GCSE History

The Road to War

Paper One
### Key Question: Why had international peace collapsed by 1939?

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<td>What were the consequences of the failures of the League in the 1930s?</td>
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<td>The Nazi-Soviet Pact.</td>
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<td>Why did Britain and France declare war on Germany in September 1939?</td>
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**Hitler’s Foreign Policy**

**Defeat Communism:**
Hitler was determined to destroy Communism. Hitler felt that the Communists had helped defeat Germany in 1918 by organising revolutions in Germany and Russia in 1917-1918. Hitler was keen to crush the USSR and its Communist system.

**Expand German Territory:**
By reversing the Versailles settlement, Hitler hoped to regain land. Hitler also wanted to gain new lands - or Lebensraum (living space) - for the German people. He wanted to take land in the East from Poland and Russia. These new lands would provide homes and prosperity for the German people.

**Abolish the Treaty of Versailles:**
Hitler felt that the Treaty had been imposed on Germany by the allies and that its terms were unfair. He blamed the post-war German government for accepting the Treaty. He felt that Germany was living in shame because of the Treaty and that Germany would not be strong until it had been swept away.

**Unite German Speaking People:**
Hitler wanted to unite all German speaking people into a Greater Germany. Austria, parts of Czechoslovakia and Poland all contained German-speaking people.
Hitler's Foreign Policy 1933-March 1938

1933

Hitler withdrew Germany from the World Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations. He said that France would not treat Germany as an equal power. He said he would disarm if France and Britain agreed to do the same. He said he wanted peace and made speeches saying that war was not really an option. This made Britain and France feel calmer about the situation.

1934

July: Hitler asks Austrian Nazis to stage a coup in Austria. They kill the Chancellor and try and take power. Mussolini supports the Austrians and threatens war - the coup fails and Hitler claims he knew nothing about it. Hitler looks weak.

1935

January: The Saar is returned to Germany following a Plebiscite. The people of the area vote to leave France and go back to Germany. France had been given the Saar under the Treaty of Versailles until 1935. Hitler says there is no longer any need for Germany and France to argue. Once again he appears reasonable.

March: Hitler introduces conscription and rearmament. This was his first major breech of the Treaty of Versailles. He said he had to do it because Britain and France were both expanding their armed forces. The League of Nations and the other major powers did nothing. Britain had sympathy with Germany on this issue - they felt that Germany had a right to defend herself. Britain also saw Germany as a potential ally if she had to go to war with Communist Russia.

June: Britain signed a treaty with Germany to allow Germany to expand her navy to 35% the size of Britain's. Hitler had not only got away with rearmament, he had received encouragement from Britain. Germany built up and air force, expanded the army and built submarines.
Hitler sent weapons and men to support the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War. He was able to support the Fascist forces in Spain and at the same time try out his new weapons. The League of Nations could do nothing to stop Hitler as his planes and guns destroyed Spanish cities.

In early 1938 Austrian Nazis were causing trouble for the Chancellor, Schuschnigg. He was unable to control the country and decided to hold a plebiscite to see if the Austrians wanted to unite with Germany. Hitler was afraid that the vote may go against union with Germany so he sent soldiers into Austria. Britain and France did nothing to help Austria. They condemned Hitler, but they felt they were in no position to help her with military force as Austria was so far away and the British and French people could see nothing wrong with a union of people who spoke the same language. Hitler took control of Austria achieved his goal of an 'Anschluss' (or union) between the two countries.

Later in 1936 Hitler signed an alliance with Italy known as the Berlin-Rome Axis. This made him a much closer ally of Mussolini. Later he signed a treaty with Japan and Italy. This treaty known as the Anti-Comintern Pact and was an agreement to stop the spread of communism. This new alliance was known as the Axis.
### Why did no one stop Hitler before 1938?

<table>
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<th>Option</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<td>A)</td>
<td>Many people in Britain felt Hitler’s aims of rebuilding his army and making Germany strong were reasonable. They felt the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh and should be reversed.</td>
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<td>B)</td>
<td>Others in Britain felt that Hitler was better than having the Communist in power in Germany and that a strong Germany with a large army would protect the West from Soviet attack.</td>
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<td>C)</td>
<td>Another reason was the hope that a strong Germany would fight a strong Soviet Union in a war and in the process would destroy each other.</td>
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<td>D)</td>
<td>The French were tied up with their own problems – the Depression had hit them very hard and their governments were too divided and weak to take action.</td>
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<td>E)</td>
<td>The British were also tied up with solving the problems of the depression. They wanted to solve the unemployment problems before they looked to Europe.</td>
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<td>F)</td>
<td>The Depression meant that neither France nor Britain had money to spend on weapons so their armies were too small to cope with Germany.</td>
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<td>G)</td>
<td>The USA was isolationist and trying to solve the problems of the depression.</td>
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<td>H)</td>
<td>Germany was too far away for the British to take action – if she had wanted to use military action it would have been impossible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I)</td>
<td>Britain was concerned about her empire – if she attacked Germany, Japan may have attacked her Empire in the Far East.</td>
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<td>J)</td>
<td>The Germans appeared reasonable – things like the Anschluss looked ok to the British – after all they were all Germans.</td>
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<td>K)</td>
<td>The League of Nations was tied up with Mussolini in Abyssinia and then it was too weak to do anything else.</td>
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Czechoslovakia had been created after the Great War. It had been made up of a number of parts of other countries and contained a number of nationalities. The Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia contained a large number of German speaking Czechs. The Sudetenland also contained a great deal of industry and raw materials. By 1938, Czech Nazis were stirring up trouble and demanding a union with Germany. Hitler said he would go to war if necessary. But the Czechs had a modern army and France, the USSR and Britain had given the Czechs promises of support.

1938

March: Hitler says he will go to war over the Sudetenland. Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister was unsure whether he could protect Czechoslovakia and the French were equally unwilling to take action.

May: Hitler told his Generals he would go to war against the Czechs 'in the near future'. The British and French tried to encourage the Czechs to give away the Sudetenland. They said they could not fight a war as the people in France and Britain would not support it and that they were not prepared from a military point of view. The British government also had some sympathy with the Sudeten Germans wanting unity with Germany.

Summer: Chamberlain flew to meet with Hitler on a number of occasions. He made little progress and it looked as if war was about to break out. Britain started to prepare for war - gas masks were issued and air raid shelters were dug.

September: Chamberlain, Mussolini, Daladier (the French Prime Minister) and Hitler met at Munich to discuss the crisis. Here they agreed that the Sudetenland would be given to Germany so long as Hitler promised not to attack the rest of Czechoslovakia. Russia and the Czechs were angry that they had not been invited to the Munich Conference. Chamberlain returned to Britain a hero for having avoided war.

1939

March: Hitler sent troops into the rest of Czechoslovakia. He claimed he had been invited in. The British started to take a harder line with Hitler - he had broken another promise.

April: Hitler demanded the return of Danzig and the Polish corridor - parts of Germany lost under the Treaty of Versailles. Poland refused to even discuss the matter with Hitler.

August: Britain and France agree to protect Poland from any invasion. Hitler ignores the promises thinking they are a bluff.

September 1st: Hitler invaded Poland.

September 3rd: Britain and France declare war on Germany.
What Was Appeasement?

Appeasement is a word used to describe the policy of the British government towards Hitler during the 1930s. It was a policy of giving way to Hitler on a number of issues in order to avoid war.

Why Appeasement?

**British Public Opinion Did not want War:** The government could not go to war if the British people were not willing to support them. For much of the 1930s the British people hated the idea of war. This was because: They were afraid of the horrors of the war: They wanted to avoid the loss of men and suffering that had happened during 1914-1918. They did not want to spend money on weapons: The depression had created unemployment and poverty, the British people wanted the government to spend money on these problems, not on weapons.

**The British people did not see Hitler as a threat:** They felt Germany had been unfairly punished after the Great War and that Hitler was just making his country strong again. The British public felt that there was nothing wrong with Hitler's actions in the Rhineland, Austria and the Sudetenland because all the people involved were German speaking.

**Britain's army was not ready for war:** The German army was much stronger than the British army. The policy of appeasement was a way of buying time until the army was ready to fight a war. By 1939 the RAF had got enough fighter planes to protect British cities from German bombers and the army was much more ready to fight a war against Hitler.

**The British Empire was not willing to go to war:** Britain also needed to have the support of the British Empire. Britain had to try and avoid war until it could win the support of countries like South Africa, Australia and Canada. These countries were needed to supply food and troops.

**Lack of Support from other Great Powers:** Britain also had to try and avoid war until she had the support of countries like France and the USA. France was weak during the 1930s. It had lost of problems at home caused by political crises and economic problems. The USA was still very isolationist and wanted to avoid war in Europe.

**British Political leaders were weak and afraid to fight:** Some people have argued that men like Chamberlain were afraid to face Hitler and as a result they gave in to everything he did.

**Chamberlain misunderstood Hitler:** Chamberlain did not really understand Hitler. Chamberlain felt that he had a good relationship with Hitler and that he could convince Hitler to stop war. However he was wrong - Hitler told his friends that Chamberlain was a 'worm'.
Was Appeasement A Success?

**YES:**
1) It gave Britain time to build up its army and airforce. Britain built huge numbers of fighter planes and trained soldiers ready for the outbreak of War.

2) It gave the government time to convince the British public that war was necessary. They used films, speeches and news stories to convince the public that Hitler was a serious threat.

3) It allowed time for Chamberlain to convince the Empire of the need for war.

4) When Britain did go to war the world blamed Germany and not Britain. Britain had done her best to avoid war. This won support in places like the USA.

5) Britain was able to prepare air raid shelters, evacuate children and give out gas masks before the war broke out.

**NO:**
1) Appeasement encouraged Hitler to be more aggressive - the more he got away with the more he did. Had he been stopped in the Rhineland he may possibly have been stopped altogether. However, he became more confident every time he got away with something. Hitler saw Britain as weak.

2) Appeasement made Germany stronger - Every time Hitler gained more land he became stronger. The Rhineland made France easier to invade and German rearmament gave Hitler the weapons to attack other countries. Austria and the Sudetenland provided him with more soldiers and raw materials. Therefore the Germans were harder to fight the longer Appeasement went on.

3) Hitler was never going to negotiate - he had made it clear that he wanted to control eastern Europe, he was never going to back down and negotiate. He was not a reasonable man.

4) Appeasement made the USSR worried - Stalin, the Russian leader did not trust Britain. He was afraid that Britain would allow Germany to attack Russia.
The Nazi Soviet Pact 1939

From 1934 Stalin was afraid that the major powers of Europe would try and invade his country. In 1934 Stalin tried to make an alliance with Hitler – It failed. Stalin became very worried that Britain and France were following a policy of Appeasement. He was worried they were letting Hitler become stronger so he could fight the Soviet Union. Stalin needed an alliance with someone!

By 1939 Hitler wanted to invade Poland – this would get back land lost at Versailles, create a Greater Germany and provide Living Space. However, Britain and France had promised to protect Poland if Hitler attacked. Hitler also knew that the Soviet Leader, Joseph Stalin, would also become involved if he invaded Poland. Poland was right next door to the Soviet Union. Hitler could not fight France Britain and the Soviet Union all at once.

By 1939 Britain and France knew they would have to fight Hitler. They tried to make an alliance with Stalin. Stalin was not impressed with Britain’s offer of an alliance. They did not seem to be serious. Britain upset Stalin and made him more worried.

Stalin and Hitler were both in a bad situation. Neither was ready to fight the other but both needed to do something. Hitler ands Stalin were enemies who hated each other. But Hitler needed to keep Stalin quiet and Stalin needed to avoid war. Hitler contacted Stalin with a proposal – Stalin was impressed with Hitler’s bold plan and personal letter.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact was the result. In August 1939 they agreed that the Nazis and the Soviet Union would divide Poland in two and take a part each. Stalin would also be allowed to invade Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. Hitler had part of Poland and did not have to fight the Soviet Union. Stalin had avoided war for the time being.
Causes of the Second World War

1) Hitler’s foreign policy

Hitler’s foreign policy helped cause the Second World War because it was aggressive and led to the invasion of other countries. Hitler wanted to smash communism, unite German-speaking people, create a Greater Germans and smash the Treaty of Versailles. All of this meant he had to invade other countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia. By invading other countries he forced Britain and France to declare war.

2) Failure of the League of Nations

The failure of the League of Nations to stop countries such as Japan invading Manchuria and Italy from invading Abyssinia meant that Hitler felt he could get away with things as well. Hitler felt he had a free hand to remilitarise the Rhineland and invade Poland and Czechoslovakia. All of these actions worried to British and French and eventually they declared war.

3) Policy of Appeasement

The Policy of Appeasement helped cause the Second World War by allowing Hitler to become stronger and more confident. The British allowed Hitler to get away with things such as remilitarising the Rhineland, rearmament, the Sudetenland and uniting with Austria in order to buy time to prepare for war. But it also allowed Hitler to become stronger and more confident so he felt he could do as he wanted. When he threatened to invade Poland in 1939, the British and French said they would declare war, but Hitler did not believe them. When he did invade war was declared.

4) Hitler’s leadership

Hitler’s leadership was important in causing the Second World War because he took risks and did bold things. The union with Austria, the Rhineland, the Sudetenland and invasion of Poland were all gambles that angered the British and French. Eventually, the British and French were so angry with Hitler’s gambles that they declared war. Hitler’s leadership also helped cause the war because he was able to convince the German people and the armed forces that his ideas were right and so they went along with him.
5) **The Treaty of Versailles**

The Treaty of Versailles helped cause the Second World War by creating anger in Germany. The loss of land, reparations and a war guilt all upset the Germans and ruined the German economy. The unrest and turmoil in Germany made the German people angry and they looked for a solution to their problems. One man who promised to scrap the Treaty of Versailles was Hitler and the German people voted for him in 1933. When Hitler came to power he started to scrap the Treaty of Versailles and he eventually invaded Poland to regain land lost under the Treaty. The invasion of Poland led to the Second World War.

6) **Nazi-Soviet Pact**

In 1939 the Nazis and the Soviet Union (Russia) agreed that they would divide Poland in half and agree not to attack each other. This was important to Hitler as he wanted to invade Poland without having to fight the Soviet Union and Britain at the same time. The agreement meant he could invade Poland without upsetting the Soviet Union, but when he did Britain declared war.

7) **The Depression**

The Depression helped cause the Second World War because it helped Hitler come to power in Germany. The German people voted for Hitler because he promised to solve the economic problems such as unemployment. Hitler was then in power and could invade other countries, such as Poland, which led to the War. Also Britain and France were unable to stop Hitler in his actions because they were too poor to fight a war and they had to solve their own economic problems at home. This meant that Hitler was able to get away with things and become stronger.