature of both governments gave them a common cause, building empires in Europe (Germany), and in Africa and south-east Europe (Italy). The fact that each country had imperial ambitions in different parts of the world was key to their growing friendship because it meant they were not in competition with each other.

KEY TERMS

militarism: the belief that a country should maintain a strong army, navy and air force and be prepared to use them aggressively to defend or promote national interests. Militarism also suggests the glorification of military ideals such as duty, order, loyalty and obedience

totalitarianism: a political system in which those in power have complete control and allow no opposition



Figure 3.1: A map showing German aggression in the late 1930s

SOURCES 3A & 3B



Source 3A: A propaganda poster from the Nazi Party, which governed Germany after 1933. The caption reads: 'Long Live Germany!'



Source 3B: A photograph of the Italian leader, Benito Mussolini, surrounded by officers from the Italian army

SOURCE ANALYSIS 3.1

Use the map in Figure 3.1 and Sources 3A and 3B to answer the following questions.

- What features of nationalism and militarism can you see in the map and the two photographs?
- What evidence can you find on the map and from your own knowledge that nationalism and militarism led to 'successes' for Germany in the 1930s?
- What can you learn from the map and sources about how the growth of nationalism and militarism might threaten the international peace in Europe during the 1930s?

FOCUS TASK 3.1

Create a table like this. As you work through this chapter, use the table to record Hitler's aims, actions and policies and how various other countries and the League of Nations reacted to them. This will help you to answer the key question: *How far was Hitler's foreign policy to blame for the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939?*

Date	Hitler's aims, actions and policies	Reactions and actions of the League of Nations, Britain, France, Italy and the USSR



3.1 What were the long-term consequences of the Treaty of Versailles?

In Chapter 1, you learnt about the Paris Peace Conference. After the decisions had been made, it was time to apply the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. However, this was difficult, as Germany, which had not been part of the negotiations, was deeply unhappy with the settlement. The treaty had several significant long-term consequences that affected Germany directly or indirectly.

German minorities in other countries

The redrawn borders in Europe left significant numbers of German minorities in new countries, including one million German people in Poland. The newly created states to the east of Germany were weak and had few defence forces. The successor states of Poland, Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia were now positioned between two strong 'friends' – Germany and the USSR. In the years after 1919, these minority groups campaigned to be allowed to return to Germany.

This campaigning grew stronger and louder after the Nazis came to power in 1933. The Treaty of Versailles and the bitterness it generated in Germany was a useful tool for nationalist politicians. They aimed to unify all Germans behind one message: that the peace was unfair and must be changed – or destroyed.

Relationship between Germany and the USSR

The two outcasts from Europe after 1919, Germany and the USSR, signed the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922. They gave up all territorial and financial claims on each other and opened up diplomatic relations. Both countries claimed territory in the newly created Poland because Germany lay to the west of it and the Soviet Union to the east. They were also moving closer economically. The USSR needed Germany's skilled industrial workers, its engineers and its knowledge of advanced industrial methods. The USSR provided a market for German products and a source of raw materials.

Relationship between France and Britain

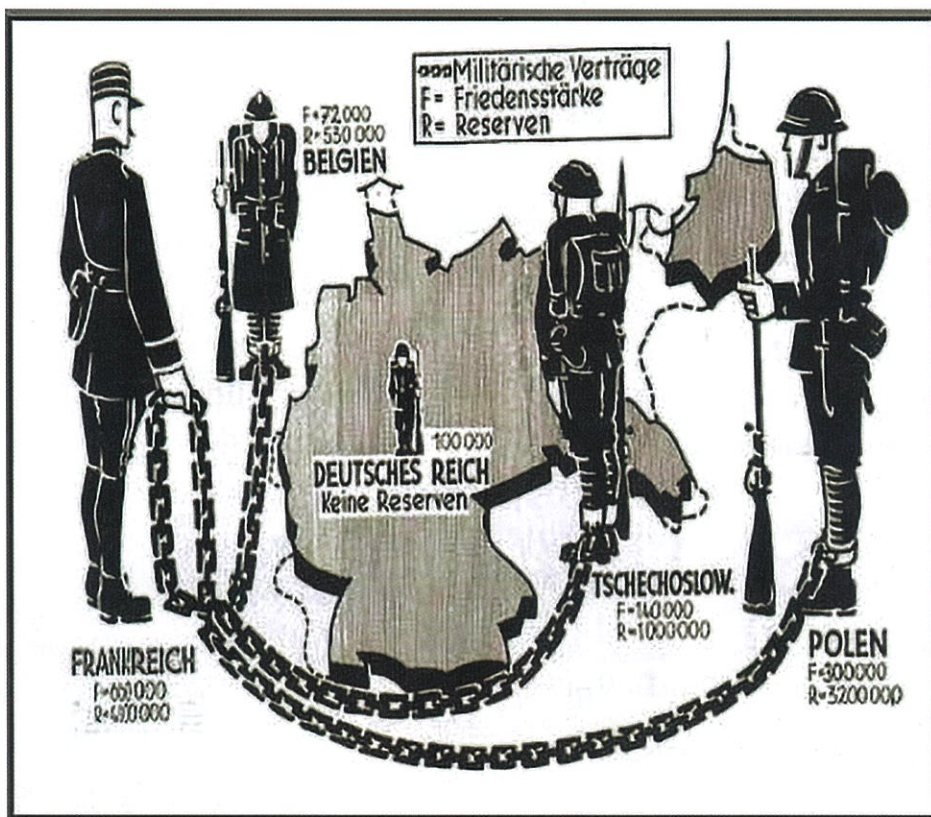
Disagreement about implementing the Treaty of Versailles worsened relations between France and Britain. France wanted every feature of the treaty to be fully implemented, believing this was the only way to secure itself against future German aggression. However, Britain saw the need for flexibility, especially to allow trade with Germany, which was essential for a healthy British economy. This was to cause serious difficulties in the 1930s as the two countries tried to keep the peace in Europe against the aggression and nationalism of Hitler's Germany.

REFLECTION

In pairs, discuss why peace is often hard to establish after war. Write down four reasons. Join with another pair to share your thoughts. Reduce your group's list of reasons to just three.

Now reflect on how you approached this activity and how successful it was. Did one pair dominate the discussions? If so, what could be done to prevent this from happening next time? If you were teaching this activity to your class, what could you say that would help two pairs work well as a group? Put these ideas into practice in the next activity that has a similar structure.

SOURCE 3C



Source 3C: A poster showing a German view of the Treaty of Versailles. The countries shown are: Belgium (*Belgien*); Poland (*Polen*); French Empire (*Frankreich*); German Empire (*Deutsches Reich*); and Czechoslovakia (*Tschechoslow.*). *Militärische Friedensstärke* are peacetime military forces. *Reserven* means reserve military forces

SOURCE ANALYSIS 3.2

Study Source 3C.

- What aspect of the treaty does the poster focus on?
- Why are there chains linking countries?
- Why have the figures been drawn in different sizes?
- Based on this poster, write down three words that sum up the German view of the Treaty of Versailles.
- Is the poster an example of propaganda or not? Give reasons for your answers.

KEY TERM

anti-Semitism: hostility towards or prejudice against Jewish people

KEY FIGURE

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)

Hitler was born in Austria but fought for Germany in the First World War. Afterwards, he joined the German Workers' Party, later the National Socialist Workers (Nazi) Party. He soon became its leader. He was sent to prison after an attempt to overthrow the state government in Munich in 1923 and spent some of his time there writing a book called *Mein Kampf* ('My Struggle'). In it, he explained his **anti-Semitism** and the need for Germany to have more *Lebensraum* ('living space'). Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933. His actions to overturn the Treaty of Versailles, including rearming, proved popular. However, his racist policies had a terrible effect on the lives of minority groups, particularly Jewish people. Hitler enjoyed some initial successes in the Second World War, but when the USA and the USSR allied against him, the tide of war turned, and Germany was defeated. In the ruins of Berlin, Hitler took his own life.



Hitler's foreign policy aims

Historians are divided on whether Hitler had a long-standing plan to go to war, or whether he saw opportunities when they arose and used them to his advantage. However, he had several clear foreign policy aims throughout the 1930s.

Tearing up the Treaty of Versailles

In Germany, resentment at the Treaty of Versailles lasted long after it was signed. Reversing the terms of the treaty was one of Hitler's main aims in the 1930s. His demands, his actions and his motives mostly came from the dictated peace. The steps he took between 1935 and 1939 in defiance of the treaty included:

- rearmament
- remilitarising the Rhineland
- *Anschluss* ('union') with Austria
- the transfer of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia
- the invasion of Prague
- the seizure of Memel
- claims over Danzig and the Polish Corridor.

Creating *Lebensraum* ('living space')

The search for *Lebensraum* was driven by the limited German resources of food and raw materials. This convinced Hitler that Germans required 'living space' to survive. He believed that this could only be found to the east, from Russia. The search for *Lebensraum* partly shaped Hitler's foreign policy after he became chancellor in 1933.

Establishing a new *Reich* ('empire')

Hitler's third foreign policy aim was to unite all German-speaking people into one *Reich*, or empire. Hitler believed that history was all about the struggle between 'races'. 'Superior races' flourished or they died. To grow and develop, the German people had to maintain their biological purity and take over more *Lebensraum*. To expand abroad, Germany must have a pure German population at home. The Nazis believed that having all Germans in one *Reich* meant that anyone who was not German had no right to live in Germany. According to Nazi ideology, the Jews were a parasitic 'race' that plotted to enslave the Germanic (*Aryan*) master race. Russians were *Slavs*, who were considered inferior by the Nazis, so taking over Russian/Slavic lands for *Lebensraum* perfectly fitted Hitler's plans.

KEY TERMS

Lebensraum: the idea that a successful country needs extra land in which to settle its people. In Hitler's thinking this was the area east of Germany in Poland and the Soviet Union

Aryan: belonging to a group of white people with pale hair and blue eyes, believed by the Nazis to be better than other groups

Slavs: a number of ethnic groups of people in eastern and south-eastern Europe. Slavs and their languages (Russian, Polish, Czech, Serbian) are related, and many (though not all) of them belong historically to the Orthodox Christian churches

REVISION TIP

It is important to remember why there was such widespread resentment of the treaty in Germany. You can record and revise this information using key headings:

- **Guilt** for War
- **Land** lost for punishment
- **Reparations** for the destruction caused
- **Military** cuts for peace.

Under each heading, write down what each of these means and the effect it had in Germany, to create a set of revision notes.



Figure 3.2: A German wall chart from 1935. Charts like this were used in 'racial theory' lessons to show what the Nazis considered to be superior and inferior characteristics

ACTIVITY 3.1

- Sum up the three aims of Hitler's foreign policy in the 1930s using just three words for each aim. Then draw a picture to represent each of the aims.
- Find a partner and share your summaries and pictures. Discuss why Hitler developed those specific aims and not others, such as invading Italy or Spain.
- Hitler's foreign policy aims were closely linked to the Nazis' views on race. If Hitler's plans for *Lebensraum* were successful, which areas of Europe would form part of his new *Reich*? What might happen to the groups living in these areas when the Nazis invaded? Discuss your ideas as a class.

Key points

Long-term consequences of the Treaty of Versailles

- The bitter legacy of the treaty lasted through the 1920s and 1930s. It stirred nationalist feelings that many politicians used to gain popularity, including Hitler.
- The treaty separated millions of Germans from their homeland, and they became minorities in new countries like Poland. These groups campaigned to re-join Germany.
- Britain and France took different views about the implementation of the treaty.
- Hitler and the Nazis made it a key policy to overturn the Treaty of Versailles.
- Hitler's other aims included looking for living space (*Lebensraum*) and creating a unified empire (*Reich*) of German-speaking people.

3.2 What were the consequences of the failures of the League of Nations in the 1930s?

You have already studied the impact of the League of Nations, the organisation set up after the end of the First World War. The League's failures in the 1930s had a significant effect on Hitler's plans for Germany. Italy, under its own dictator Benito Mussolini, was similarly affected.

KEY FIGURE

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945)

Mussolini was Italy's prime minister from 1922 to 1943. As a fascist dictator, he was a close ally of Hitler during the Second World War. Mussolini wanted to restore the grandeur of the Roman Empire by increasing Italy's overseas empire and the fascist sphere of influence. When war started in 1939, Mussolini tried to match Germany's initial successes but could never match Germany's military resources. Mussolini was replaced as prime minister in 1943. However, he served as the head of the Italian Social Republic until he was captured and executed by Italian partisans in 1945.

