

Causes of World War II [Revision Cascade]

Hitler's aims in foreign policy	Abolish the Treaty of Versailles	'My foreign policy was to abolish the Treaty of Versailles'; Hitler speaking in 1939
	Fear of Communist Russia	Ribbentrop claimed: 'Hitler wanted a strong Reich ... should a military power arise in the East.'
	Lebensraum	'Living space' in the East for an expanding Germany
	Aryan supremacy	A German 'master race' which would enslave the Slav nations
	Gross Deutschland	A 'greater Germany' which would rule central and eastern Europe
The return of the Saar, 1935: facts	League control ended	The Treaty of Versailles had put the Saar under League control for fifteen years
	Plebiscite planned	A plebiscite (referendum) was planned for 1935 to see what the Saarlanders wanted
	United Front	Communists & Social Democrats fought a joint campaign against union with Germany
	Nazi violence	17,000 Saarlanders, members of the Nazi SA in Germany, threatened to invade; they backed down when Britain threatened to send in troops
	90.3% voted yes, 13 Jan 1935	In the plebiscite, 90.3% voted to return to Germany –legally, a triumph for Hitler
Return of the Saar: significance	Hitler's prestige grew	It was a great success for the Nazis
	Hitler grew bolder	It encouraged Hitler to pursue further territorial ambitions
	German nationalism was encouraged	It showed that Germans preferred nationalism to freedom
	Self-determination for Germans	It established the principle that Germans deserved self-determination too
	Britain's threat went unnoticed	Nobody noticed that when Britain threatened military force the Nazis backed down
German rearmament: causes	Challenge the Treaty of Versailles	It was part of Hitler's aim to abolish the Treaty of Versailles
	National security	Germans argued that Germany was surrounded by enemies and needed an army
	Failure of the Disarmament Conference	Hitler wrecked the 1933 Disarmament Conference by demanding parity with France, then used its failure as a reason to rearm
	Aggressive foreign policy	Hitler needed a strong army if he was going to achieve his territorial ambitions
	Public spectacle	Most dictatorships mount parades displaying their military might
German rearmament, 1933–35: facts	Disarmament Conference, 1933	Hitler withdrew from the Conference, demanding parity of arms with France
	Non-aggression Pact with Poland, 1934	Hitler signed a ten-year non-aggression pact with Poland's President Pilsudski
	Conscription Law, Mar 1935	By 1935 the army had risen secretly to 300,000; Hitler introduced conscription
	Anglo-German Naval Agreement, Jun 1935	Britain agreed to a German navy tonnage one-third as big as Britain's.
	Military rally, Nov 1935	The 7th Party Congress at Nuremberg was called the 'Freedom to Rearm' Rally

German rearmament: significance	Broke the Treaty of Versailles	Hitler had broken Article 163 of the Treaty – and nobody stopped him
	Weakened the League of Nations	It showed the weakness of Britain, France and the League; it also weakened the League's prestige
	Raised Hitler's prestige	It was a great success for Hitler; there were celebrations in Germany
	Encouraged Hitler	It encouraged Hitler to pursue further territorial ambitions
	Allowed an aggressive foreign policy	Gave Hitler a strong army to pursue his territorial ambitions
Non-aggression Pact with Poland, 1934: causes	Poland abandoned its planned invasion	Poland's President Pilsudski wanted to invade Germany, but France refused to help
	France's Maginot Line	The Maginot Line meant France was concentrating on defence, and would not defend Poland
	Pilsudski feared Russia	Pilsudski wanted peace with surrounding countries so he could resist Russia
	Hitler needed an ally	Poland was a buffer between Russia and Germany, and let Hitler focus on the West
	Breaking Collective Security	Hitler wanted to undermine the League's principle of 'collective security'
Non-aggression Pact with Poland, 1934: results	Non-aggression and trade agreement	Germany and Poland promised not to go to war; also there was a trade treaty
	Hitler defused Poland	It meant that Poland remained neutral while Germany expanded, 1934–1939
	It weakened France	Although Poland remained allied to France, it was a pact with France's enemy
	It allowed Hitler to expand	It meant that Hitler did not have to worry about Poland, 1934–1939
	Breaking Collective Security	The Pact undermined the League's principle of 'collective security'
Stresa Front, 1935 – the facts	Immediate Causes	Germany's attempt to provoke a Nazi takeover of Austria (1934), and its announcement that it intended to create an airforce (March 1935)
	Organised by	the British diplomat Robert Vansittart
	The Conference, April 1935	Britain, France and Italy agreed to resist Germany's attempts to overturn the Treaty of Versailles
	Damaged by	Britain's appeasement of Hitler, esp. the Anglo-German Naval Agreement (ie Britain going behind the Front's back to help Germany break Versailles)
	Destroyed by	Mussolini, when he invaded Abyssinia in October 1935
Anglo-German Naval Agreement, 1935: causes	Rearmament	Hitler sought Britain's 'permission' to rebuild his navy
	Hitler wanted an alliance	Hitler regarded Britain as a 'Teutonic' nation
	Breaking Collective Security	Hitler wanted to undermine the League's principle of 'collective security'
	The Disarmament Conference failed	Britain hoped to limit German rearmament instead.
	The Abyssinian Crisis, 1935–36	The Abyssinian Crisis made Britain realise 'collective security' did not work

Anglo-German Naval Agreement, 1935: results	One-third of British tonnage, Jun 1935	Britain agreed to a German navy tonnage one-third as big as Britain's
	Raised Hitler's prestige	It was a great success for Hitler; he called it 'the happiest day of my life'
	Encouraged Hitler	It made Hitler think Britain was weak and encouraged him to make more demands
	Allowed an aggressive foreign policy	Gave Hitler a strong navy to pursue his territorial ambitions
	Britain betrayed the League	The agreement (said Mussolini) wrecked the principle of 'collective security'
Collapse of the Stresa Front – results	Hitler was encouraged	Britain's betrayal of the Front in favour of a policy of appeasement encouraged Hitler; in March 1936 he remilitarised the Rhineland
	Abyssinia, October 1935	Mussolini took the Front as a sign that Britain and France supported him in Abyssinia, so he ignored the League and invaded
	The Axis, October 1937	Mussolini decided that it would be easier to join Hitler than to try to stop him
	Anschluss, 1938	instead of being safe from Hitler, Austria was now sandwiched between Italy and Germany, and would be overtaken in March 1938
	'Perfidious Albion'	(= 'lying Britain') Britain's reputation was damaged
Hitler builds a Bloc – The Axis'	Rome-Berlin Axis, 1 Nov 1936	The 'Axis' alliance between Germany and Mussolini's Italy
	Anti-Comintern Pact, 24 Nov 1936	The 'Anti-Comintern Pact' between Germany and Japan against communism
	Italy joined the Anti-Comintern Pact, 1937	Italy 'decided to align herself with Germany and Japan to defend themselves against the Communist International'
	Pact of Steel, May 1939	Hitler and Mussolini signed an alliance promising to cooperate on the economy, foreign policy and military planning, with a secret protocol promised to coordinate newspapers and propaganda
	Tripartite Pact, 1940	Germany, Italy and Japan agreed to coordinate their military campaigns
Remilitarisation of the Rhineland, 1936: causes	To challenge the Treaty of Versailles	It was part of Hitler's aim to destroy the Treaty of Versailles
	German nationalism	Germans hated the fact that Germany's army was excluded from part of Germany
	Economic crisis in Germany	Hitler needed a foreign policy success to take people's minds off problems at home
	Franco-Soviet Treaty, Mar 1936	Hitler argued that this threatened Germany's security
	The Abyssinian Crisis, 1935–36	In 1936, Britain and France were distracted by Italy and Abyssinia
Remilitarisation of the Rhineland, 1936: events	Operation Winter Exercise, 12 Feb 1936	Hitler authorised the 'Operation Winter Exercise' to remilitarise the Rhineland
	'General Settlement' offer, 13 Feb, 1936	Britain offered Germany remilitarisation in return for a promise not to bomb Britain
	Remilitarisation, 7 Mar 1936	19 Germany battalions crossed the Rhine; they had orders to retreat if opposed
	Britain rejected France, 11 Mar 1936	Britain rejected a French suggestion of a joint attack
	The League condemned Hitler, 19 Mar 1936	The League condemned Germany, but only the USSR supported sanctions

Remilitarisation of the Rhineland, 1936: results	Remilitarisation, 7 Mar 1936	Germany occupied the Rhineland and its military fortifications
	It broke the Treaty of Versailles	Hitler had broken Article 180 of the Treaty – and nobody stopped him
	It raised Hitler's prestige	German troops were welcomed into Strasbourg as conquering heroes
	It encouraged Hitler	Hitler decided Britain and France were weak, so he made more demands
	Failure [of the] League	Everybody realised that the League was powerless to stop Hitler
The Dollfuss Affair – the facts	Fatherland Front, 1933	an 'austrofascist' movement, based on Italian fascism, and on the Christian-Social Party of Engelbert Dollfuss, who became Austrian Chancellor in 1932
	<i>Schutzbund</i> uprising, 1933	when a dispute arose with the Social Democrats, an Austrian Nazi tried to kill Dollfuss. Dollfuss used the attempt as an excuse to repress the <i>Schutzbund</i> , the paramilitary wing of the Social Democrats, who rebelled (unsuccessfully)
	First Austrian Republic	Dollfuss used the <i>Schutzbund</i> uprising as the excuse to set up a one-party government
	July Putsch, 25 July 1934	Dollfuss was assassinated by the Nazis, who set up a new government led by exiled Nazi Anton Rintelen
	Italian mobilisation	– fearing a German takeover of Austria, Mussolini promised to defend Austrian independence, mobilised the Italian army on the border, and helped the Austrian forces fighting the Nazis. Hitler backed down and the coup collapsed
Anschluss with Austria, 1938: causes	To challenge the Treaty of Versailles	It was part of Hitler's aim to destroy the Treaty of Versailles
	Greater Germany	In Mein Kampf, Hitler had demanded that Austria be part of 'Greater Germany'
	Chancellor Dollfuss assassinated, 1934	The Austrian Nazis rebelled, but Mussolini had forced Hitler to back down
	Axis Alliance, 1936	Hitler's Axis alliance with Mussolini freed Hitler to try to conquer Austria again.
	Chancellor Schuschnigg, 1938	Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg banned the Nazi Party and arrested its leaders
Anschluss with Austria, 1938: events	Austrian Nazis rioted, Feb 1938	They were demanding Anschluss; Hitler supported them
	Schuschnigg announced a plebiscite, 9 Mar 1938	Schuschnigg agreed to Hitler's demand to make the Austrian Nazi Seyss-Inquart his Minister of Security, but when Hitler made further threats, Schuschnigg called a plebiscite to seek public support
	Hitler invaded, 11 Mar 1938	Hitler invaded to prevent the plebiscite (fearing that he would lose)
	20,000 Austrians were arrested, Mar 1938	All political opponents of the Nazis were arrested, intimidated, or fled
	99.75% voted yes, Apr 1938	In a plebiscite – controlled by the German army – 99.75% voted for Anschluss

Anschluss with Austria, 1938: results	Anschluss	Germany and Austria were united
	It broke the Treaty of Versailles	Hitler had broken Article 80 of the Treaty – and nobody stopped him
	Hitler's first success outside Germany	It was the first time Hitler had tried aggression outside Germany – a huge victory
	It encouraged Hitler	Hitler decided Britain and France were weak, so he made more demands
	Appeasement	Chamberlain was convinced to abandon collective security and use 'appeasement'
Reasons for appeasement	The Treaty of Versailles was unfair	The Treaty of Versailles was unfair to Germany
	Negotiation is better than war	It is right to try to avoid war by negotiation, and the League had failed to keep the peace
	Peace Pledge Movement	Public opinion did not support a war until 1939
	One year to rearm	Appeasement gave Britain a year to rearm
	A bulwark against Russia	Nazi Germany was a good way to stop Communist Russia growing
Reasons against appeasement	"Our enemies are worms"	Hitler despised the appeasers, which tempted him into war
	Nazi tyranny spread	Appeasement abandoned millions of people in central Europe to Nazi tyranny
	Humiliating for Britain	Appeasement was a humiliation for Britain and Chamberlain
	One year for Hitler to prepare	Instead of stopping Hitler early it waited until he was strong enough to fight for 6 years 1939-45
	Second World War	Appeasement failed to prevent war
The Sudetenland Crisis, 1938: causes	To challenge the Treaty of Versailles	It was part of Hitler's aim to destroy the Treaty of Versailles
	Greater Germany	In Mein Kampf, Hitler had demanded that all Germans be part of 'Greater Germany'
	The Sudeten Germans	On the border with Germany, the Sudeten people were German AND Nazi
	Danger from Czechoslovakia	Was a democracy with a strong army and economy; it could be a threat to Hitler
	Sudeten Nazis rioted, 7 Sep 1938	This was the trigger; led by Henlein, they demanded union with Germany.
The Sudetenland and Munich, 1938: events	Sudeten Nazis rioted, 7 Sep 1938	Led by Henlein, they demanded union with Germany; Hitler supported them
	Berchtesgaden, 15 Sep 1938	Chamberlain met Hitler; agreed on a plebiscite
	Bad Godesberg, 22 Sep 1938	Hitler demanded more; Chamberlain refused, although it was 'a faraway country'
	Munich, 29 Sep 1938	Chamberlain and Daladier met Hitler and gave him the Sudetenland
	"A piece of paper", 30 Sep 1938	Chamberlain returned to England with a 'piece of paper' apparently agreeing peace

The Sudetenland and Munich, 1938: results	Hitler occupied Sudetenland, 1 Oct 1938	Hitler said it was the start of a thousand-year Reich
	"Our enemies are worms"	Hitler despised Chamberlain and Daladier, which tempted him to go further
	Nazi–Soviet Pact	Stalin decided that Britain and France would never stand up to Hitler
	Britain prepared for war	e.g. increased RAF; air raid shelters; evacuation plans; conscription May 1939
	British morale	Britons knew they had done all possible to avoid war and decided Hitler was evil
Fall of Czechoslovakia, 1939: causes	Lebensraum	Czechoslovakia was not German; its acquisition was Nazi imperialism
	Aryanism	The Czechs and Slovaks were despised 'Slav' nations the Nazis wanted as slaves
	Czechoslovakia was weak and divided	Czechoslovakia had a strong army, but there were internal racial tensions, especially between the Germans of the Sudetenland and the Czechs of Bohemia.
	Czechoslovakia was open to attack	All Czechoslovakia's defences had been in the Sudetenland
	Hacha and Tiso were right-wing	Both the Czech leader Hacha and the Slovak leader Tiso were right-wing
Fall of Czechoslovakia, 1939: results	Slovak independence, 14 Mar 1939	Hitler bullied Tiso into declaring Slovak independence under German 'protection'
	Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 15 Mar 1939	Hitler forced Hacha to invite German occupation; the Nazis marched into Prague
	Britain realised appeasement had failed, 16 Mar 1939	British newspapers declared that only war would stop Hitler
	Chamberlain acknowledged Munich was broken, 17 Mar 1939	Chamberlain acknowledged that Hitler was trying to dominate the world by force
	Chamberlain guaranteed Poland, 31 Mar 1939	Chamberlain promised to support Poland if Poland was invaded
Britain prepares for War	1 December 1938	Britain sets up a 'National Register' of who would do what if there was a war.
	3 January 1939	The British navy is made stronger. The RAF increases production of planes to 400 a month. In March the Territorial Army is doubled in numbers.
	15 February 1939	Parliament increases defence spending to £580 million a year (and again to £1,322m in April). ¼ million free air raid shelters are given to Londoners.
	1 May 1939	The Military Training Act introduces conscription in Britain
	31 August 1939	The first children are evacuated from London
Nazi–Soviet Pact, 1939: causes	Hitler wanted to conquer Poland	Hitler wanted to conquer Poland; but only Russia could stop him
	Stalin distrusted Britain and France	After Munich, Stalin decided Britain and France would never stand up to Hitler
	An Anglo-Soviet Alliance failed	Chamberlain did not trust Stalin, and sent Reginald Drax on a slow boat
	Stalin wanted time to rearm	Stalin did not want to end up fighting a war for Britain against Germany
	Hitler moved decisively	Hitler sent Ribbentrop, and offered Stalin part of Poland, and the Baltic states

Nazi–Soviet Pact, 1939: results	A Nazi–Soviet Trade Treaty, 19 Aug 1939	Germany gave Russia 200m Reichmarks to buy German goods in return for raw materials
	Nazi–Soviet Pact, 23 Aug 1939	A non-aggression pact
	Secret Protocol (also 23 Aug 1939)	A promise to partition Poland, with the USSR to take Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia
	Invasion of Poland, 1 Sep 1939	Hitler was now free to invade Poland – Britain was unable to prevent it
	Britain declared war, 3 Sep 1939	Increased the morale of the British people; Hitler was seen to be amoral
The invasion of Poland, 1939: facts	Polish Corridor Crisis, Mar 1939	Hitler demanded passage through the Polish corridor
	Chamberlain guaranteed Poland, Apr 1939	Hitler renounced the Polish non-aggression pact & Anglo-German naval agreement
	Danzig customs crisis, 4 Aug 1939	There was a clash over custom duties between the Polish government and German Nazis in the Danzig senate; Hitler threatened war
	Nazi–Soviet Pact, 23 Aug 1939	Hitler was now free to invade Poland – Britain was unable to prevent it
	Hitler invaded Poland, 1 Sep 1939	Britain declared war on 3 September
Who was to blame?	The League – failed to stop Hitler	At the time, people blamed the weakness of the League of Nations – in 1945, the United Nations was set up with much greater power
	The appeasers – encouraged Hitler	In 1941, a group of British journalists blamed 'the Guilty Men' – Chamberlain and the appeasers – whose weakness, they said, allowed the war to break out
	Hitler – wanted war	Alan Bullock claimed Hitler sought war, and had a systematic policy of aggression
	Britain – encouraged Hitler	Soviet historians blamed Britain, which, they said, encouraged Hitler to attack the USSR on the hope that communism and fascism would destroy each other
	Chamberlain – allowed Hitler to fool him	In 1961, AJP Taylor portrayed Hitler as a foolish opportunist, who took advantage of Chamberlain and Daladier as they allowed him
'Classical' Causes of WWI:	Hitler was expansionist	Many historians still think that the Second World War was Hitler's personal war, and that he always intended to fight a war - as a re-run of a First World War he did not believe that German had lost fairly
	Appeasement failed to stop him so...	Appeasement encouraged war; it made Hitler think no one dare stop him. Munich led Stalin to make the Nazi-Soviet Pact, because he believed he could not trust Britain
	... he led the world to war in Eight Steps	EIGHT events – Saar, Rearmament, Rhineland, Anschluss, Munich, Czechoslovakia, Nazi-Soviet Pact, Poland – were a 'countdown to war'
	The Treaty of Versailles solved nothing	Reparations left the victorious nations feeling guilty and Hitler's early aggression look justified/ Self-determination surrounded Germany with weak states/ the Treaty the Germans wanting revenge
	The League of Nations failed to keep the peace	It failed to prevent Hitler & Mussolini breaking the Treaty of Versailles/ it failed to achieve disarmament/ Britain and France abandoned collective security, and turned to appeasement

'Other' Causes of WWII	Gerhard Weinberg (1970)	Ideology
	'Functionalist' historians (1980s onwards)	Hitler whipped up forces within Germany that drove him into war
	Timothy Mason (late 1980s)	rearmament caused economic instability which needed a 'flight into war' to prevent economic meltdown
	John Vasquez (1996)	a series of 'steps to interstate war' – Territorial Disputes/ Militarism/ Alliances/ Crises/ Breakdown of political order/ Economic Depression/ Polarisation into 2 hostile blocs, neither bloc preponderant
	PMH Bell (1997)	underlying forces' "shaped and constrained the calculations of statesmen"
Historiography of the Causes of the Second World War	Winston Churchill (1948)	in <i>The Gathering Storm</i> he wrote that Hitler intended war all along; after he re-armed, only war could stop him
	Andreas Hillgruber (1965)	Hitler had a <i>Stufenplan</i> for war
	AJP Taylor (1961)	there was no plan, only opportunism as Hitler followed a continuation of Germany's attempt to dominate Europe since the 1870s. War came by accident when Hitler misread Britain's determination over Poland
	Counter-revisionism	recent studies have shifted back away to 'intentionalism'. (e.g. RJ Overy, 1994: it is impossible to explain Hitler's massive re-armament as anything BUT a preparation for war)
	Ruth Henig (The "vast collection of primary evidence ... accumulating pile of secondary sources [and] complexity of issues" make conclusion "daunting"
Historiography of Appeasement	At the time	Chamberlain's attempts to prevent war by 'appeasement' were welcomed
	1945-1960s	<i>The Guilty Men</i> (1941) blamed Chamberlain and the appeasers for allowing – even encouraging – Hitler to move towards war; this was the 'orthodox' view until the 1960s
	1960s-present	AJP Taylor claimed that appeasement was common-sense politics and Munich was 'a triumph'. The opening of the public records in the 1960s, and Chamberlain's personal papers in 1975, led to revisionism in favour of Chamberlain's reputation and policies
	1980s-present	there has been a counter-revisionism towards the orthodox position that standing up to Hitler earlier may have prevented war
	Sidney Astor (2008)	found that there is no simple progression from orthodoxy, to revisionism, to counter-revisionism but that arguments for and against appeasement and Chamberlain have existed side-by-side since before the War