

Assess hitler's skill as a diplomat



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

" One pound was demanded at the pistol's point. When it was given, two pounds were demanded at the pistol's point. Finally, the dictator consented to take one pound seventeen shillings and six pence and the rest in promises of good will for the future". Winston Churchill, October 1938. When Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany on 30th January 1933, Germany's diplomatic situation was far more favourable than after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles 11 years previously. Good relations had been fostered with Britain, Italy and the United States through Chancellor Stresemann's policy of peaceful revisionism, which included the signing of the Locarno Treaty in 1925, the guaranteeing of Germany's western frontiers and joining the League of Nations in 1926. Diplomatic relations with France were still poor, due to the view of the French that Stresemann's conciliatory policies did not have the full support of the German people. Indeed, after Stresemann's death in 1930, German foreign policy became markedly more right-wing, with the Grand Coalition governments of Brüning and Von Papen trying to ensure a complete revision of the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler came to power on the premise that he would combat the economic and social hardship that Germany was experiencing by tearing up the Treaty, which his propaganda blamed solely for Germany's predicament. In order to make herself a major power again, Germany would need to find strong European allies. Hitler sought to capitalise on the diplomatic successes that Stresemann had achieved during the 1920s to reach alliances with Italy and Britain, whom he had described in *Mein Kampf* as Germany's " natural allies in Europe". The first attempt for an alliance with Britain was made in November 1933, when Hitler sent his " representative for disarmament questions ", Joachim Von Ribbentrop, to London for talks, where Von

Ribbentrop suggested an agreement between Germany and Britain in which Germany would guarantee the British Empire in return for a free hand in Eastern Europe. Britain neglected to take up these proposals, but Hitler did not abandon his desire to reach an agreement with Britain. His initial attempt in June 1934 to woo Germany's other "natural ally", Italy, was even more unsuccessful. Hitler tried to convince Mussolini that Germany had no intention to annex South Tyrol, a German-speaking area, which had been transferred to Italy under the 1919 Treaty of St. Germain, but to no avail. Mussolini was aware that it was Hitler's wish to bring all Germans into the Reich, which he stated in *Mein Kampf*. The German foreign minister, Von Neurath, recalled that "their minds didn't meet; they didn't understand each other¹". A low in German-Italian relations was reached in August 1934, when the Austrian Chancellor, Dollfuss, was assassinated in an abortive coup by the Austrian Nazis, which resulted in serious diplomatic complications, as well as personal embarrassment for Mussolini, who was hosting Frau Dollfuss at the time. On hearing the news, he referred to Hitler as a "horrible sexual degenerate" and a "dangerous fool²", and ordered troops to the Brenner Pass. 1934 could be described as a mixed diplomatic year for Hitler. Despite the Dollfuss assassination and the poor diplomatic relations with Italy, Hitler had achieved a diplomatic coup by securing a non-aggression pact with Poland. Poland and Germany had remained openly hostile to each other since Poland was awarded the industrial port of Danzig (Gdansk), Silesia and Posen in 1919. Hitler managed to exploit the Polish uncertainty about the reliability of France and their common hostility towards the Soviet Union to secure this agreement. Despite Von Neurath and State Secretary Von Bulow's belief that Poland was Germany's arch enemy with whom no

agreement could be possible. Hitler pushed through his own policy, and thereby managed to demonstrate peaceful intentions to a hostile nation, reduce tension on Germany's eastern border, and crack the French Cordon Sanitaire, a series of pacts France had made to encircle Germany. However, Hitler's remark to the president of the Danzig Senate, Hermann Rauschning, was characteristic of his attitude towards pacts with other countries, " All of our agreements with Poland have a purely temporary significance. I have no intention of maintaining a serious friendship with Poland³". Differing private and public policies was a feature of Hitler's diplomatic style. British and French disagreement over the time that Germany should have to wait before returning to military parity at the Geneva Disarmament Conference in October 1933 gave Hitler the perfect opportunity to profess Germany's desire for peace, which he had stated in a Friedensrede (peace speech) in May 1933, and claimed that Germany was being unfairly victimised by the intransigence of the French, and was " ostensibly upset by the clear failure of the conference to achieve disarmament⁴". Indeed, so upset was Hitler that he walked out of the conference and withdrew Germany from the League of Nations. In fact, Hitler had told a cabinet meeting on 5th February 1933 that " rearmament was to have the first priority for the next 4 to 5 years⁵".

Germany's isolation in 1934 was not capitalised on by the Western Powers, as the French were badly shaken by domestic upheaval, while prominent members of the Conservative Party in Britain called for a rapprochement with Germany, alarmed at French negotiations with Russia. Hitler portrayed Germany as a bastion against Bolshevism, which drew sympathy in Britain, and this portrayal was only invalidated 9 days before the outbreak of war, following the German alliance with the Soviet Union. It was this lack of

diplomatic consensus which allowed Hitler to achieve several diplomatic successes in 1935. Following the return of the Saar to Germany, Hitler managed to avoid a multilateral treaty with Britain and France on disarmament, excusing himself with a cold. Armament was on again the agenda in March, when he let Goering announce that the airforce was being built up, and when little diplomatic protest followed, he announced the introduction of conscription a week later. Britain, Italy and France were worried enough by these developments to meet at Stresa in Italy on 11th April, where they expressed their collective regret and reaffirmed their commitment to the Treaty of Locarno. They could not, however, agree on a course of action to take against Germany. Italy favoured sanctions, whilst Britain made it clear from the start that they would not support sanctions. Thus, the "Stresa Front" never went beyond rhetoric. If this represented the nadir in Germany's diplomatic relations, the period in the wilderness was a short one. Within 3 months Germany had signed a Naval Agreement with Britain, whereby Germany would keep their naval tonnage to 35% of that of Britain. The Navy wanted a figure of 50%, but Hitler realised the importance of renewing diplomatic relations with Britain. At the same time Britain wanted to bring Germany back to the League of Nations and the European framework of multilateral agreements. However, Hitler was able to rebuff this idea, and for the first time apply diplomatic pressure by stating (untruthfully) that Germany had reached air parity with Britain. He again put forward the idea of a general Anglo-German alliance, rejected by the British on the grounds that it would jeopardise relations with France. Nevertheless, Hitler was very content with the outcome, and responded by stating that "I am convinced that the British regard this agreement with us in this sphere as

<https://assignbuster.com/assess-hitlers-skill-as-a-diplomat/>

only as a preliminary to much wider co-operation⁶". Relations with Italy also began to thaw; Mussolini now convinced that Germany would be the best partner for Italian expansion, following the unexpected imposition of sanctions on Italy by Britain for invading Abyssinia. Hitler sensed the opportunity to cement relations with Italy, and whilst remaining neutral, Germany continued to supply Italy with raw materials. Mussolini's statement to the German Ambassador that "Stresa is dead⁷", provided further encouragement to Hitler, and the British preoccupation with Abyssinia and French political chaos gave him an opportunity to remilitarise the Rhineland on 7th March 1936, under the pretext that the recently signed Franco-Soviet pact violated the Treaty of Locarno. Had military action been taken, they would have found 3 badly trained divisions of the German army. Hitler had in fact not intended to remilitarise the Rhineland until "the Spring of 1937⁸". Their common support for Franco in the Spanish Civil War helped cement relations between Italy and Germany. As well as increasing warmth with Mussolini, Hitler knew that the fight against the Soviet-supported Spanish government would find a support amongst the anti-Bolsheviks in Britain. Despite finding a receptive climate amongst the upper classes in Britain, Britain did not sign the Anti-Comintern pact of November 1936. Hitler referred to 1937 as the "year of awareness⁹". It certainly marked a far more diplomatic strategy. He believed in the "survival of the fittest", and that "struggle was the essence of life", and between 1937 and 1939, he indulged in far more brinkmanship diplomacy, aware that other countries had started crash re-armament programmes, and that Germany was in the military ascendancy, so if war came then "so be it". He realised that the alliance with Britain might have to be dispensed with, but following the signing of the Anti-

<https://assignbuster.com/assess-hitlers-skill-as-a-diplomat/>

Comintern pact and the Rome-Berlin Axis in 1936, he assumed that Britain would be forced to stay neutral in any conflict in the face of such overwhelming force. His next target on the diplomatic horizon was an Anschluss (Union) with Austria, his homeland. He had tread carefully on the Austrian question since the botched coup of 1934 and the implication of an Anschluss on relations with Italy, and let Goering decide policy, whilst describing it as "too tough"¹⁰. A meeting with the British foreign minister Lord Halifax in November 1937 convinced him that Britain wouldn't intervene, but he still pursued a cautious approach. Following demands to the Austrian Chancellor Kurt Von Schuschnigg in February 1938 for an Austrian Nazi, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, to be put in charge of security, Hitler was shocked to learn that his Austrian counterpart had called a plebiscite on Austrian sovereignty. Under pressure from Goering the plebiscite was cancelled and despite stoic resistance from Austrian President Miklas, Austria became part of the Third Reich on 12th March 1938. The Sudeten Germans, a German minority separated by the Treaty of Versailles from Germany, were Hitler's next diplomatic quest. They provided a useful excuse for Hitler's eventual aim to dismantle the entire Czech state, which he admired for its stability and despised for its "inferior" Slavic population. Following intense anti-Czech propaganda and a vitriolic speech at Nuremberg, British Prime Minister Chamberlain flew to Germany twice in September 1938, desperate to preserve the peace. Hitler correctly thought that Britain was not greatly concerned with the fate of the Sudetenland, and Hitler asserted that it was his last territorial demand in Europe. Also aware that the French had no military plan to protect Czechoslovakia, he grew more belligerent in his attitude, although he was aware that there was little appetite at home for

war. Following a British call for Mussolini to mediate, a conference was arranged in Munich on 29th September 1938. There it was agreed that the Czech would evacuate the Sudetenland starting on 1st October 1938. Although this appeared to be a major diplomatic success for Hitler, he was not happy with the outcome, complaining that "that fellow Chamberlain has spoiled my entry into Prague¹¹". He was also bound into a multilateral agreement which he had previously managed to avoid, and he was irritated by the continued existence of Czechoslovakia. He had however managed to further erode French security and to isolate Russia, who were not present at Munich. Hitler had little intention of seeing Czech sovereignty preserved much longer, and on 21st November 1938 he issued a military directive ordering the "complete liquidation of the Czech state¹²". He found another pretext in the form of the Slovaks, who had been given limited autonomy under the Munich agreement. The Czech president, Hacha, went to Berlin to try and save his country, and was threatened with the destruction of Prague with such force that he had a heart attack. Although Czechoslovakia was invaded without resistance on 15th March 1939, this also marked the end of diplomacy with Britain and France. The Czechs were not German-speakers and invading another country was not national self-determination. Hitler turned 50 in 1939, and his confidence, his lack of respect for the appeasers and the pacts made with Italy and the Soviet Union made a Hitler-instigated war inevitable. He knew that the German public would not accept nationalistic rhetoric and hardship forever. He had managed to completely invalidate the Treaty of Versailles and invade a non-German speaking country without any military opposition. He had exploited the differences of the Western Powers and the bad conscience left by the Treaty of Versailles in

<https://assignbuster.com/assess-hitlers-skill-as-a-diplomat/>

Britain, and was aware that without the support of the United States, who had not ratified the Treaty of Versailles, Britain and France's opposition would only materialise in the form of paper protests. His pragmatic approach to diplomacy and alliance-making meant that Germany became engaged in the quest for lebensraum (living space) with the Soviet Union, whom he had wanted to destroy, against Britain, whom he wanted as an ally, which was started by an attack on Poland, with whom he had signed his first non-aggression pact in 1934.