

# Hitler's foreign policies



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Ultimately Hitler's determination to transform European society brought war and destruction to Europe in 1939. Though not necessarily the war he was planning for; evidence suggests that Hitler was preparing Germany for conflict with Russia. This indication would consist of economic output towards the end of the 1930's for example, according to Anthony Wood in 'Europe 1815-1945,' the output of steel in 1935 stood at 16.1 million metric tonnes; this by far out produced the superpowers steel industry and could imply the planning for military conflict. Hitler's policies based on lebensraum and the establishment of a racial empire on East European and Russian soil were without doubt ruthless, but did they make the Second World War unavoidable? The extent to which Hitler's foreign policies made the Second World War inevitable has constantly been under contention. A J P Taylor argues Hitler was just an average western leader, and the Second World War was at the fault of many rather than solely Hitler's foreign policy. According to Ian Kershaw, Hitler defines his foreign policy as "the art of securing for a people, the necessary quantity and quality of lebensraum" Deflated from the effects of The Treaty of Versailles, German economy was crippled, the army was reduced, and they suffered from loss of Land. Germany was desperate to revoke the Treaty which brought it to its knees, and unite all German speaking countries. In protest, Hitler began a course of secret conscription, written in 'Mein Kampf', Hitler justified this action, "Especially your people, doomed to languish along unarmed beneath the thousand eyes of the Versailles peace treaty" This action can be seen as a trigger, contributing to making the Second World War inevitable as surrounding countries felt threatened by Hitler and his determination to reverse the damages of the Treaty of Versailles. Another breach of the Treaty Hitler was able to embark

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on was his creation of the Air force the Luftwaffe, Taylor agrees that the treaty is a cause of the war, " Second world war was cause by the first world war, the armistice, or the Versailles treaty." Mein Kampf is a crucial element into understanding the reasons behind Hitler's foreign policy, and being able to assess if they made the Second World War inevitable. Introduced within the text, Hitler establishes the need to achieve aims in which he sees as vital to the success of the Third Reich. Hitler sought to destroy the Treaty of Versailles imposed on Germany after the defeat in World War One. Hitler felt the Treaty was unfair and most Germans supported this view. Uniting all German speakers together in one country would strengthen Germany, as after World War One there were Germans living in many countries spread across Europe. Hitler hoped that by uniting them together in one country he would create a powerful Germany or Grossdeutschland. Finally, Hitler wanted to expand his ideology and population into the East to gain land and vital resources for Germany, for example the tank producing factories in Czechoslovakia would prove vital if Hitler was planning for war. By signing non-aggression pacts, Hitler gave the impression he had peaceful intentions which would prevent a war. For example the alliance with the Poles, who felt threatened should Germany attempt to win back the Polish Corridor. This could suggest a triumph for Hitler, as it was evidence of peaceful negotiations which would give reason for Britain to follow a policy of appeasement. Moreover this ensured Hitler was guaranteed Polish neutrality whenever Germany should move against Austria and Czechoslovakia. However, according to John Weitz in his book 'Hitler's diplomat', " Hitler had mentioned a definite solution to the Danzig and corridor problems." This questions if Hitler had an overall plan to attack Poland. Neville Chamberlain's

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policy of appeasement could be seen as a mistake which eventually contributed to the Second World War as, " Appeasement was partly the result of a history lesson too well learned." After The First World War, Europe was left devastated. Chamberlain was keen to avoid another war and sympathised with Hitler and the severity of the Treaty of Versailles upon Germany. Hitler was able to exploit Britain, as he knew they would appease and compromise with Hitler to avoid another War. Thus Hitler could fulfil his aims without the threat of immediate military intervention, " Taking full advantage of appeasement the Nazis moved swiftly to annex German Austria in March 1938." The naval agreements between Britain and Germany reiterate the failure of appeasement and its role in contributing to the Second World War, " Both Britain and France were reluctant to take stronger stands against German rearmament for fear that this would give the Germans all the more reason to refuse to cooperate in international efforts to maintain peace." Hitler was able to build up strength of the Navy and the Air Force. Foreign Policy encompassed the importance of racial purity and the need for a nation to be prepared to compete with its neighbours in a fierce, uncompromising and constant struggle to survive and expand into Eastern Europe. Present in 'Mein Kampf', this expansion was to give extra living space to the Aryan Master Race. For example, Hitler discusses that Germany " must find the courage to gather our people and their strength for an advance along the road that will lead this people from its present restricted living space to new land and soil" The occupation of Russia would ultimately give him living space which would provide resources for the German population and an area, in which the excess German population could settle and colonise. An additional advantage Hitler saw was that communism would

be destroyed. Most historians are in cohesion that Hitler and his foreign policy caused the Second World War, However, A. J. P. Taylor, claims that Hitler never intended a major war and at most was prepared for only a limited war against Poland. However this claim is widely rejected throughout the differing interpretations. Germany's constant rhetorical on Russia is crucial to the debate. Russia was rich in raw materials such as oil which is vital for any country planning to wage war. Through realisation that Russia would solve internal problems, strengthen it militarily, and enable Germany to become economically self-sufficient by adding food and other raw material sources, The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact is essential within this argument. The Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union had its advantages for both countries involved. The pact meant that Germany was safe from threat of Russia and communism, but in a secret appendix Eastern Europe was divided into German and Soviet spheres of influence, fascism was safe from destruction whilst this bided time for Russia to prepare for a war. Realising the strength of the French Empire and their colonies, Hitler saw Russia as a temporary ally, until this pact was broken when Hitler invaded Russia in 1941. Another alliance signed was the Rome Berlin Axis, surrounding countries such as Poland were threatened as the aims of this threatened as territorial expansion and foundation of empires based on military conquest and the overthrow of the post-World War I international order; and to stop the spread of communism throughout Europe. The occupation and annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany revealed to Hitler the weaknesses of the allies' decision making and tested how far they would be pushed before they would intervene with military action. The events leading up to the union revealed fragments in the Foreign policy of Britain

and France who yet again did nothing to protest Hitler's aggressive foreign policy " British attitudes were a key factor in the other problem Taylor cites, unity." It also it dealt a severe strategic blow at Czechoslovakia which could now be attacked from the south as well as from the West and North. Another example in which Hitler recognised is the Abyssinian crisis which Britain and France failed to react towards Mussolini " It had already been manifested in their reluctance to wage a full scale economic war on fascist Italy during the Abyssinian crisis", this gave Hitler the opportunity to remilitarize the Rhineland, free from threat from the other western powers, " Hitler's coup in the Rhineland the vacillating recognisable pattern of weakness" Hitler had given the instruction that if they met any resistance, to withdraw however none was met, " And France made no move". This shows the allies as inconsistent, and seemed to be more interested in their own domestic policy rather than foreign policy, " most people had the failures of their own government and the everyday worries of trying to cope with economic misery". The Hossbach Memorandum can be used as evidence that Hitler had planned for war and revenge, which would therefore suggest that Hitler's hostile foreign policies made the Second World War inevitable. Through this memorandum Hitler's motives becomes clear. The aim of German policy was to preserve the racial community and gain space; this is mentioned within his works, 'Mein Kampf.' Germany used an aggressive foreign policy force to secure the goals, 'his successes in foreign policy down to 1938 derived in the main from this bully's intuition, coupled with his instinctive gamblers risk" This memorandum has two conflicting interpretations, There have been two interpretations of this memorandum, Hugh Trevor-Roper suggest that this was Hitler's scheme for war, " The

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Second World War was Hitler's personal war in many senses. He intended it, he prepared for it, he chose the moment for launching it" whereas A. J. P. Taylor disagrees and suggests " Little can be discovered so long as we go on attributing everything that happened to Hitler" In conclusion, the extent to which Hitler's foreign policies made the Second World War inevitable is open to much debate. A J P Taylor argues Hitler was just an average western leader and the foreign policy he shaped would have been similar to that of any other German leader. The Treaty of Versailles acted as a catalyst which ultimately created more problems than in solved. Taylor argues that it was the fault of many events and different leaders, whereas other historians such as Hugh Trevor-Roper suggest that Hitler's foreign policy was fully intent on making the Second World War inevitable. The allies took a stance of non intervention, which could be argued as too little action too late, their policy of appeasement had failed and with it the League of Nations. The evidence put forward would suggest that the aggressive stance in foreign policy that Hitler portrayed was ultimately the last straw in a series of events and different circumstances which led to the destruction of the Second World War.