

Essay on hitler's foreign policy

[People](#), [Adolf Hitler](#)



No one was aware at the time of the impending tragedy with an international system busy recovering from the previous war. A League of Nations established at the Treaty of Versailles was halfheartedly trying to keep international peace intact. However, it failed to do so. Not only did the Treaty of Versailles leave countries in economic despair but it also brought resentment to Germany; the nation with the most losses. Again, the League of Nations set up did not keep international peace.

Appeasement was offered in order to avoid war, however it gave the Germans a more aggressive approach in their foreign policy. Most of all, a new phenomenon had hit Germany-Hitler.

A man of revolutionist and expansionist policies had a dream in which he would not give up on and on January 30th 1933, was made chancellor of Germany. The origins of war and failure of international peace can be determined as follows: the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations, and the policy of appeasement.

Although they all seem to be the primary reasons for the breakdown of international peace, it was Hitler's foreign policy that deteriorated the peace leading to the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Treaty of Versailles had left Germany humiliated for numerous reasons. German territory had been reduced to about an eighth of Europe, population had been cut by six and a half million, Rhineland was demilitarized, Anschluss, a union with Austria, was forbidden and not to mention they had to reduce their own military and offensive weapons. 1 In terms of reducing their military and arms, the Allies upheld that ' it would render possible the

initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations.'² Since this wasn't the case, Germany's excuse was most likely to deplore these restrictions and rearm 15 years later. Versailles principles were to prevent a resurgence of Pan-German power and to impose a self-determination policy, in which nations could choose their sovereignty and status. These purposes clashed and tended to contradict each other, the conclusion being undesirable circumstances.

³ As a result of self-determination, Germany found herself surrounded by a number of vulnerable nations. The Baltic States of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania were all in ill-fated situations, stuck between an expansionist Germany and the Soviet Union, of whom they did not exactly trust. ⁴ Kennedy argues "the Versailles settlement was an artificial, spatch-cocked one, leaving ethnic minorities on the wrong side of hastily drawn boundaries." ⁵ The Treaty failed in both protecting these ethnic minorities and failing to take the right steps into preventing Germany becoming disheartened by the Treaty.

The Germans were so humiliated that they even believed the Allies had tricked them into approaching the peace table with Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. ⁶ Germany was thus left angry and believed the treaty should have been reversed. Hitler, as written in his *Mein Kampf*, speaks of such resentment towards the treaty: "The Versailles Treaty is worthless. 60 million German hearts and minds are on fire with anger and shame. They will cry out "We want war!" ⁷ This was a major implication of Hitler's foreign policy-to reverse what had been done at Versailles, thus making the inadequacies on the Treaty of Versailles an origin of war.

The League of Nations, established at the Treaty of Versailles, proved to be a failure in maintaining international peace. It was a means of resolving disputes and preventing war however, the result of the economic turmoil that existed in countries internationally, and those in the League, were more concerned with their own domestic policies. World growth was encouraged on setting a "growth of protectionist, isolationist policies that exposed the weakness of collective action...the spirit of cooperation and mutual aid evaporated." 8 This is why countries like Germany and Japan, hit hardest by this economic disparity, created such strong domestic policies in order to overcome the slump.

Although the League seemed strong with sixty members in the 1930s, including Britain, France, Italy and Germany, some of the most powerful nations were not members. The United States was opposed to joining, proving to weaken the League immensely. It did not have access to wealth and influence the United States had-Britain and France were terribly weak after the First World War, making them hard to be a great source of dependence. Russia also refused to join due to their communist nature. Russia's main outlook for themselves was to focus on their domestic policy. Through the eyes of British diplomats, the League was not seen to be of any strength. Lord Cecil commented on the League by stating:

No attempt was made to transfer important international work to it...Little or no attempt was made to coordinate our general foreign policy with that pursued by our representatives in the League...On the contrary, an atmosphere of semi-hostility was allowed to grow up in our Diplomatic Service both at home and abroad. 9

It was in October 1933, when Hitler pulled Germany from the League, refusing to negotiate and renouncing from international disarmament.¹⁰ The League failed in achieving disarmament, resulting in an arms race, which failed to prevent Hitler from breaking the Treaty of Versailles. However, Hitler leaving the League was not the first sign of impotence in international peace.

Examples of failures in the League of Nations can be seen through both Japan in the Manchurian crisis and Italy in Ethiopia. These two crises truly showed the League was disintegrating. Japan, in September of 1931, invaded the Chinese province of Manchuria and set up a Japanese state called Manchukuo. The League condemned Japan but largely did nothing about it. "The League proved unable to force one of its own members to renounce aggression, because it lacked the resources to do so other than moral pressure and the threat of economic sanctions."¹¹ The League was scared to intervene, as they did not have the United States on their side. Moreover, they did not want to put Asian trade and Eastern security in a compromising situation. Another failure of the League was when Italian troops invaded Ethiopia in September of 1935.

The League tried to support Ethiopia and denounced the invasion, talking of economic sanctions the Italians would have to face. However, just as the Manchurian crisis, the Italian efforts could not have been reversed.¹² Japan and Italy essentially took opportunities and obtained what they could from them, exploiting the breakdown of collective security that was supposed to be imposed by the League. The Ethiopian crisis motivated countries to rearmament and proved to be some of the first indications of an impending

war. 13 The League of Nations failed to achieve its major goal directly stated in Document two in "The Covenant of the League":

Any war or threat of war, whether immediately affecting any of the members of the League or not, is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League, and the League shall take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations." 14

Consequently, the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations led to collective security becoming abandoned, and nations turning to appeasement.

Appeasement is a democratic policy intended to avoid war and keep peace. So then why is it that appeasement is an origin of the Second World War? Although a lot of diplomats were in favour as it was seeming the right way out, what was not realized at the time is that appeasement can only be effective if it is done from a point of relative strength. For Britain and France to appease Germany, and let them take Sudetenland, only gave Germany more of the upper hand. Kennedy argues:

Since Hitler was regarded as the Devil incarnate, it followed that Chamberlain and Daladier's diplomacy in the late 1930s had been hopelessly misconceived and morally wrong. Instead of standing up to the Fuhrer's manic ambitions, they had weakly appeased them. 15

In September of 1938, a conference on the Czech crisis came to order. It was agreed that Czechoslovakia would leave Sudetenland leaving Germany the opportunity to seize it. Chamberlain believed that they had reached "peace in our time" however others reprimanded him for destroying "one of the last democracies on the continent." 16 The way he went around trying to achieve

peace was ultimately one of expediency over principle. The MacDonald-Baldwin-Chamberlain administration was criticized for failing on two parts. One was that they did not sufficiently prepare Britain to the clear threats of impending aggression. They deceived the country by claiming they were prepared.

Second, they were denounced on the notion of turning a blind eye to the clear belligerent ambitions of the Nazi thus making allowances that should not have been made. This was done in order to escape immediate conflict in which should have been dealt with urgently. 17 Appeasement made Hitler believe he was invincible, which in turn encouraged war. He assumed Britain was too 'cowardly' to fight back against the Reich and would most likely stay neutral. "Hitler, emboldened by appeasement, regarded Chamberlain and Daladier as "miserable worms" and "cowards." 18 Appeasement essentially encouraged any aggression that was later to be imposed by Hitler.

Hitler's foreign policy was a phenomenon in which proceeded from no other leader or policy. His policy lacked continuity and was one that consisted of "racist ideology, conducted with revolutionary methods and dedicated to the realization of unlimited aims." 19 He was the primary cause of the outbreak of the war and in fact many historians believed that it was Hitler's own personal war. His policy of discontinuity consisted of many elements such as racism, expansionism, the hatred of Russia, and the disregard of the International System. Through these extreme elements that he imposes in his foreign policy, we can see how in fact he was a dictator, providing a lack of continuity of Germany foreign policy when he came to reign. He intended

to achieve world domination for a purified German race and would not stop at nothing to achieve this.

Hitler believed that there should be a purified race of Aryans as they were genetically superior. He believed that they were destined to rule others especially the Poles and Slavs who should be their slaves. No German leader before this cared to exterminate a certain race. John Hiden argues that Germans in the First World War “ followed an expansionist policy in the East primarily to help them preserve a conservative reactionary status quo, not a racially-driven revolution of German, then European and ultimately, world society!” 20

His policy was clearly far different than any others as Hitler said, “ with the concept of race, National Socialism will carry its revolution abroad and recast the world.” 21The fact that he wanted to exterminate the Jews shows fully how different he was from other leaders who just had an appetite of success. Hitler wanted a world of purified Germans leading, and he knew that war would be inevitable to get there.

Hitler took expansionism to an extreme, posing as a major factor in the outbreak of the war. His domestic policy was of expanding, solidifying and purifying the German state. 22 His aggressive foreign policy included mounting German territory to create more “ living space”. This was called “ lebensraum” and he was determined to do this by annexing land in Eastern Europe. Although it is geographically obvious that Hitler would want to expand into Eastern Europe, Hitler did not only want to achieve the German colonies pre-1914, he wanted a conquest of all of Eastern Europe. He felt the

need to annex it as such, full of its rich and productive soil to support the expanding of the Aryan race.

23 The Four-Year plan was created in order to build arms and revive Germans socially to prepare them for Global domination. First of what Hitler wanted to eliminate was Communism and he thought to do this through conquering and expanding. "Lebensraum did mean something concrete—even if the war there was unchartered: war against Soviet Union." 24 In fact, even Hitler goes on to say that "it will be the duty of German foreign policy to get large spaces to feed and house the growing population of Germany. Destiny points us towards Russia." 25 It is through this ideological and extremist foreign policy that proves to be the principal reason for the outbreak of the Second World War.

Hitler's will to expand into Russia be not only on account of "Lebensraum" but because of his hatred of Russia. He believed for total global domination he would have to implement fascism in Russia and defeat the Russians—hence defeat Communism. Not to mention, Hitler believed communists were the reason Germany lost in First World War. As opposed to the relations the Germans and Russians have had in the past, Hitler's outlook on Bolshevik Russia was very distinct. 26 Russo-German relations of the past have acknowledged similar policies and tried to enjoy decent relations with each other. However, Hitler was determined to destroy Russia and its Communist regime. He stated, "the menace of Russia hangs over Germany. All our strength is needed to rescue our nation from this international snake." 27 He started slowly in the Spanish Civil War by trying to turn Britain and France even further against the Russians, moreover trying to make sure of Spain not

becoming a communist regime. His ideology is what drove him to stop at nothing to get what he wanted-even if it meant another World War.

Hitler's main aim was to overthrow the international system and create one based on his ideological views. He, unlike any German leaders of the past who would have settled with a slow expansion of Germany in Europe, wanted a pure race ruled by Germans. He manipulated his allies and used them as ploys when he was weak, however he then rejected them or even annexed them when he grew in strength. He wanted to overthrow the system so he could essentially replace it with " a racially-based global order." 28 He was not willing to negotiate with Europe and made sure what he wanted is what he got-he would not stop at anything. Europe was in fact relatively willing to give Germany some of its power back through appeasement, however Hitler took advantage of their weaknesses and aggressively annexed more.

He would not cease until he got what he wanted however extreme it may be since he " knew no bounds". 29 He wrote in 1928, " Wherever our success may end, there will always be only the starting-point of a new fight." 30 He manipulatively built up his arms in rearmament programs when according to the treaty of Versailles he was forbidden to. However he did so, slowly, without causing any attention from the international scene. He built it up and then by 1935 he declared rearmament and pulled out of the treaty. He was building himself up for what he knew was to come. For this, Hitler's foreign policy is the primary reason for the outbreak of the war.

In conclusion, the origins of war and the reasons for the collapse of international peace both derive as a result of Hitler's foreign policy. The Treaty of Versailles left small nations vulnerable to German annexation. The

losses felt by Germany left them bitter and proved to be a catalyst in aggression towards the rest of the international scene. Later causing them to deplore their restrictions and rearm. Second, the League of Nations proved to be a failure in keeping collective security and international peace. Countries started isolating themselves and looking out for their own interest. The biggest failures of the League were the Manchurian crisis and Italy and Ethiopia proving that international peace was disintegrated. This disintegration thus led to appeasement. Third, although appeasement was proposed to avoid war, it did the opposite.

Germans and Hitler felt invincible, exploiting French and British weakness. Appeasement encouraged war and happily coincided with Hitler's foreign policy. Last, a lack of continuity in German foreign policy through Hitler's extreme ideology primarily brought on the war. His ideology of a purified race, extreme expansionism, his hatred of the Russians and want to overthrow the international system all account for a foreign policy that essentially led to the outbreak of the war. The Second World War would not have occurred without the phenomenon of Hitler. The collapse of international peace through the Treaty of Versailles, League of Nations and the policy of appeasement are indirectly origins of the Second World War; however Hitler and his foreign policy prove to be the primary cause of the outbreak.

ENDNOTES

- 1 C. Grove Haines & Ross J. S Hoffman, *The Origins and Background of the Second World War*, (Oxford University Press, 1947) p. 92

- 2 Michael Howard, " Legacy of the First World War" in *Paths to War*, (MacMillan, 1989) p. 52
- 3 Haines & Hoffman, *Origins and Background*, p. 90
- 4 Haines & Hoffman, *Origins and Background*, p. 400
- 5 Gordon Martel, *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered*, (Allen & Unwin, 1986) p. 141
- 6 Haines & Hoffman, *Origins and Background*, p. 98
- 7 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (Eher Verlag, 1925)
- 8 R. J Overy, *The Origins of the Second World War*, (Longman, 1998) p. 12
- 9 Haines & Hoffman, *Origins and Background*, p. 134
- 10 Eleanor L. Turk, *The History of Germany*, (Greenwood Press, 1999) p. 120
- 11 Overy, *Origins of the Second World War*, p. 12
- 12 Overy, *Origins of the Second World War*, p. 15
- 13 Overy, *Origins of the Second World War*, p. 16
- 14 Treaty of Versailles, 28 June 1919, Part I, *the Covenant of the League of Nations* in [8], p. 59-60
- 15 Martel, *Origins Reconsidered*, p. 141
- 16 Turk, *History of Germany*, p. 124
- 17 Sidney Aster, " Guilty Men" in *Paths to War*, (MacMillan, 1989), p. 239
- 18 Turk, *History of Germany*, p. 126

19 Martel, *Origins Reconsidered*, p. 131

20 Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the Second War*, (New Perspective, 1997)

21 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (Eher Verlag, 1925)

22 Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the Second War*, (New Perspective, 1997)

23 Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the Second War*, (New Perspective, 1997)

24 Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, (Edward Arnold, 1985) p. 123

25 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (Eher Verlag, 1925)

26 Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the Second War*, (New Perspective, 1997)

27 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (Eher Verlag, 1925)

28 Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the Second War*, (New Perspective, 1997)

29 Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, p. 111

30 Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the Second War*, (New Perspective, 1997)

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