

ACTIVITY 3.1

- a 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.
- b 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.
- c 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.





Figure 3.3: Lord Robert Cecil (see Chapter 2) speaking at the Women's International League before the Disarmament Conference in Geneva

The Disarmament Conference

Disarmament was a feature of the treaties that ended the First World War, but it was only the losers of the war who were made to disarm. The League of Nations organised a conference to meet in Geneva between 1932 and 1934 to discuss broader plans for disarmament. However, it failed to reduce the levels of weapons in land, sea and air. France was willing to disarm, but only if Britain and the USA guaranteed they would too. Neither was willing to give such a guarantee.

Hitler's plan was for **rearmament**, not disarmament. He argued that France was not serious about disarmament and the Germans left the conference and withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933.

The failure to achieve anything substantial at the Conference damaged the League's international reputation. Countries including Germany, Italy and Japan were already rearming.

Manchuria

In 1931, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria was the first time the League of Nations faced a challenge from a great power. If the League had met the challenge and the Japanese had been stopped this would have been a **deterrent** to other Great Powers such as Germany and Italy. However, with the world looking on, the League's failure to stop the Japanese showed Japan as well as Hitler and Mussolini that the League was incapable of stopping an aggressive country from making territorial gains. As Japan rejected the findings of the Lytton Report (see Chapter 2), it withdrew from the League of Nations.

KEY TERMS

rearmament:

increasing the number of weapons and personnel in the armed forces in order to become a strong military power again

deterrent: an action that puts off (deters) a country from being aggressive towards others

Abyssinia

Both Hitler and Mussolini were delighted at the outcome in the Far East. The League could not take effective action and it was proving impossible to put international interests ahead of national interests. This meant that further aggressive behaviour from Italy was extremely likely, and that Hitler would soon be furthering his policy of destroying the Treaty of Versailles. The Italian conquest of Abyssinia in 1935 (see Chapter 2) was humiliating for the League because the Great Powers – France and Britain – were shown to be playing a double game. They supported the application of sanctions while at the same time negotiated behind the back of the League with the aggressor, Italy, in the form of the Hoare-Laval Pact.

As time went on, it was harder and harder for Britain and France to keep Italy on their side and detached from Hitler's Germany. Italy withdrew from the League in 1937. Mussolini visited Berlin in September 1937. In November of the same year, Italy signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany and Japan to present a united front against Soviet communism – an ideology all three countries hated.

What were the consequences of the League's failure?

The League's three main failures in the 1930s were covered in newspapers all over the world. The organisation's flaws had been exposed. Collective security through the League was finished. This humiliating result gave Hitler confidence, and he realised that the League would not be able to stop a European war. What would Britain and France do now? Public opinion in both countries was against rearmament, as ordinary citizens had more faith in the League than politicians did.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

A good reputation is hard to build and easy to destroy. In these days of instant news and social media, failures are often very public. It can be difficult to rebuild a reputation once it is damaged. How was the League of Nations' reputation damaged by 1934? How did people know about it? What could have been done at the time to rebuild its reputation?

What examples can you think of in recent times where large organisations or international bodies have found their reputations damaged? How did it happen? Was it their own fault or was another group acting against them? How did the facts of the case become public? Was the organisation able to rebuild its reputation? If so, how?

FOCUS TASK 3.2

Discuss the following questions in pairs. Make notes of your answers.

- a Which of the three failures of the League in the 1930s did most to undermine its authority?
- b Which of the three failures of the League did most damage to the reputation of Britain and France as its defenders?
- c What do you think smaller powers made of the League's failures? What changes in the League do you think they would like to have seen to make it more favourable to them?

Key points

The failures of the League of Nations

- Nationalism and militarism were on the rise in Germany, Italy and Japan during the 1930s. These developments made war likely in Europe and Asia.
- The League experienced three key failures in the 1930s: the Disarmament Conference, the Manchurian crisis and the war in Abyssinia. All three weakened the League's reputation and undermined its authority.
- The confidence of dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini grew as they realised that the League of Nations could not prevent war in Europe.

3.3 Was the policy of appeasement justified?

In the mid-1930s, Britain and France decided on a new policy to deal with Germany: **appeasement**. Since the end of the Second World War, the policy of appeasement and its supporters have been criticised for not opposing Hitler. Hitler's confidence grew as he made successes against the appeasers and made new demands. However, the policy of appeasement was developed by intelligent leaders, and it made sense to them and many ordinary people at the time. This was largely because of a series of aggressive actions that Hitler took from 1935 onwards, which led other nations to try to find ways to stop the situation from getting worse.

KEY TERM

appeasement: agreeing to some or all of the opposing side's demands in order to prevent further disagreement

TIMELINE OF HITLER'S ACTIONS, 1935–39

January 1935	A plebiscite is held in Saarland and, influenced by the Nazis, people vote overwhelmingly to join Germany.
March 1935	Hitler publicly announces his intentions to rearm Germany and start conscription.
March 1936	The Rhineland is remilitarised.
October 1936	Italy and Germany sign the Rome–Berlin Axis.
November 1937	Germany and Japan sign the Anti-Comintern Pact.
March 1938	Germany achieves <i>Anschluss</i> with Austria.
September 1938	The Sudetenland is transferred from Czechoslovakia to Germany. The Munich Agreement is signed.
March 1939	Germany invades Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia.
March 1939	Hitler makes claims to Danzig and the Polish Corridor.
September 1939	Germany invades Poland.



Rearmament, 1935

In 1935, Hitler announced German rearmament and introduced conscription, which was prohibited under the Treaty of Versailles. In fact, rearmament had been happening secretly for a few years (see Figure 3.4). Hitler told the world that his actions were defensive, and that Germany was not a threat to international peace.

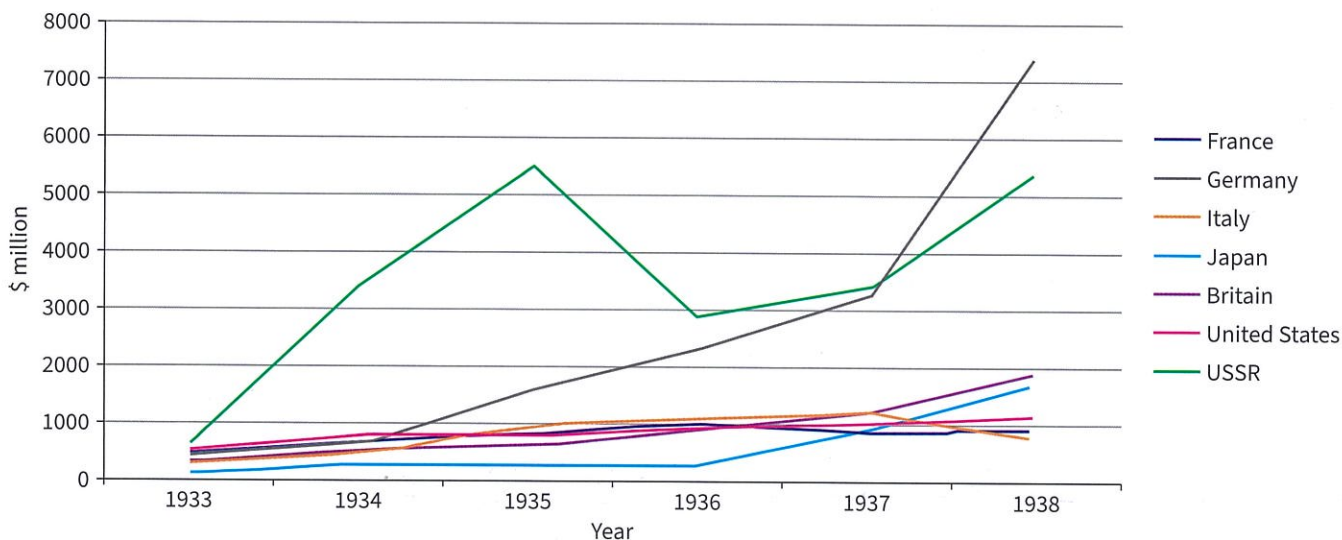


Figure 3.4: A graph showing German and international comparisons of defence spending from 1933 to 1938

FOCUS TASK 3.3

In pairs, look at the graph in Figure 3.4. Make notes on the increases of German expenditure compared with other Great Powers following Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933. Consider the following questions.

- Why did German defence spending increase suddenly after 1934?
- What trend can you see in Britain's spending on defence?
- What hindered the British government from spending more on rearming their country?

As a class, discuss whether or not this graph provides evidence that Hitler was to blame for the war in Europe.



Most German generals opposed the move into the Rhineland. They feared that the French would defeat their half-trained, inadequately equipped army within hours. But the French public was worried about provoking another war, and the French government feared that the German forces were stronger than they were in reality. In England, the public was indifferent to the German occupation of the Rhineland, making it difficult for any British leaders who wanted to stop Germany. Once again, appeasement seemed the best policy.



Figure 3.5: A map showing the position of the Rhineland; the area was demilitarised after the Treaty of Versailles

SOURCES 3D & 3E

The 48 hours after the march were the most nerve-racking in my life. If the French troops had [challenged] us we would have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs.

Source 3D: Hitler commenting on the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, after the event

Hitler has got away with it! France is not marching. Instead, it is appealing to the League of Nations. Oh, the stupidity of the French. I learnt today that the German troops were under strict orders to beat a hasty retreat if the French army opposed them in any way.

Source 3E: William Shirer, a US journalist working in Berlin in 1936, commenting on the remilitarisation of the Rhineland

SOURCE ANALYSIS 3.3

Read Sources 3D and 3E.

- a** What do these sources suggest would have happened if the French had challenged the German troops?
- b** Based on your understanding of Source 3D, what lessons might Hitler have learnt from the Rhineland that shaped his later foreign policy decisions?

THINKING SKILLS

Re-read the information about the remilitarisation of the Rhineland. Choose one of the following people. Write a diary entry describing your thoughts and emotions about the event, explaining why you feel as you do:

- a German soldier marching into the Rhineland
- a French woman living in the Rhineland
- a British tourist visiting the Rhineland
- a German journalist reporting on the event.

The Rome–Berlin Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact, 1936–37

The division of Europe's Great Powers had taken shape by early 1937. Britain was once again allied with France as Germany and Italy grew closer. In part this was because Italy had fallen out of favour with the other European countries after its invasion of Abyssinia (see Chapter 2). By this time, Germany and Italy shared a common ideology, as both were ruled as fascist dictatorships. The alliance was sealed by the signing of the Rome–Berlin Axis in October 1936. This committed both countries to following a common foreign policy. From this time on, Germany and its partners in military aggression would be known as the Axis Powers.

In November 1936, Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, an agreement that focused on opposing the spread of communism. Japan was looking for allies who would be willing to support it if it was attacked by the communist Soviet Union, and the pact included a secret clause that required both countries to help each other if either of them was attacked by the Soviet Union. Italy joined the Pact a year later, and Hungary and Spain added their signatures in 1939.

Anschluss with Austria, 1938

The Treaty of Versailles banned the union of Germany and Austria. However, as most Austrians spoke German, this decision ran against the principle of national self-determination, as outlined in President Wilson's Fourteen Points (see Chapter 1). The word *Anschluss* means both 'union' and 'annexation'. When it occurred in 1938, Hitler called his invasion of Austria a union, to bring Austria's seven million German-speaking people into one German *Reich*. However, his opponents called it an annexation – a forced takeover.

The *Anschluss* was a striking example of Hitler's ability to combine clear aims with patient preparation and then seizing an opportunity when it arose. To begin with, Hitler regularly spoke about creating a 'Third Reich' unifying all Germans, including the Austrian people. Hitler was also patient. After being warned off taking over Austria by Mussolini in 1934, he waited for four years until the time was right to try again. During this period, the Austrian Nazis undermined the government from within and Mussolini decided to give Hitler whatever he wanted in Austria.

KEY TERM

annexation:
possession of a country or region, usually by force or without permission

From gradual takeover to invasion

The timing of the *Anschluss* was not of Hitler's choosing, but he seized the opportunity when it arose. Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg of Austria wanted his country to remain independent. He had tried to limit Austrian Nazis from encouraging union with Germany. In response, Hitler made a series of demands that would turn Austria into a German-controlled state. On 9 March 1938, Schuschnigg tried to retake the initiative from Hitler by calling a referendum that asked Austrians to vote for a 'free and German, independent and social, Christian and united Austria'. When news of the planned referendum reached Hitler, he demanded Schuschnigg's resignation and changed his policy of 'gradual absorption' to 'immediate invasion'. He had originally planned to replace Schuschnigg with Arthur Seyss-Inquart, a leading Austrian Nazi, and take control gradually. But as the situation changed, Hitler quickly decided to incorporate Austria into the *Reich* by force.

The *Anschluss* was over in days and most Austrians welcomed it. To legitimise his takeover, Hitler organised a plebiscite in early April to prove to the world that the *Anschluss* was what the Austrian people wanted. They voted by a large majority to join the Third Reich.

Hitler had used his army beyond Germany's frontiers for the very first time. He was immensely popular in Germany because he had expanded German territory as well as increasing the population and resources of the Third Reich. The **Führer's** confidence in his abilities and the perceived weakness of Germany's opponents reached new heights.

KEY TERM

Führer: a German word meaning 'leader' or 'guide'. The title is usually associated with Adolf Hitler



Figure 3.6: A map of Europe in April 1938, just after Hitler's annexation of Austria

FOCUS TASK 3.4

The key question asks you to judge how far Hitler's foreign policies were to blame for the Second World War in Europe. How would you answer this based on what you have learnt so far? In small groups, discuss the question.

- First consider events in the Saar, the Rhineland and Austria. What do they suggest about the causes of the Second World War?
- Now add the Spanish Civil War, the Rome–Berlin Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact into the discussion. Do they complicate the question? Why, or why not?

In your groups, agree a judgement based on 'how far' Hitler's foreign policies were to blame for the war: fully, mostly, partly, a little or not at all.

Share your judgements as a class and record how many groups chose each judgement. When you have completed this chapter, come back to this question and discuss whether you have changed your mind and would reach a different conclusion.

ACTIVITY 3.2

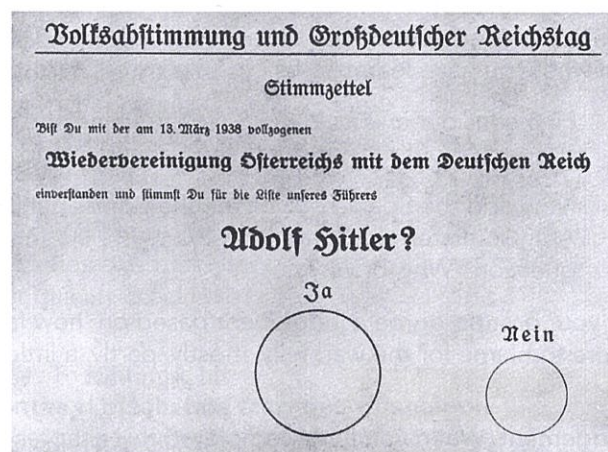
- a** In pairs, discuss the following questions. Make notes of your ideas.
- Why was Austria part of Hitler's plan for a Third Reich?
 - Why did Hitler not want Kurt Schuschnigg to hold a referendum?
 - Did Hitler plan the *Anschluss* or did he just seize an opportunity?
- b** Join up with another pair and work together to create a storyboard of the events of the *Anschluss* using pictures and words. Display your finished storyboard and take feedback from other groups. Have you missed out any key events? Have you told the story of the *Anschluss* clearly and in a logical order?



SOURCES 3G & 3H



Source 3G: A photo taken at the time of the *Anschluss* in March 1938. Here, Austrian girls welcome some of the first German soldiers to reach Vienna, the capital of Austria



Source 3H: A voting ballot slip from 10 April 1938. The text says: 'Do you agree with the reunification of Austria with the German Reich that was enacted on 13 March 1938, and do you vote for the party of our leader Adolf Hitler?' The large circle is labelled 'Yes', the smaller 'No'

SOURCE ANALYSIS 3.5

Study Sources 3G and 3H.

- a What links these two sources?
- b Do you think that the response to the *Anschluss* in Source 3G was the same for all Austrians? Explain your answer.
- c What can you see in Source 3H that suggests the plebiscite was not a fair process? Do you think a fairer process could have changed the result of the plebiscite?

REVISION TIP

Storyboards like the one you created in Activity 3.2 can be useful revision tools. Try creating one to help you remember the sequence of German actions, dates and locations in the 1930s. Start with words and pictures to show the first few that you have read about in this section: Saar, Rhineland and Austria. As you get closer to 1939, add further boxes to your storyboard to tell the whole story.

The Spanish Civil War, 1936–39

The Spanish Civil War was a conflict that reflected the ideological divide that existed in Europe in the 1930s: fascism versus communism, liberal democracy versus dictatorship. General Francisco Franco led the Nationalist rebels against the Republican government in Spain.

Hitler and his Italian counterpart Mussolini saw the fighting in Spain as an ideal opportunity to test out military equipment that had only seen action on the training ground. Both countries gave support to the Nationalists against the democratically elected, left-leaning Republican government.

When war broke out in 1936, Hitler immediately sent aid to Franco's forces. German aid amounted to \$215 million by the time the conflict ended in 1939. Between late July and early October 1936, the Germans transported 13 523 troops and 270 100 kilograms of war supplies from north Africa to Andalusia in southern Spain. These African soldiers proved decisive in Franco's victory over the Republicans. Italy's involvement was also important for the Nationalists. Mussolini sent 80 000 men to support Franco. Italian supplies included 1800 cannons, 3400 machine guns and 157 tanks.



Figure 3.7: Republican fighters defending an unidentified road against Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War

At the same time, the communist USSR helped the Republican government. Britain and France stayed out of the conflict, fearing that it might spill over beyond Spain's borders to the rest of Europe. They placed a ban on war supplies and volunteers going to Spain. It worried the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin that neither Britain nor France provided help and made him wonder if they could be trusted if it came to a war with Germany.

The Spanish Civil War was important in Hitler's plans for the rest of Europe. He was keen to gain access to resources from Spain for his own weapons industry. The dive-bombing attacks that the *Luftwaffe* ('German air force') inflicted on Spanish towns such as Guernica were useful practice for Hitler's air force (see Figure 3.8). In time, dive-bombing developed into the strategy called *Blitzkrieg* ('lightning attack') that was widely used in the Second World War. The Nationalist victory in 1939 increased Hitler's confidence about the impact of his rearmament programme for German military forces. While the Spanish Civil War was continuing, Hitler was able to achieve further success in Austria and Czechoslovakia, without starting a war. The Spanish conflict did not become a wider European war, and this suited Hitler who knew Germany was not yet ready for such a huge fight.



Figure 3.8: The Spanish city of Guernica after the German *Luftwaffe* had finished its attack using dive-bombing techniques, May 1937

SOURCE 3F



Source 3F: A Republican propaganda poster from the Spanish Civil War. The title translates as 'What are you doing to stop this?'

SOURCE ANALYSIS 3.4

Study Source 3F.

- a What does the map in the background show?
- b What do the two hands holding daggers represent? How do you know?
- c The cap on the map was a symbol used by republican revolutionaries. What do the chains around it suggest?
- d What do you think is the overall purpose of the poster and who is the target audience?

How did Britain and France react?

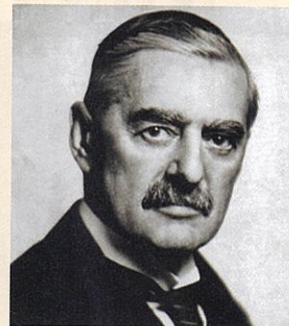
By the mid-1930s it was clear that Hitler was trying to destroy the Versailles peace settlement. But what could other countries do about it? The League of Nations' failure to keep the international peace meant that they had to find another way to stop German aggression. The problem with that was that public and political opinion in both Britain and France were still against pursuing a policy that risked war. Both countries were still suffering from the economic effects of the Depression (see Chapter 2), and they also wanted to keep their empires safe. Britain and France both had colonies in the Far East and were worried that Japan's wish for new territory might result in a war on two fronts. Both countries hoped to avoid such a war by

making reasonable concessions to German grievances. So, the policy of appeasement developed. It was largely driven by British prime minister Neville Chamberlain, but the French also adopted this approach.

KEY FIGURE

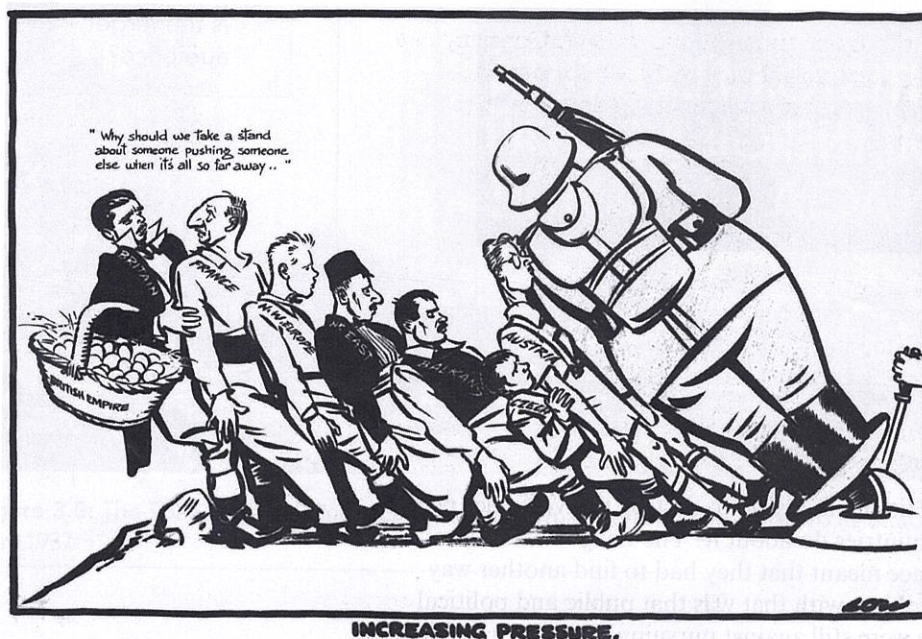
Neville Chamberlain (1869–1940)

Chamberlain came to politics late. He was first elected as a member of parliament in 1918 and became a member of several Conservative governments. By 1935, Chamberlain was persuaded of the need for rearmament, recognising that the English Channel by itself was no defence against enemy planes. He became prime minister in May 1937 and his name will always be linked with the policy of appeasement that he adopted. When war began in September 1939, Chamberlain stayed on as prime minister, but after a disastrous military campaign in Norway, he was forced to resign.



Hitler's actions in influencing the Saar plebiscite and remilitarising the Rhineland had caused concern in Britain and especially France. However, Austria was far enough away for the German *Anschluss* to seem less problematic at first. Britain and France protested to Hitler but realised that there was little they could do without Italy's help, and Italy had allied with Germany through the Rome–Berlin Axis. Appeasing Hitler in the case of Austria did keep peace in Europe, but it also boosted his confidence.

SOURCE 31



Source 31: A British cartoon by David Low, published in 1938 after the *Anschluss*. Britain is shown at the end carrying a basket representing the British Empire. The quote reads: 'Why should we take a stand about someone pushing someone else when it's all so far away...'

SOURCE ANALYSIS 3.6

Study Source 31.

- a Is the cartoonist critical of the *Anschluss* or of Britain's response to it?
- b Why does Low call his cartoon 'Increasing Pressure'?

Both Britain and France had already begun a more serious programme of rearmament. However, they knew it would take time to fully rearm and be ready for a major war, so appeasement seemed the best approach in the meantime. The policy faced its toughest test in September 1938, when Hitler set his sights on Czechoslovakia.

ACTIVITY 3.3

In pairs, create a 'What if . . . ?' graphic organiser based on the 'What if' questions below. It could be a spider diagram / flow chart / infographic poster. Use colours and images to help distinguish and organise your ideas.

Discuss each question first and make notes of all your ideas and responses. Afterwards, go through your notes and pick out the strongest ideas to record in your graphic organiser.

What if . . .

- . . . the British government had disregarded public opinion and challenged Hitler with increased armaments and the threat of war?
- . . . both the British and French governments had joined forces and stationed troops on the border with Germany along with a significant number of planes?
- . . . the League of Nations had put in place strong sanctions to punish Germany for its aggression?

THINKING SKILLS

Work in groups of four. Consider the situation in Europe in 1937. Germany and Italy are rearming. There are weak states neighbouring these two countries. The League of Nations seems unable to control aggression. In your groups, discuss what you would have done to:

- keep the two aggressors apart
- handle Hitler's demands in relation to the Treaty of Versailles
- prepare for war in ways that do not increase the risk of war.

The crisis over Czechoslovakia, 1938

Austria was incorporated into Hitler's *Reich*, but he still wanted to appear reasonable in his demands. Was it not reasonable to want the 3.5 million Germans living in the Sudetenland to join the *Reich*? After all, it was next to Germany (see Figure 3.9) and the Sudeten Germans claimed that they suffered discrimination at the hands of the Czech government in the capital, Prague.

Hitler had other reasons to dislike Czechoslovakia. The country was very new because it had been created in 1919 as part of the Paris Peace Settlement. To keep its frontiers secure, the Czech government had made alliances with both France and the Soviet Union. In addition, Czechoslovakia was a democracy – something Hitler hated just as much as the Treaty of Versailles. So, how did Hitler approach the Sudetenland, given his aim to unite all Germans?



Figure 3.9: A map showing the position of the Sudetenland, part of Czechoslovakia in 1938

Unrest in the Sudetenland, 1938

Until late May 1938, Hitler had no immediate plan for attacking Czechoslovakia. On 28 March, Hitler told Konrad Henlein, the leader of the Sudeten Germans, to make demands for **home rule** for the Sudeten Germans. Of course this would be unacceptable to the Czech leader, Edvard Beneš, and his government because it would break up the country. Hitler was surprised to learn that the Czechs had partially mobilised their army in response to rumours of an imminent German attack. The rumours were untrue, but instead of denying them Hitler was now determined to 'smash Czechoslovakia'. However, he knew he needed to be careful, to avoid world opinion turning against him. So, throughout the summer of 1938, Hitler continued to encourage the Sudeten Germans to campaign for home rule. By early September, he had secretly finalised his plans for action against the Czechs.

On 12 September, Hitler made a speech bitterly attacking the government of Czechoslovakia. He claimed that the Czechs discriminated against the Sudeten Germans, and that they had forced 600 000 Germans from their homes. His words caused an uprising in the Sudetenland. Believing that war was coming, Neville Chamberlain flew to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden, the Führer's mountain retreat

KEY TERM

home rule: a political arrangement in which a part of a country governs itself independently of the central government of a country

in Bavaria, on 15 September. There, Hitler emphasised his wish for friendship and cooperation between Britain and Germany, but he also threatened war if the issue of the Sudeten Germans was not resolved. Chamberlain, the appeaser, said he was ready to agree to the peaceful handover of the Sudetenland to Germany if the French and Czech governments also agreed.

At a second meeting on 22 September, Chamberlain reported to Hitler that he had secured approval from all three governments. However, Hitler now made additional demands. He wanted the Sudetenland to be occupied by German troops immediately. Chamberlain was horrified at Hitler's change of mind. At their previous meeting there had been no mention of troops or an invasion. Chamberlain returned to London to prepare Britain for war. The British navy and the French army were told to mobilise.

KEY FIGURE

Edvard Beneš (1884–1948)

Beneš was born in what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. When the country of Czechoslovakia was created after the First World War, Beneš was its first foreign minister. In 1935, he became president. Beneš opposed Germany's claim to the Sudetenland in 1938 but had to accept the Munich Agreement or face war with Germany. He resigned soon after. The following month he went to England, where he established a Czech government-in-exile. After the war, Beneš returned to Czechoslovakia and became president again in June 1946. Bad health prevented Beneš from opposing the gradual takeover of Czechoslovakia by the USSR after the war. He died in September 1948.



The Munich Agreement, 1938

Hitler realised he was on the edge of a war with Britain and France that he was not quite ready for. So, he agreed to Chamberlain's and Mussolini's suggestion of an international conference to be held in Munich. Chamberlain, the French prime minister Daladier, Mussolini and Hitler met on 29 September 1938 (see Figure 3.10). They agreed the following points.

- The Sudetenland would be handed over to Germany over a ten-day period.
- In any part of the Sudetenland where the population was mixed, plebiscites would be held to decide what would happen.
- The four leaders would guarantee the remaining part of Czechoslovakia after Polish and Hungarian claims had been satisfied.

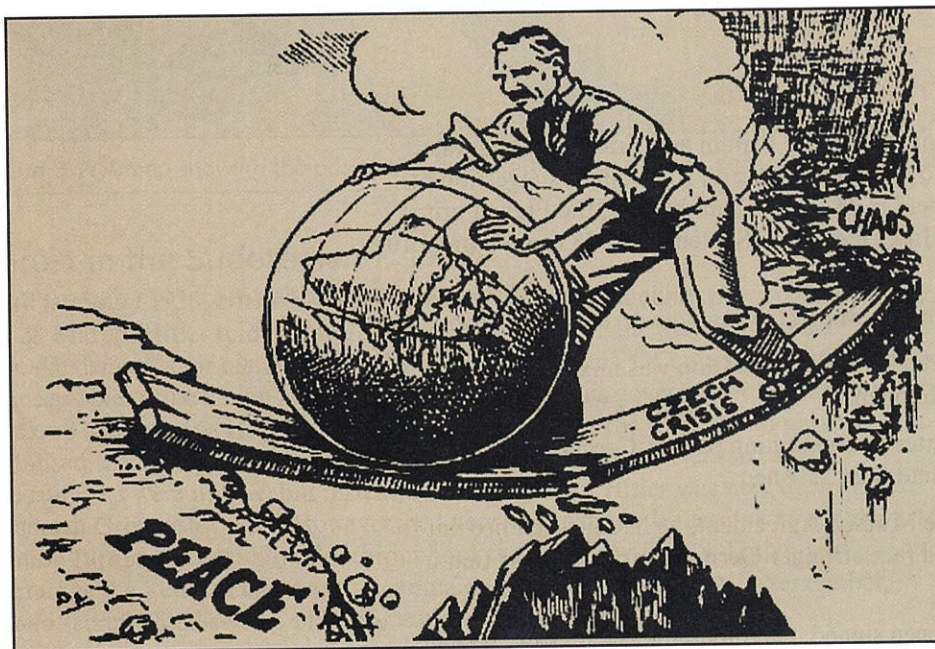
When Beneš was presented with the Munich Agreement, he had little choice but to agree. If not, the Czech army would face stronger German forces in a war that it would lose.

After the Munich Agreement had been signed, Chamberlain asked Hitler to sign a second document that promised both men would do everything they could to promote peace in Europe and to resolve any differences by peaceful means. With Hitler's signature and his own on this 'piece of paper', Chamberlain returned to London believing he had saved Europe from war.



Figure 3.10: Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini (left to right) at the meeting to sign the Munich Agreement

SOURCE 3J



Source 3J: A cartoon published in the British magazine *Punch* in October 1938, showing Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain rolling the world towards peace during the Czech crisis.

SOURCE ANALYSIS 3.7

Study Source 3J.

- a** What does this cartoon suggest about Chamberlain's role in keeping the peace during the Czech crisis of 1938?
- b** How far is this an accurate picture of the policy of appeasement?
- c** What features or words would you add to this cartoon (and its caption) to ensure it reflects the leaders and appeasement accurately?

FOCUS TASK 3.5

- a** In pairs, copy and complete this table to compare the *Anschluss* with Austria and the crisis in Czechoslovakia. How did nations apply the policy of appeasement to German actions? What was the result? Use the information in this section and research using any other resources available. When you have finished, compare your table with another pair's. Add anything to yours that you may have missed out.

Austria, March 1938	Czechoslovakia, September 1938
Similarities	
Differences	

- b** In your groups of four, discuss the following questions.
- Do your completed tables suggest that appeasement was working?
 - How might the appeasement policy have been changed to make it more effective?
 - Does the chart provide evidence that appeasement was justified?

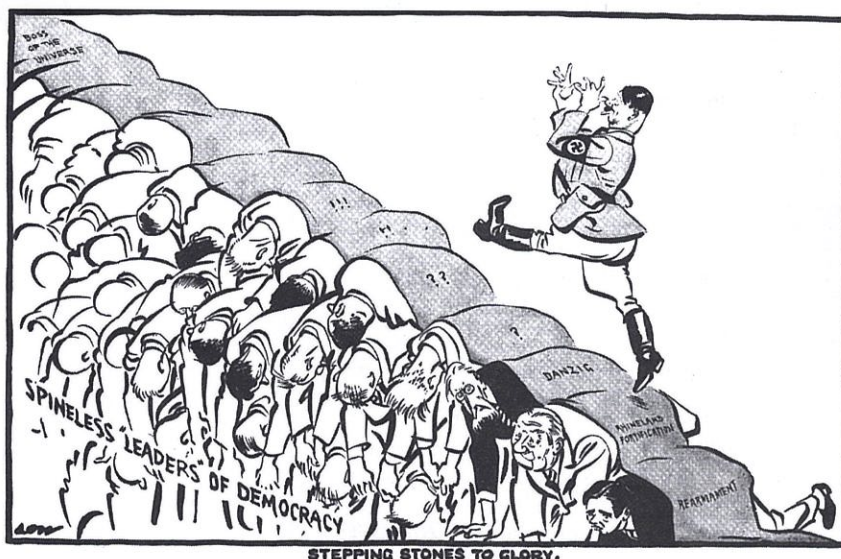
Was the Munich Agreement justified?

The Munich Agreement caused controversy in 1938 and it has done so ever since. Some arguments for and against applying the policy of appeasement are outlined in Figure 3.11.

For appeasement	Against appeasement
Although rearmament had started, Britain was not ready to fight a war in September 1938 and Chamberlain knew this. Britain needed more time to rearm.	If war had broken out against Germany, Britain and France might have been supported by the USSR.
The Sudetenland was populated by Germans and so a war in 1938 would have been against the principle of national self-determination.	If war had started in September 1938, Britain and France would have the backing of the 36 divisions of the Czech army fighting behind their strong defences on the frontier.
The British Empire was not united behind Britain in wanting to fight a war in 1938. South Africa and Canada had indicated that they were not willing to support a war in Europe.	Munich came to be seen as the worst example of the policy of appeasement and the USSR no longer trusted Britain or France.
Britain's air defences were not ready and an attack by the <i>Luftwaffe</i> could have meant an immediate defeat for Britain.	Britain and France, two Great Powers, had abandoned a small power, Czechoslovakia, to its fate.
Hitler claimed to be helping Britain and France by standing up to communism and said that they should be more concerned about the Soviet Union than Germany.	Hitler had proved by his earlier actions that his claims could not be trusted.
If war broke out, it was unlikely that the USA would be persuaded to join, so European nations would have had to fight without the strong backing of the USA.	Germany was clearly becoming the dominant power in Europe, and appeasement was not preventing this – war was inevitable.

Figure 3.11: A table showing arguments for and against appeasement

SOURCE 3K



Source 3K: A cartoon by David Low, drawn after the Munich Agreement was signed at the end of September 1938

SOURCE ANALYSIS 3.8

Study Source 3K.

- a What do you think Chamberlain might have said about this cartoon?
- b What might Hitler might have said about the cartoon? Explain your answer.

FOCUS TASK 3.6

Neville Chamberlain called the Munich Agreement 'peace with honour'.

The future prime minister of Britain Winston Churchill said: 'We have suffered a total and unmitigated defeat. You will find that in a period of time Czechoslovakia will be engulfed in the Nazi regime.'

- a Do you think the policy of appeasement was justified? Plan a short essay in which you explore this key question, considering both sides of the argument. Structure your plan in the following way, making notes in each section.
 - Introduction: Whether appeasement was justified or not depends on who you ask. Consider what a historian might say, or a British person who lived at the same time as Chamberlain, or a German adviser to Hitler.
 - Paragraph 1: Arguments in favour of justifying appeasement plus any weaknesses or qualifications.
 - Paragraph 2: Arguments against justifying appeasement plus any weaknesses or qualifications.
 - Conclusion: On balance, where do you place your judgement on the spectrum of opinion?
- b Share your essay plan with a partner. Give each other feedback, then improve your essay plan.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia, March 1939

For six months, the Munich Agreement held. Then, on the morning of 15 March 1939, German troops entered Prague and the remaining areas of Czechoslovakia. They seized Czech reserves of gold and hard currency. The Germans also took over all the weapon factories and mines that would now provide crucial raw materials for their armament plans. They also picked up a substantial haul of weapons: nearly 500 tanks and nearly 1600 aircraft.

The impact of the German invasion

Besides the fact that it broke the Munich Agreement, the invasion of Czechoslovakia stood out from previous aggressive actions. Having repeatedly stated that he was only interested in unifying Germans into one *Reich*, Hitler had now conquered seven million Czech people. His territorial ambitions had been exposed.

British and French public opinion changed significantly after the invasion. Chamberlain realised that the Munich Agreement had meant nothing to Hitler and declared that the German leader was attempting 'to dominate the world by force'.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia marked the end of appeasement. It proved that Hitler had been lying at Munich and could not be trusted. Chamberlain announced that Britain would defend Poland if it was attacked by Germany, and France made the same guarantee. For Germany, the takeover of Czechoslovakia strengthened Hitler's hold on Central Europe and helped his preparations for war. The large Czech army was no longer a threat. Airfields that could have been used to attack German cities and the Czech weapons industry were in German hands.



Figure 3.12: Czech citizens watch as German troops drive through Prague after the invasion of March 1939

THINKING SKILLS

Look at the photograph in Figure 3.12 of the people in Prague watching the Germans invade their city. What range of emotions can you see on their faces? What thoughts might lie behind those emotions? Imagine you are in that crowd. What is it like? Write down your responses to these questions.

- What can you see happening?
- What sounds can you hear?
- How do you feel, watching your country being taken over by another? Fear? Anger? Acceptance?
- What happened ten minutes after the last Germans passed by you?

3.4 How important was the Nazi–Soviet Pact?

After Munich in September 1938, most people thought that appeasement was over. In February 1939, Chamberlain publicly guaranteed to defend French security. France and Britain began joint military planning. In March, they offered security guarantees to Poland, Romania and Greece. Rearmament increased.

British and French officials still hoped to keep the peace with Germany, but Hitler now wanted war. In April 1939, he abandoned the Anglo–German naval agreement of 1935 and signed a ten-year agreement with Italy known as the Pact of Steel, which reinforced the Rome–Berlin Axis. Hitler’s foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, assured the Führer that Britain and France were bluffing, and had no intention of guaranteeing the security of other European nations, particularly Poland. Dismissing the signs that Britain and France really did mean war, Hitler turned to the Soviet Union.

Relations with the USSR

Of all the consequences of the Munich Agreement, few were as important as the damage it caused to the relationship between the USSR and Britain and France. Stalin had not been invited to the meeting at Munich and was not part of the agreement. Stalin concluded that he could not trust the western powers. He needed to make his own deal with Germany.

Hitler had already planned his next move against Poland, and it was vital that this would not meet with Soviet opposition. Stalin wanted to ensure that his own frontier was secure. After just one day of negotiations, on 23 August 1939, the two countries signed the Nazi–Soviet Pact (see Figure 3.13).

Part of the pact was a non-aggression treaty lasting ten years. The pact contained guarantees of economic cooperation and a promise that neither country would make agreements with other nations. The pact also included **secret protocols** which divided the territories that lay between Germany and the Soviet Union into spheres of influence. The western half of Poland was Germany’s. The rest of Poland plus Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania fell into the Soviet sphere. Stalin regained some territory the USSR had lost at the end of the First World War, but also gained some time that he desperately needed to prepare his military.

KEY TERM

secret protocol: an addition to a formal agreement that is not made public