

Key Question 7 : What factors led to the outbreak of war in 1939?

Timeline of events



Important concept

Hitler wanted to “make Germany great again”, to make it the strong imperial country that nationalists thought it had been before it was “stabbed in the back” at the end of the First World War.

Key words

Greater Germany	Germany plus Rhineland, Austria, Sudetenland, and the Polish Corridor
Lebensraum	Living space, for the growing German population
Communism	The belief that everyone must be equal – the Soviet Union (USSR) was a communist dictatorship
Anschluss	Union of Germany and Austria into one country
Remilitarisation	Allowing troops to be stationed somewhere again
Pact of Steel	Military alliance between Germany and Italy
Re-armament	Building up Germany’s armed forces again
Conscription	Compulsory military service
Plebiscite	A referendum, a public vote
Anti-Comintern	Against communists
Appeasement	Giving in to demands to avoid conflict

What were Hitler’s foreign policy aims?

- *Reverse the Treaty of Versailles* - to restore German territory and to build up the German armed forces.
- *Unite all German-speaking people* - to create a ‘Greater Germany’ (Grossdeutschland) by uniting all Germans into one homeland.
- *Lebensraum* – to get ‘living space’ in eastern Europe for the growing population of Greater Germany.
- *Destroy communism* - to get rid of communists who had betrayed Germany in 1919 and to destroy the USSR to stop it from attacking Germany.

What agreements did Hitler make with other countries?

- *Non-aggression Pact with Poland 1934* - Hitler promised to accept the borders of Poland for last ten years.
- *Rome-Berlin Axis 1936* - Italy and Germany agreed to follow a common foreign policy and stop the spread of communism in Europe.
- *Anti-Comintern Pact 1936* - Hitler signed a treaty with Japan and Italy to limit communist influence around the world.
- *Pact of Steel 1939* - Hitler and Mussolini signed a full military alliance to assist each other in the event of war.
- *Nazi-Soviet Pact 1939* - Hitler wanted to destroy Poland, not just take back Germany’s lost land. The USSR and Germany promised not to support attacks on each other. In secret they agreed to divide Poland.

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How did Hitler re-arm Germany?

- Conscription was introduced – the army was increased from 100,000 in 1933 to 1,400,000 in 1939.
- In 1933 3.5 billion marks was spent on producing tanks, aircraft and ships. By 1939 this had increased to 26 billion marks.

Why did Hitler continue his aggressive foreign policy?

- After the Depression most countries were more worried about their own problems than those in other countries.
- The League of Nations was seen as weak because it had failed to stop Italy in Africa and Japan in China.
- British people thought the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh on Germany.
- Britain and France did nothing to stop Hitler earlier on and he became convinced that they would never stop him.

What territories did Hitler take over between 1933 and 1939?

1. *Saarland 1935* – citizens voted by 477,000 to 48,000 to rejoin Germany after League of Nations control since the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.
2. *Rhineland 1936* - Allied troops were withdrawn in 1935, in 1936 Hitler sent his army to re-militarise it. 98.8% of German people supported this. He had ordered his troops to withdraw if Britain and France objected but they said nothing.
3. *Anschluss 1938* - Hitler encouraged the Nazi Party in Austria to demand union with Germany. 99.75 per cent of Austrians voted in favour. Hitler had become more confident as his army was stronger and he had the support of Italy. Britain and France did nothing.
4. *Sudetenland 1938* – 3 million German speaking people lived there. 3/4 of Czechoslovakia's industry was there. Hitler threatened to attack Czechoslovakia to protect the Sudetenland Germans. Hitler met with the British, French and Italian leaders in Munich and they agreed to let Germany have Sudetenland as long as it left the rest of Czechoslovakia alone. Hitler agreed.
5. *Czechoslovakia 1939* - German troops were invited in to restore order, even though there was no disorder. Britain and France ended their policy of appeasement and agreed that they had to stop further German aggression.
6. *Poland 1939* - The Polish Corridor was created to allow Poland access to the sea and Danzig was controlled by the League of Nations. Britain had guaranteed Poland's borders. Hitler planned to invade Poland.