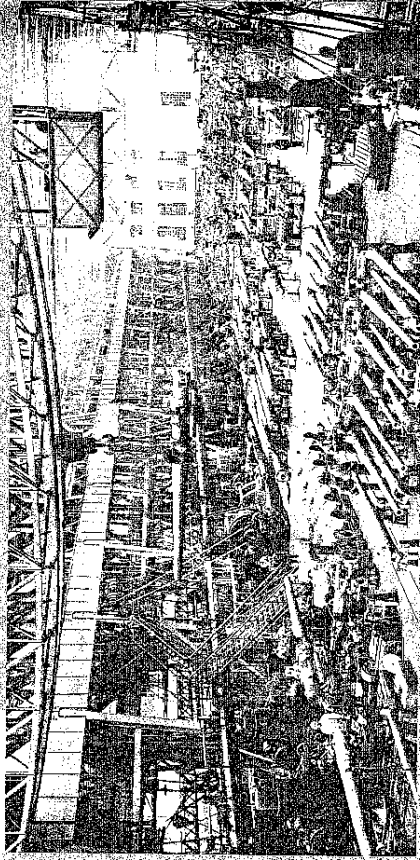


Chapter

The Nazi economy

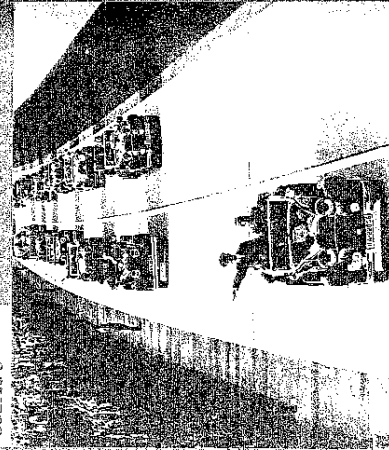
Source 1



Source 2



Source 3



Deficit financing

Government borrowing in order to finance the gap between spending and income and to fund schemes that increase employment to boost the economy.

Protectionism

When countries raise the duties on imports to encourage people to buy home-produced products.

Introduction

The German economy was just, but only just, beginning to recover from the Wall Street Crash and subsequent depression when Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933. It is estimated that by 1932, 40 per cent of the working population was unemployed. The official unemployment figures were to approach 6 million, though the reality was probably nearer to 8 million. Foreign trade had halved and industrial production had fallen by 40 per cent during the slump. Indeed, by 1932, industry was producing little more than it had done in the 1890s. Hitler staked a great deal of his reputation on solving this economic nightmare. He promised to 'save' the German farmer and the German worker and his popularity rested on this promise.

Key questions

- Did the Nazis solve the economic problems they inherited?
- Did they create a strong economy?
- Did they create new problems?
- To what extent did they create a successful war economy?
- Were people better off under the Nazis?
- Were the Nazis economically prepared for war in 1939?

Nazi economic policy

The Nazis had no great economic strategy up their sleeves in 1933. There was some pressure for Hitler to implement the more socialist-inspired elements of the Twenty-Five Points of 1920, but Hitler resisted such a move as he realized that he would need the support of private enterprise, and especially big business, to achieve his expansionist aims. So Hitler looked to the experts for guidance. Broadly speaking this advice fell into two categories:

A. 'Unorthodox economics'

Hitler was advised to:

- risk *deficit financing* by pumping government money into schemes which would provide employment. In the long run this would help the economy because more employment meant more people with money in their pockets to spend on goods and services.
- develop autarky (self-sufficiency) as far as possible, so that Germany would not have to import as many goods from other countries. This would obviously be useful in a state of war, but was also attractive in the 1930s when the world-wide slump was encouraging greater protectionism in other countries.

- create a trading zone in which Germany could arrange special deals with other countries over those goods which Germany could not produce itself.

B. Wehrwirtschaft (defence economy)

Hitler was advised to:

- base the economy, even in peacetime, around the needs of war. Only by doing this would Germany avoid a repeat of 1914-1918, when the economy proved unfit to sustain a lengthy war.

1933-1936: Economic recovery

In March 1933, Dr Hjalmar Schacht was appointed President of the Reichsbank, a post he had held before, in the 1920s. His appointment was a relief to the business community as it signalled a wish by the Nazis to work with big business and not against it. A year later, Schacht became Minister of Economics, thereby exerting an extremely powerful grip on economic policy.

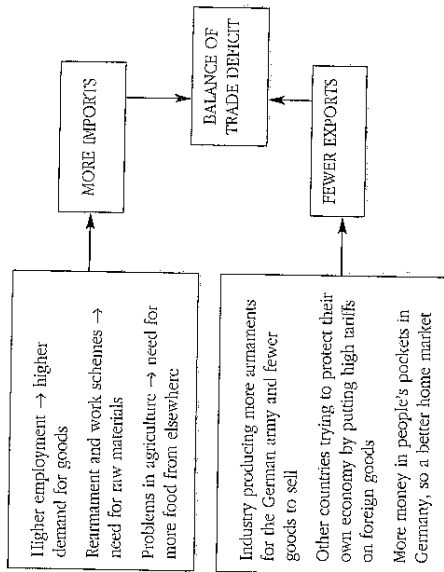
Tackling unemployment

Policies were quickly implemented to tackle unemployment. Over 1 billion Reichsmarks were ploughed into public works schemes such as the building of roads, canals and public buildings. Not only did such schemes provide employment, they also provided perfect propaganda opportunities to demonstrate how the Nazis were improving life in Germany.

In 1935, labour service (RAD) was introduced, making it compulsory for all men between the ages of 19 and 25 to work in areas such as farming or public work schemes for 6 months. Together with the introduction of conscription in the same year, these early policies led to a dramatic fall in unemployment. Even if one takes into account a certain massaging of the figures by the Nazis (for example, part-time workers were classed as full-time) this was a significant achievement.

Trade and government controls

In 1934 there was a balance of payments deficit. This means that Germany was importing more than she was exporting, leading to a shortage of foreign exchange with which to buy more imports. This was a situation which was to haunt Schacht up to his resignation in 1937 and its causes are summarized below:



Schacht, as part of the 'New Plan' of September 1934, tried to solve the problem by exercising tight government controls over what could and could not be imported. Only vital foodstuffs and materials required by heavy industry,

Think about



Study the unemployment figures above carefully.

➤ What impact did the Nazis have on the unemployment figures as far as you can tell?

➤ Read the section 'Tackling unemployment' again. Do you think the Nazis were adopting sensible strategies to tackle this problem?

Think about

Study the flow diagram carefully.

➤ What was at the root of the problem, do you think?

➤ How might this problem have been solved?

largely for rearmament, were allowed to be imported in bulk. Non-essential goods such as raw cotton and wool were imported in much smaller quantities than before. In addition, trade agreements were made, particularly with the Balkan states, whereby the money gained from selling raw materials to Germany had to be spent buying back German goods. Schacht succeeded in creating a trade surplus in 1935, but he had hardly tackled the root of the problem.

Agriculture

Farmers had been suffering for longer than most and it was no coincidence that the rural farming population formed the core of Nazi support between 1930 and 1933. The Nazis held the peasant in high regard as a model of racial purity as embodied in their slogan 'blood and soil'. Hitler promised to return prosperity to the farming community, but, as ever, Nazi policy was fraught with contradictions. The strict control of food prices by the Nazis (to avoid inflation which could damage the rearmament programme) hardly brought the farmers greater prosperity. Added to this were the policies followed by the idealistic Minister of Agriculture and Food, Walter Darre, who was a keen proponent of the 'blood and soil' ideology.

Darre set up the Reich Food Estate, with himself in charge, to control all aspects of food production. The result was a lack of freedom which even today's farmers would find intolerable. In September 1933, the Reich Enacted Farm Law placed further restrictions on farmers by making it impossible to sell or divide up any farm of between 7.5 and 10 hectares, which accounted for about 35 per cent of all farms. The purpose was to give peasants security in their jobs, but the result was to hinder modern development on those farms that were not big enough to compete with the larger operations. The inability to divide a farm between more than one son also accelerated the drift to the towns where the attraction of higher wages was already proving irresistible to many. The outcome was a shortage of rural labour.

The situation by 1936

In 1936, there was the threat of another trading deficit and by the summer, munitions factories were only producing 70 per cent as much as they were able to because of a shortage of raw materials. The time had come for Hitler to make a decision about his priorities.

Activity

In the margin box is a list of the economic options available in 1936. Get into small groups and each assume the role of one of the people below. Imagine you are discussing, in 1936, what economic policy the Nazis should now take. What do you agree/disagree about? What decision do you finally take?

- ⊗ Schacht, whose priority is to keep a balance of trade
- ⊗ Goebbels, the propaganda chief, whose priority is to keep the German people as happy as possible
- ⊗ A representative of export industries whose priority is to make profits
- ⊗ A representative of industries heavily involved in rearmament whose priority is to make profit
- ⊗ Darre, whose priority is to ensure high levels of food supplies from German farmers
- ⊗ Hitler, whose priority is foreign expansion

The economic options available in 1936

- ⊗ Reduce armaments production and instead produce more goods to sell as exports.
- ⊗ Introduce strict food rationing so that food imports can be cut.
- ⊗ Become more self-sufficient in raw materials so that arms production can continue to increase and food rationing is avoided.

A new direction

Schacht believed that continued rearmament would undermine the whole economy by restricting the production of goods for export and increasing the demand for imported raw materials. This would force Germany into a deeper trade deficit crisis. He was aware that his New Plan was only disguising a deeper problem. He wanted to see exports increase at the expense of arms manufacture, and imports of food decrease through food rationing. However, these were not the words that Hitler wanted to hear. Senior Nazis were hostile to food rationing on the grounds that it would lower public morale. But perhaps more importantly, the reduction of arms manufacture would undermine the whole thrust of Nazi expansionist policy.

It seemed to be a question of guns or butter, neither of which the Nazis wanted to sacrifice. However, there was an alternative route. Experiments with synthetic substitutes for materials such as rubber and fuel had been going on for a number of years and, together with ambitious targets for the production of all armament-related materials, they could provide Hitler with the solution he wanted. This way, the army would still get its guns and the German people would still have their butter. This solution lay at the heart of the Four Year Plan.

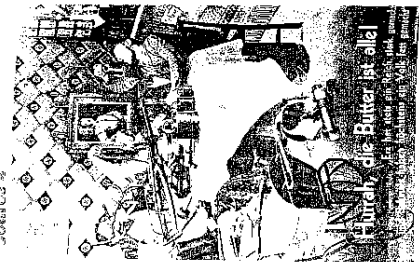
Hitler provided a comprehensive statement of his aims in a memo in August 1936. In it, he wrote of the 'historical life struggle of nations' and specifically emphasized the Bolshevik threat which could destroy the German people. Germany, he claimed, was the 'focal point' of Europe's fight against this threat, a fact that he did not welcome but which was nevertheless Germany's 'destiny'. Thus, he succeeded in making Germany's position seem primarily a defensive one. He then elaborated on the necessary means of strengthening Germany's defensive capacity:

Source 5

We are overpopulated and cannot feed ourselves from our own resources. The solution ultimately lies in extending the living space of our people, that is, in extending the sources of its raw materials and foodstuffs... Temporary improvement can be brought about only within the framework of our present economy... The increase of our own exports is theoretically possible, but unrealistic in practical terms... it is essential [therefore] to ensure peacetime food supplies and, above all else, the means for the conduct of war; these things can be assured through human energy and activity... Hitler goes on to identify specific areas in which to achieve self-sufficiency such as rubber and fuel

Summarized briefly: I consider it necessary that from now on with iron determination we attain 100% self-sufficiency in all these areas so that we will not be dependent on foreign countries for these most important raw materials, and that thereby we will also be able to save the foreign currency we require during peacetime in order to import our foodstuffs... I therefore set the following tasks: 1. The German army must be operational within four years, and 2. The German economy must be fit for war within four years.

By putting Goering in charge of the Four Year Plan, which was launched in October 1936 at the Nuremberg Rally, Hitler brought the economy under the control of the Nazi Party. As you can see from the memo, Goering was left in no doubt as the nature of his job: to make Germany economically and militarily



Source 6

Hitler and Goering in 1936

This photograph by Heinrich Hoffmann is suggesting that the German people are being denied butter. In fact, the Nazis were anxious not to restrict foodstuffs and food was only rationed with the outbreak of war.

Source 7

What does Source 7 suggest about Hitler's priorities in 1936?

Why did Hitler believe an increase in exports to be 'unrealistic'?

Read the first sentence again. Using the information from this chapter, how far was this statement true?

A.J.P. Taylor argued that Hitler had a masterplan, a 'blueprint' for his foreign policy. Is this piece of evidence conclusive proof that Hitler was in complete control of events and their timing?

ready for war in four years. All efforts were henceforth directed towards the creation of a full-scale war economy.

The Four Year Plan

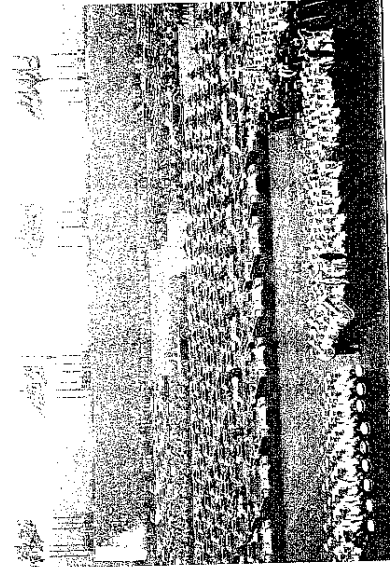
Goering's Four Year Plan was a prime example of a Supreme Reich Authority (see pages 170-171). Its six departments clearly overlapped with several Reich ministries and Schacht found that his decisions as Minister of Economics were overruled by Goering, whose regular contact with the Führer put him in a privileged position. In November 1937, Schacht resigned and was replaced by a weaker man, Walther Funk. Goering assumed the position of economic dictator, but his rash, egocentric temperament was ill-matched to the task. Internal rivalries and bureaucratic inefficiency characterized the Plan and it failed to achieve almost all of its planned targets.

The main priorities of the Four Year Plan were:

- To achieve self-sufficiency in raw materials, especially rubber, oil and metals
- To retain certain sectors of the labour force
- To regulate imports and exports closely
- To increase agricultural production.

The ultimate goal of self-sufficiency in key areas was not achieved. Output of oil substitutes, rubber, aluminium and iron fell short of the planned targets by 1938, and the situation was only partially improved by 1942 (see Source 10 on p.223). In agricultural production, it was a similar story. However, there was a considerable expansion of industry and important new techniques were developed in the field of synthetic substitutes, especially leather, plastics, silk and rubber. There can be no question that the economy became entirely geared towards the needs of war. Between 1936 and 1939, two-thirds of industrial investment went into war-related sectors, and by 1939, 40-50 per cent of all employees were involved in war-related projects.

Source 8



Source 8

When conscription was introduced in 1935, the other major powers did little to stop it, even though it broke the Treaty of Versailles.

Why do you think this was the case?

Do you think that this expansion of armaments helped or hindered economic development? Think of short- and long-term development.

Tanks, sailors and motorised infantry on parade at Nuremberg in 1937.

Was there an economic crisis by the late 1930s?

Historical debates

Historians have disagreed in their explanations of the timing of the Second World War and this is closely related to whether or not they believe that Germany was experiencing an economic crisis by the late 1930s. Historians from the 'structuralist' school, such as Tim Mason, argue that Hitler was forced into a war in 1939 in order to gain more resources from the conquered lands and divert attention away from Germany's domestic problems. They have pointed to the labour shortage as an example, where the decision to expand and thereby gain more foreign workers was preferable to the employment of women or the compulsory civil conscription of workers which would prove unpopular. Other symptoms of the crisis included a falling trade balance and the potential collapse of trade agreements with Eastern Europe. The only escape for Hitler, according to this interpretation, was to fight a short war in which maximum gains were achieved for minimum effort. Obviously, in the context of an economic crisis, Hitler did not want a prolonged war. This therefore explains *Blitzkrieg* or lightning war, where opponents were simply overwhelmed by the might of the German forces. Poland fell within a month in 1939; Norway, the Low Countries and France were all defeated by the spring of 1940.

There is, however, an alternative interpretation which credits Hitler with much more advanced planning. In particular, Richard Overy has argued that Hitler was not simply reacting to a domestic crisis in 1939. On the contrary, he didn't expect there to be a war at all in September 1939 and gravely underestimated the reaction of Britain and France to his invasion of Poland. Overy suggests that the economy, although under a great deal of strain, was not in a state of crisis. It certainly was not facing the problems normally associated with economic crisis, namely growing unemployment and a fall in prices and profits. If there was not an economic crisis, then Hitler was not forced into a war to solve it or distract attention away from it. The fact that Hitler was not even planning war in 1939 is further proof of this, according to Overy.

Were people better off under the Nazis?

Mittelstand

The *Mittelstand* expected to benefit from the Nazi regime which was why they had supported Hitler in such large numbers in the years leading up to 1933. An early piece of legislation, the Law for the Protection of the Retail Trade, screamed to fulfil these expectations by forbidding the extension of department stores and thereby protecting the small shopkeeper. However, in reality, the *Mittelstand* was readily sacrificed by the Nazis when its interests conflicted with other, more urgent priorities. In July 1933, over 14 million Reichmarks were invested in a chain of Jewish-owned department stores to avoid their closure and subsequent job losses. Thereafter, the needs of big business began to take precedence over the needs of the *Mittelstand*.

See page 171 for a summary of the 'Structuralist' school of thought.

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See pages 237-239 for more information on whether Hitler planned the outbreak of war in 1939 or not.

Overy writes: 'If Hitler did not expect a major war in 1939, it can hardly be argued that he deliberately provoked one to avoid domestic crisis.'

Farmers

In October 1933, Hitler declared that the farmer was vital to the future of the nation and promised 'with all means and under any circumstances, to support this group on whose existence the continuation or destruction of our people depends.' However, as we have already seen, Nazi agricultural policy was not a success. Smaller farm owners were tied to their land, there was a shortage of rural labour, government controls on production were excessive and price restrictions prevented farmers from buying better machinery or paying more competitive wages. A Gestapo report of 1936 claimed that 'the farmer surfaces as the one member of society who is least enamoured of National Socialism'. However, many farmers probably had mixed feelings. They still saw Nazism as preferable to the threat of Bolshevism, and some were no doubt flattered by their supposed importance in Nazi ideology.

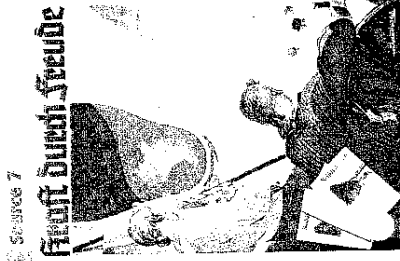
Workers

It was clear that a war economy would require certain sacrifices by the people. Certain foodstuffs would be in shorter supply, wages were unlikely to increase much and working hours were likely to be longer. Of course, not all workers were affected in the same ways. Wages varied depending on the sector you worked in. But it was true that living standards in general did not rise after 1936. The Nazis used a number of ways of trying to secure the support of the workers during such times. The KdF - 'Strength Through Joy' - was one such example. This organization was an offshoot of the German Labour Front and was set up in 1933 to provide greater leisure opportunities for German workers who normally would not have been able to afford them. Activities included art exhibitions, theatre trips, hikes and even special holiday cruises. Members were offered the chance to pay in instalments for the Volkswagen ('People's car'). The instalments paid were in fact used for rearmament and the onset of war meant that few of the cars were actually produced, but a SOPADE report of 1939 claimed that it had nevertheless met considerable success as a propaganda programme.

SCHEPPE 8

'For a great many Germans the announcement of a people's car was a very great and pleasant surprise. A veritable KdF-Wagen psychosis developed. For a long time the KdF-Wagen was the main topic of conversations among all classes of people in Germany. All other pressing problems - both domestic and in foreign policy - were for a time pushed into the background.'

There was also a 'Beauty of Labour' campaign carried out by the KdF which created better working conditions in factories, including 'Good Illumination - Good Light'.



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8 A Strength through Joy poster from 1938 advertising the new KdF travel pass.

Were workers better off in the Third Reich?

Source 13

Activity	How many took part
Concerts	2,515,598
Popular entertainments	13,666,015
Theatre	7,478,653
Films	857,402
Exhibitions	1,595,516
Guided tours	58,472
Others	11,118,656

Neakas and Pritham, *Nazism 1919-1945 Vol. II*, 1984

Source 14

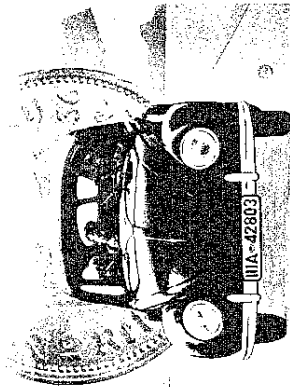
At the end of January, 1933, Thalburg had 653 registered unemployed... in July, the great campaign began. Some 450 persons were put to work on a great variety of jobs. Roads were repaired, the town's forests were worked over, and the old moat around Thalburg was drained and converted into a ring of swan ponds and parks... By July 24, Kurt Aergeyx was able to call a press conference and make public the news that all unemployed persons previously on the welfare rolls were at work... This was astounding news... some insisted that they be given work suited to their ability and experience, but the Nazi alternative was work on the works projects or no more dole... Nevertheless, many workers were pleased to be gainfully employed again, and Thalburg's middle class was enormously impressed by the Nazi success in this level.

Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, 1966

Source 15

*Die Arbeit ist ein Recht und nicht ein Geschenk!
Mitte 1930er Jahre: Arbeiter fordern Arbeit!*

The Deputy Führer (Hess) began by making the point that he was aware that some employees still held against us the fact that, whereas we are always talking about the increase in production and the growth in the national product, our wages have not been correspondingly increased, so that in reality the employees are not sharing the fruits of this increase in production. I can only reply to them that the swimming pool in his plant, the canteens, the improvements in working conditions... all these things are the result of the increase in production...



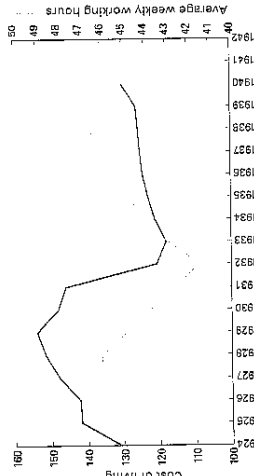
Karl Weick: Die Arbeiterbewegung und die Zukunft der Arbeiter. Ein Buch der Arbeiterbewegung und der Arbeiter der R.F. Deutschland. Köln 1933. Verlag: Die Arbeiterbewegung.

Source 16

Year	Actual wages	Real wages (taking inflation into account)
1913/14	76.0	94.6
1925	93.4	83.2
1926	97.1	85.1
1927	109.6	92.3
1928	124.5	102.2
1929	128.2	103.6
1930	118.1	99.2
1931	103.9	95.1
1932	85.8	88.5
1933	87.7	92.5
1934	94.1	96.7
1935	96.4	97.6
1936	100.0	100.0
1937	103.5	103.0
1938	108.5	107.5
1939	112.6	111.1
1940	116.0	111.0

Source 17

1932	29.9%
1935	10.3%
1939	0.5%



Source 18

Cost of living

Source 19

Real wages

Source 20

Sorting through the evidence

- Get into small groups or pairs. Discuss the question at the top of this section: 'were workers better off in the Third Reich?' What might we mean by 'better off'? What should we be comparing life in the Third Reich to?
- Now sort through the evidence. The easiest way to do this is to divide your page in half with 'Workers were better off' at the top of one half and 'Workers were not better off' at the top of the other. Now summarize the evidence for each point of view (you might find you need another column).
- Compare your finished chart with others in your group. Should any of the information be discounted on grounds of unreliability? Is there any evidence that you are unsure about?
- Is there anything you can add to your chart from your own knowledge? In addition to this chapter you might like to revisit the information on women on pages 186-190

Source 21

Presenting your case

- There are lots of ways to do this:
- In your small group, reach a decision about the answer to the 'Big Question' at the top of this spotlight. Summarize your arguments on a sheet of sugar paper to present to the rest of the class. It will be interesting to see how the groups' conclusions differ!
- Prepare for a class debate, with one half of the class arguing that workers were better off in the Third Reich and the other half arguing that they weren't. Appoint a person or group of people to judge which side argues most convincingly. OR
- Prepare two pieces of propaganda on 'The German Workers and the Nazis'. One produced by the DAF (German Labour Front, run by the Nazis, and one produced by the Communist Party in exile. Imagine that both pieces were produced in 1938.

Big business

Big business was the main beneficiary of Nazi economic policy, though some areas benefited more than others. Heavy industry such as coal-mining and steel manufacture benefited hugely from rearmament, and chemical firms such as I.G. Farben prospered after 1936 due to their role in developing synthetic substitutes. Other industries which were more export-oriented did less well in the 1930s. Overall, however, big business saw an increase in undistributed profits from 1.3 billion Reichsmarks in 1928 to 5 billion Reichsmarks in 1939. And whilst hampered by government controls over production, trade, wages and prices, business was left in the private sector and not taken over by the state. This explains the readiness of industrial leaders such as Thyssen to continue their backing of Hitler even when they disagreed over the route he was taking in economic policy.

Document exercise: How successful was the Nazi economy?

Sources

A report by an SPD analyst, 1939

It is true that as long as the German people are prepared to put up with their living standards being held at the lowest of crisis levels, the mechanism by which 12–13 billion Reichsmarks are squeezed from the national income for rearmament will keep on functioning. But even then one cannot do everything at once with these billions. One cannot at the same time use them to increase armaments for the land and air forces endlessly, to build up a massive fleet, to build gigantic installations for the production of synthetic substitutes, to construct megalomaniacal buildings and to tear down large parts of cities in order to build them somewhere else. On the basis of the living standards of the German people hitherto, one can either do one or the other or a bit of everything, but not everything at the same time and on an unlimited scale.

Sources

The Four Year Plan

Commodity	1938 output	1938 output	1942 output	Plan target
Mineral oil*	1,790	2,340	6,260	13,830
Aluminium	98	166	260	273
Buna rubber	0.7	5	96	120
Nitrogen	770	914	930	1,040
Explosives	18	45	300	223
Powder	20	26	160	217
Steel	19,216	22,656	20,480	24,000
Iron ore	2,255	3,360	4,137	5,549
Brown coal	161,382	194,886	245,918	240,500
Hard coal	158,400	186,186	166,069	213,000

* Including synthetic petrol
(in thousands of tons)

Bio-geography

Fritz Thyssen

Fritz Thyssen was an extremely rich and powerful industrialist with strong nationalist views. He vigorously opposed the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 and became one of the largest benefactors of the Nazi Party, donating over 1 million marks. In 1933 he was elected to the Reichstag and was appointed Prussian State Governor by Goebbels. However, by 1935 he was beginning to have doubts about the Nazi regime and fled the country in 1939 after making his views public.

I consider it necessary that from now on with iron determination we attain 100 percent self-sufficiency in all these areas (such as steel and coal) so that we will not be dependent on foreign countries for these most important raw materials, and that thereby we will also be able to save the foreign currency we require during peacetime in order to import our foodstuffs.

Sources

A historian's view of the Four Year Plan

The success of the Plan was mixed. On the one hand it fell a long way short of the targets in the vital commodities of rubber and oil, whilst arms production never reached the levels desired by the armed forces and Hitler. On the other hand, production of a number of key materials, such as aluminium and explosives, had expanded greatly and, in others it had grown at a respectable rate. All in all Germany's reliance on imports had not been exacerbated further, despite the economic growth.

Layton, *Germany The Third Reich, 1992*

Examination-style questions

1 Comprehension in context

Study Source D. Using the source and your own knowledge, explain why Hitler was so keen to develop greater self-sufficiency in Germany.

2 Comparing the sources

Study Sources A and E. To what extent and why do they differ in their views on the Nazi economy?

3 Assessing the sources

How useful are statistics such as Sources B and C to a historian studying the Nazi economy?

4 Making judgements

Using all the sources and your own knowledge, explain whether you think the Nazi economy was successful or not.

Conclusions

Until 1936, economic policy was dominated by attempts to reduce unemployment and maintain a favourable trade balance. Rearmament began to earnest in 1934, but did not initially dominate the economy as much as it was to do after 1936.

After 1936 the economy was dominated by rearmament and the need to prepare for war. The Four Year Plan was a central part of this.

Overall, the success of the Nazi economy was mixed. Unemployment was reduced significantly and industrial production increased. But the Four Year Plan targets were not met and the German people did not, on the whole, find themselves better off by the end of the 1930s, though some groups benefited more than others.

There has been debate, particularly between the historians Richard Overy and the late Tim Mason, over whether the German economy was in crisis or not by the end of the 1930s. It was certainly the case that Germany was not fully prepared for war by 1939. Food rationing, for example, was introduced immediately in September 1939 (rationing was not introduced in Britain until 1941). It is far from clear, however, that the Nazis wanted or indeed planned a war in 1939 in order to avoid a worse economic situation. A contrasting argument suggests that war was *not* planned for 1939 and came as an unexpected shock.

Further reading
Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery, 1996*.

Sources

Unemployment figures

YEAR	(000s)	%
1930	3,076	14.0
1931	4,520	21.9
1932	5,603	29.9
1933	4,804	25.9
1934	2,718	13.5
1935	2,151	10.3
1936	1,583	7.4
1937	912	4.1
1938	429	1.9
1939	119	0.5
1940	62	0.2

Chapter

Nazi foreign policy

Think about it

- ▶ Why do you think the German troops in Source 1 are being cheered by the Austrian people?
- ▶ To what extent and why is the reaction of the people in Source 2 different?

Source 1



Source 2



Introduction

Hitler's foreign policy lay at the very heart of his ambitions. It was central to his vision of Germany as a world power, perhaps even *the* world power, and to his vision of racial superiority. For Hitler, strength and power were the result of continued struggle and the survival of the fittest. Convinced of the destiny of the Aryan people to become the world's master race and to destroy the evil represented by sub-humans, he never doubted that a successful foreign policy would lead to war. Historians may disagree about the precise nature of Hitler's plans and the extent to which he was able to carry them out as he wished, but none would dispute the fact that Hitler expected and was planning for war from an early stage.

Key questions

- What were Hitler's foreign policy aims? Did they remain consistent?
- Did Hitler have a fixed plan or did he react to circumstance?
- Was Hitler planning for a total war?
- Was Hitler limited in his actions by other states or by Germany's economy?
- What was Germany's role in the outbreak of war?
- Did Hitler expect war to break out in September 1939?

The international scene in 1933

Hitler was fortunate in becoming Chancellor at a time when revision of the Treaty of Versailles had already begun. In 1929–1930, Britain and France withdrew all remaining troops from the Rhineland and, in 1932, reparations repayments were effectively written off at the Lausanne Conference. Indeed, the global situation in 1933 worked to Hitler's advantage in a number of ways. The United States, whose entry into the First World War had proved disastrous for Germany, had withdrawn politically from Europe. Her isolation was heightened by the world depression following the Wall Street Crash. Russia was still recovering from the First World War and subsequent internal upheavals and posed no immediate threat to anyone. In Central and Eastern Europe, the peace settlement following the First World War had created a number of small, ill-defended new states who, despite the creation of defensive alliances, remained largely at the mercy of the major powers. In the Far East, Japanese expansion into Manchuria had exposed the weaknesses of the League of Nations and was of particular concern to Britain. Finally, in Italy, the expansionist ambitions of Mussolini held out the possibility of an alliance with Germany.

That was not to say, however, that Hitler had a totally free hand to pursue his ambitions. Alarmed by the aggressive tone of Nazi propaganda before 1933, many European states sought reassurance that Germany posed no threat. Hitler was careful to stress his desire for peace in a speech in May 1933:

Source 3

I desire to declare in the name of the National Government... that we in Germany are filled with deep understanding for the rightful claims to life of the other nations... The French, the Poles etc. are our neighbours, and we know that through no possible development of history can this reality be altered.



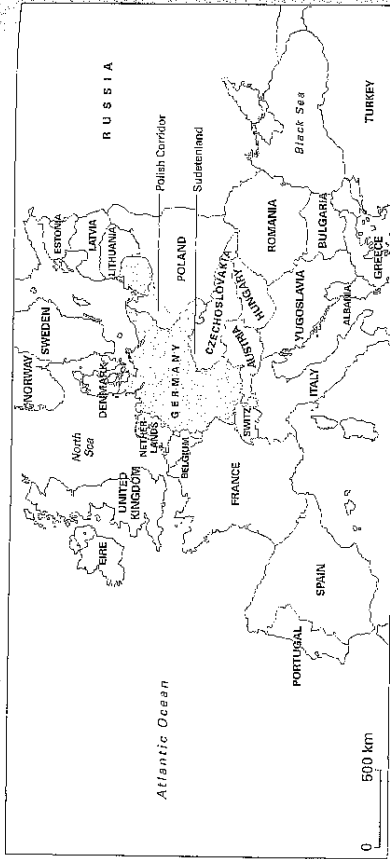
Greatest Britain
 Britain's main aims in 1933 were to protect her own empire and maintain a balance of power in Europe (which included restraining France if necessary). A greater Germany would threaten the balance of power and Britain was concerned by the Nazis' aggressive talk before 1933. Britain wanted to avoid another war at all costs - she was busy enough attending to her ailing Empire. She supported moves towards a revision of the Treaty of Versailles and was more prepared than France to accept German demands regarding disarmament.

Europe in 1933

France
 France's main aim - as it had been throughout the 1920s - was security from German attack. Dissatisfied with the Treaty of Versailles, she concluded a series of treaties between 1921 and 1927 with the new Eastern European states, designed to provide assistance in the event of an attack from Germany or Russia. The failure of the Ruhr invasion strengthened a move towards a defensive policy and a greater dependence on British support. Forced to accept the evacuation of troops from the Rhineland in 1930, France nevertheless stood firm on the question of disarmament.

Russia

Stalin's main aim in 1933 was to maintain good relations with Germany. Following the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922 (see page 90), the Berlin Treaty was concluded between Germany and Russia in 1926. This treaty promised neutrality in any conflict and reaffirmed the agreements at Rapallo. It was renewed in 1931. Stalin discouraged communist action against Hitler, largely by preventing a communist alliance with the SPD. He did not believe the Nazi regime would last long. Meanwhile, relations between Russia and the rest of Western Europe were not particularly good, largely because of the mutual mistrust between communist and capitalist states.



Italy
 In 1922 Mussolini became leader of Italy and established a fascist dictatorship. His aims were: to revise the peace terms of 1919 in order to gain greater spoils for Italy; to construct a defence against possible threats from Germany or France and to pursue colonial expansion. Treaties with Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary and Austria were concluded between 1924 and 1930. Although Mussolini welcomed the appointment of Hitler in 1933, he was keen to avoid a Nazi take-over of Austria, largely for strategic reasons, and supported the Austrian leader Dollfus.

Austria
 In the peace settlement following the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismantled. Austria became a single state and was significantly weakened. Consequently, she became more dependent on Germany. Most Austrians were hopeful of a union with Germany (*Anschluß*) even though it was forbidden in the Treaty of Versailles. It made sense both from an economic and ethnic point of view. Thus, attempts were made not to offend Germany in any way. Austria was isolated during the 1920s, but in the early 1930s friendships developed with Italy and Hungary.

Czechoslovakia and Poland

Czechoslovakia signed treaties with France and Italy in 1924. She also constructed what became known as the 'Little Entente' with Yugoslavia and Romania in an attempt to build security amongst the newly formed states which emerged from the peace settlement, herself included. The largest minority group in the country were German speakers living in the Sudetenland. Poland was also one of the new national states created by the peace settlement. Her main concern was security and a treaty with France in 1921 was the main focus of this. Polish territory was potentially under threat from Russia and Germany (whose land was divided in half by the 'Polish Corridor' - see map above). The appointment of Hitler was a cause for concern.

Hitler's foreign policy aims

The first three points of the Nazi 'programme' of 1920 indicated that Nazi foreign policy was no different from that of traditional nationalists. The key aims appeared to be revision of the Treaty of Versailles, the retrieval of the colonies lost in 1919 and the creation of a Greater Germany to embrace all the ethnic Germans of Europe. Britain and France were at this point regarded as the main enemies. Between 1920 and 1924 Hitler modified these aims, however. In *Mein Kampf* he outlined the principles of a foreign policy that endured until his death:

SOURCE 4

Germany has an annual increase in population of nearly 900,000. The difficulty of feeding this army of new citizens must increase from year to year and ultimately end in catastrophe, unless ways and means are found to forestall the danger of starvation and misery in time... The acquisition of new soil for the settlement of our surplus population has an infinite number of advantages, particularly if we turn from the present to the future... The National Socialist movement must seek to eliminate the present disastrous imbalance between our population and the area of our national territory, regarding the latter as the source of food and the basis of our political power... In striving for this it must bear in mind the fact that, as members of the highest species of humanity on this earth, we have a correspondingly high obligation and that we should fulfil this obligation only if we inspire the German people with the racial idea, so that in addition to breeding good dogs and horses and cats, they will also care for the purity of their own blood... The demand for the restoration of the frontiers of 1914 is a political absurdity... the Reich's frontiers in 1914 were anything but logical. In reality they were neither final in the sense of embracing all ethnic Germans, nor sensible with regard to geo-military considerations... However, when we speak of new land in Europe today we must principally bear in mind Russia and the border states subject to her. Destiny itself seems to wish to point the way for us here... The colossal empire in the east is ripe for dissolution. And the end of Jewish domination of Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state... England does not want Germany to be a world power, but France does not want Germany to exist at all; quite a vital difference after all! Today we are not struggling to achieve a position as a world power; we must fight for the existence of our fatherland, for the unity of our nation and the daily bread of our children. If we look round for European allies from this point of view, only two states remain: England and Italy.

Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1926

Two main shifts had occurred in Hitler's thinking. Firstly, he now argued for expansion into Eastern Europe (Russia) rather than the retrieval of lost colonies. This was partly a consequence of Hitler's ideological shift towards seeing the Russian communist movement as part of a Jewish world conspiracy (see page 124). He began to see the destruction of Russia as fundamental to a destruction of world Jewry. Secondly, he now identified Britain as a potential ally rather than as an enemy. This may have been partly as a consequence of the 1923 Ruhr crisis when Britain offered little support to France. Britain subsequently appeared sympathetic to a revision of the Treaty of Versailles. The shift away from colonial aims also made Britain a more likely ally.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Read Source 4 carefully. As you read it, make notes under the following headings:
 - ⊗ The need for living space
 - ⊗ Power
 - ⊗ Racial superiority
 - ⊗ Where to expand and why
 - ⊗ Allies
- 2 How had Hitler's thinking changed since 1920?

ACTIVITY

- 1 Read about Hitler's foreign policy aims on this page.
- 2 Using the map and the summaries opposite, discuss the following:
 - ⊗ What were the potential 'hotspots' in the Europe of 1933?
 - ⊗ What indications were there of future friends and enemies?
 - ⊗ Were there any indications of what Hitler's foreign policy might include and how others might respond?

There is a debate amongst historians about whether Hitler had a fixed foreign policy 'programme'. When you study the events of the 1920s, you will see how Hitler was forced to change his plans on a number of occasions and seemed to be improvising his policy as he went along. Most historians now agree however that Hitler's main aims remained constant. This issue is explored in much greater detail on page 237.

1933-1937: Diplomacy and rearmament

Cautious diplomacy

Although *Mein Kampf* had signalled Hitler's clear intention to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, he was not in a position to do so immediately in 1933. Germany's army was far too small, her arms far too limited and her position in Europe too isolated. In any case, with six million Germans unemployed, immediate concerns lay elsewhere. Two months after becoming Chancellor, Hitler made a speech indicating that six months after becoming necessary in order to make Germany strong again. Nevertheless, Hitler was able to make progress towards his ultimate foreign policy aims in ways that avoided war. His short-term aims were:

- To create an economy capable of sustaining a lengthy war
- To rearm
- To avoid war in the short term
- To pursue alliances, especially with Britain and Italy.

The Geneva Disarmament Conference, which had begun before Hitler became Chancellor, presented Hitler with his first opportunity. Weimar politicians, particularly Stresemann, had been keen to see a general reduction of arms in Europe and the purpose of the Disarmament Conference was to reach a common agreement amongst the major powers. However, France refused to allow German forces to equal her own in size and Hitler walked out in protest. In fact, this incident was entirely to Hitler's advantage. He didn't want the size of his army to be dictated by other powers, especially at the figure of 200,000 proposed by Britain. However, the attitude of the French allowed Hitler to represent himself as a victim of injustice and indeed he received some sympathy, particularly from Britain and Italy. This left France more isolated, also to Germany's advantage.

Although this clever diplomacy appeared successful, Hitler took measures to protect Germany against any possible negative reaction. He concluded a ten-year non-aggression pact with Poland in January 1934 which achieved a number of objectives. Firstly, it was intended to signal that Germany had no intention of invading Poland. Secondly, it weakened the Eastern European defence system created by France. Thirdly, it removed a potential threat from the east. Of course, the pact was entirely cynical; Hitler had no intention of sticking to it. Privately his view was simple: 'All our agreements with Poland have a purely temporary significance'.

The only notable failure in the first two years of Nazi foreign policy was the assassination, by Austrian Nazis, of the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss. Hitler's aim for Austria was to turn it into a satellite of Germany. He hoped that bullying tactics would bring Austrian Nazis to power. They would then allow Germany to gain her goal of a 'Greater Germany' without having to invade and force the Austrians to unite with her. This would in turn weaken any case brought against Germany by the other powers on the grounds that the *Anschluss* was forbidden in the Treaty of Versailles. However, the violence of an assassination was an embarrassment to Hitler; he could hardly claim that this represented the wishes of the Austrian people as a whole. It also damaged his relations with Italy who had major doubts about a Nazi take-over in Austria given its geographical location. Hitler was, therefore, forced to play down the significance of the assassination and indeed to distance himself from it. His policy in Austria was forced to take a back seat for a while until things cooled down.

Rearmament

The beginning of 1935 saw a victory for the Nazis. The people of the Saar, under the control of the League of Nations for 15 years according to the peace terms, voted in favour of rejoining Germany in a plebiscite. This seemed to mark the beginning of a 'Greater Germany' which embraced all German-speaking people. It also provided the Nazis with excellent propaganda material. This success was quickly followed up with a decision to make Germany's rearmament public. Behind the busy diplomatic activity of the first two years of Nazi rule, rearmament had been gaining pace. It was becoming difficult to disguise the growth of the army and the expansion of the airforce. In March 1935, Hitler publicly announced the existence of a German airforce (banned under the Treaty of Versailles). This was followed by a decree introducing conscription into the peacetime army and a declaration that, henceforth, the Nazis would not obey any of the limitations on German defence contained within the Versailles Treaty.

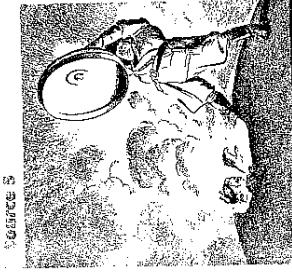
This time, Hitler provoked a reaction. German rearmament was condemned by the League of Nations and the Prime Ministers of Britain, France and Italy met at Stresa in Italy where they confirmed their support for an independent Austria. This was soon followed by a pact of mutual assistance between France and Russia. This was the high point of German isolation. It was, however, short-lived.

Hitler was still attempting to win the support of Britain and, in June 1935, succeeded in securing an Anglo-German Naval Pact. This allowed Germany to build a navy which was 35 per cent of the size of Britain's and a submarine force which was of equal size. This was not quite the comprehensive agreement that Hitler wanted. Ideally, he wanted Britain to allow Germany a completely free hand in Eastern Europe in return for a promise from Germany not to involve herself in colonial matters. However, the naval agreement was a substantial victory for Germany and a crushing blow to the unity of the Stresa Front.

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the same year further improved Germany's fortunes. France and Britain's condemnation of the invasion and subsequent economic sanctions against Italy destroyed what was left of the Stresa Front and convinced Italy of the need to find alternative allies. Germany's neutral position and her continued supply of raw materials to Italy convinced Mussolini of the need to build up a friendship with Hitler. He was even prepared to give Hitler a free hand in Austria. The invasion of Ethiopia did not only provide Germany with a potential new ally, however, it also provided a distraction from German rearmament. Not for the last time Hitler made the most of a good opportunity. In March 1936 he sent troops into the Rhineland, a demilitarized area according to the Treaty of Versailles. It was a risky move with Hitler acting against the advice of his generals. Had the French intervened, the German troops - numbering just 22,000 - would have been hopelessly outnumbered and Hitler would have been forced to withdraw. As it was, however, the French would not mount a challenge without British backing, which was not forthcoming. Hitler had scored a diplomatic and a strategic triumph at France's expense. As ever, in the aftermath of his coup, Hitler attempted to reassure the major powers of his peaceful intentions, stressing the 'purely defensive' character of these measures, as well as ... unalterable longing for a real pacification of Europe...

See page 235 for a map showing the location of the Saar.

Less Cases Study
In 1925, Germany signed the Locarno pact which recognized Germany's western borders as fixed by the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler used the pact between France and Russia in 1935, as an excuse to break the Locarno Pact. He argued that the Franco-Russian agreement was against the spirit of Locarno and put Germany in danger.



A British cartoon about Mussolini in October 1935.

Think about

➤ What is the cartoonist predicting here?

Hitler also used this incident as an excuse to leave the League of Nations.

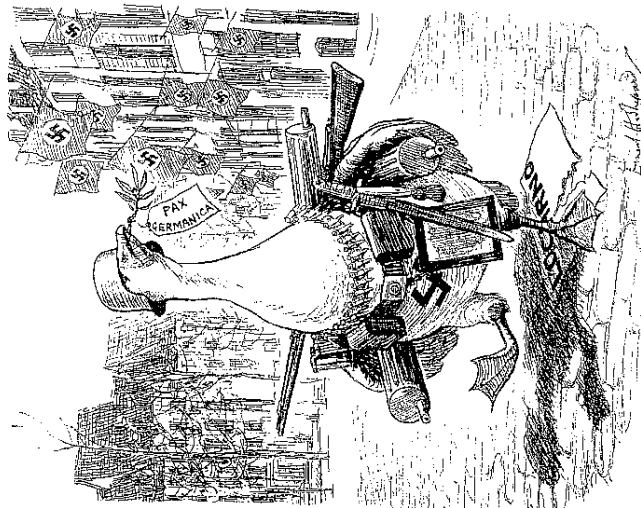
Satellites

This is a country which is entirely dependent on another. It cannot make decisions by itself and is in practice an extension of the 'another' country.

Anschluss

The term used to describe a union between Germany and Austria.

Source C



THE GOOSE-SUPPER.
 "GUSHY GOOSEY GAMBLER,
 WHETHER POST TIDOU WANDER!
 "ONLY THROUGH THE RHINELAND—
 PEAY KAVOSE BY BLANDIER!"

Germany's friendship with Italy was further cemented by the Spanish Civil War in which they both supported General Franco. In November 1936, the two powers concluded the Rome-Berlin Axis in which co-operation of a non-military nature was secured. Germany had also gained a new and unexpected ally outside of Europe. In the same month as the Rome-Berlin Axis was agreed, Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern (anti-Russian) Pact. Hitler was gradually – though not totally – beginning to accept the absence of a British alliance and focus his efforts elsewhere.

Moving towards war

By the beginning of 1937 Hitler was in a much stronger position than in 1933. Germany was no longer isolated within Europe, she had successfully asserted her right to rearm and she had re-established troops in the Rhineland with no opposition. Although an alliance with Britain remained elusive, Hitler's confidence was growing and he was beginning to make plans based around British opposition rather than support. There were, however, two problems facing Hitler. Firstly, he was aware that his own actions had sparked off an

A British cartoon about the German military reoccupation of the Rhineland.

- ▶ Think about:
 - ▶ Why are German troops represented as a goose?
 - ▶ Explain the significance of the torn piece of paper under the goose's foot.
 - ▶ Why does the goose have an olive branch in its mouth?
 - ▶ What do you think is the overall message of this British cartoon?

Spanish Civil War
 Lasting from 1936 to 1939, this war was fought between Republicans and Nationalists led by General Franco. Although the Republicans were in the stronger position initially, the support of Germany and Italy was crucial in securing a victory for Franco. France and Britain, the major democracies of the West, did not offer official support to the Republicans, who instead received most help from Russia and from individuals within the International Brigades. This was the first war in which civilians suffered from air attacks on a large scale. It was also the first war between fascism and democracy and as such anticipated the Second World War. In 1939 Franco established an authoritarian dictatorship.

arms race in Europe, a race that he would not ultimately be able to win. Secondly, it was not clear for how long the German economy could sustain the pressure imposed on it by such intensive rearmament. Both developments indicated that war could not be postponed for much longer.

Hitler's thinking at this point is best illustrated in the Hossbach Memorandum. This document consists of minutes taken by Colonel Hossbach at a secret meeting between Hitler and his army advisers. Although it is a personal record of the meeting rather than an official record, it is nevertheless generally regarded as a reasonably accurate account of what was said. Hitler began, according to Hossbach, by stating Germany's right to more living space. It was impossible, he said, for Germany to become self-sufficient, particularly in food, without more land. The question was, however, 'Where could she achieve the greatest gain at the lowest cost?' Hitler went on to outline the destruction of Czechoslovakia and a union with Austria. Both of these, he suggested, could be achieved without too much opposition from Britain and France, both of whom were preoccupied with other matters. Most importantly, Hitler put a time scale to this expansion. He identified 1913–1945 as the latest date by which expansion should have been achieved and stated that 'After this date only a change for the worse, from our point of view, could be expected'.

Historians have disagreed over whether this document represented a serious plan of action. When compared to the actual events which followed it, the memorandum included several inaccurate predictions. Neither the *Anschlus*s nor the invasion of Czechoslovakia were carried out as described in the document, the time scale was clearly wrong (war broke out in 1939) and no mention was made of expansion into Russia which was one of Hitler's central aims. It is possible, however, that Hitler was trying to reassure the more conservative generals by playing down the extent of his expansionist ambitions. It is also possible to regard the document as a blueprint for his subsequent thinking at that particular moment rather than as a blueprint for his subsequent actions. Used in this way – and at the risk of using hindsight – we learn that by 1937, Hitler was identifying Britain as a major enemy and that he was increasingly aware that time was beginning to run out.

1938–1939: The road to war

The end of compromise

Reactions to the Hossbach meeting amongst the army leadership were not wholly positive. Doubts were expressed about Germany's ability to fight a large-scale war as soon as Hitler was suggesting. But Hitler was no longer prepared to tolerate such doubts and made his first move to impose his wishes on the army, itself a sign of his confidence both at home and abroad. The Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General von Fritsch, and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, von Blomberg, were forced out of office on the ground of personal scandals which were largely fictional. Hitler assumed Blomberg's role himself, in addition to the post of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, which he already held. At the same time, Hitler appointed Ribbentrop as Foreign Minister.

Hitler's next step was to establish control in Austria. He had trodden a very careful path since 1934 and it was Goering who pushed for a more assertive policy towards the end of 1937. Hitler continued his diplomatic approach in 1938, bullying the Austrians into conceding considerable rights to the Austrian Nazis. The Austrian Chancellor, Schuschnigg, however, threw the Nazi campaign off course by announcing a plebiscite on the issue of Austria's future.

the Ribbentrop believed that almost certainly Britain, and probably France as well, had already...written off the Czechs...

Extract from the Hossbach Memorandum

Ribbentrop
 A social climber who pursued his political ambitions by being utterly subservient to Hitler and ensuring he only said and did what the Führer wanted to hear and see. He was intensely disliked by others in the Party. Goebbels wrote of him 'Von Ribbentrop bought his name, he married his money, and he swindled his way into office'. Others remained him 'Ribbentrop' because of his airs and graces. He joined the Nazi Party had barely travelled anywhere, Ribbentrop had the air of a well-travelled man. Hitler made him ambassador to Britain in 1936, where he made a series of wrong moves, including greeting the King with the Nazi salute. He made little progress in concluding an alliance with the British and indeed became openly hostile to them after he was snubbed by polite society. He urged Hitler to pursue alliances elsewhere and provided Hitler with misleading information which led him to underestimate the strength of the British and their likelihood to fight over Poland.

Hitler was furious and doubtful of the result. Schuschnigg was forced to resign but the Austrian President refused to appoint a Nazi Chancellor in his place. German troops were sent in, although only at the (forced) invitation of the Austrian government. They were greeted enthusiastically by the crowds (see Source 1) and Hitler, on returning to his childhood town of Linz, made the decision to unite fully with Austria. His strategy had worked. Another step in the direction of a Greater Germany had been made, no opposition from the major powers was forthcoming and Mussolini had not turned a hair. Hitler's grateful response to Mussolini's support bordered on the comical:

Source 7

Hesse: I have just come back from the Palazzo Venezia. The Duce sends you his regards.

Hitler: Then please tell Mussolini: I will never forget him for this.

Hesse: Yes.

Hitler: Never, never, never, whatever happens...

Hesse: Yes, my Führer...

Hitler: I will never forget, whatever may happen. If he should ever need any help or be in any danger, he can be convinced that I shall stick to him, whatever may happen, even if the whole world were against him.

Hesse: Yes, my Führer.

A telephone conversation between Hitler and Prince Philip of Hesse, 11 March 1938

The next problem: Czechoslovakia

Hitler now turned his attention to Czechoslovakia. He could not pursue expansion into the east without neutralizing any possible threat from the Czechs. He had also, as we saw in Chapter 6, developed ill-feelings towards the Czechs in his youth (see Source 16 page 125) and certainly did not consider them to be a worthy nation. In May 1938 he declared 'I am utterly determined that Czechoslovakia should disappear from the map'. He was still, however, reluctant to risk war so soon and continued the tactic of making his actions appear somehow justified in order to minimize an adverse reaction from the major powers. He did this by exploiting the ethnic situation in Czechoslovakia. The biggest minority group was the three-and-a-quarter million Germans living in the Sudetenland (see map opposite) and who were demanding independence. Hitler used their demands as a bargaining tool with the Czech government, demanding that the Sudetenland be given over to Germany. Hitler did not believe these demands would be met and hoped to turn the Czech refusal into a justification for invading the whole of Czechoslovakia. However, with the encouragement of Britain and France, the Czech government agreed. The matter was formally resolved at the Munich Conference in September 1938. In the Munich Agreement, Hitler was allowed to annex the Sudetenland. However, the major powers also provided a guarantee of Czechoslovakia's new borders against 'unprovoked aggression'. In other words, Hitler had to be content with what he had been allowed to have.

It was hardly in Hitler's nature, however, to do what he was told. He felt cheated by the Munich Agreement and was determined to secure the collapse of Czechoslovakia. His excuse was the same as before, i.e. that he was supporting the claims of minority groups for independence. In March 1939,

Think about:

- ▶ Look at the map on page 228. Why was the union with Austria so important strategically for Germany?
- ▶ What impression do you get from Source 7 about Hitler's concerns in March 1938?

Use the Web:

Using the Internet, search for and set information about the Munich Conference. In particular, try to find primary evidence and images. What do they suggest about the Munich Agreement? Share your findings with the group.

You may wish to include in your writing on the last back says 'those of the Universe'.

Source 8

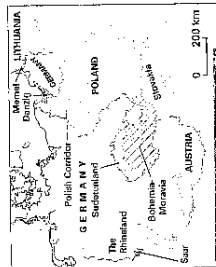
A cartoon from July 1936. The writing on the last back says 'those of the Universe'.

Think about:

- ▶ What point is Low (a British cartoonist) making in this cartoon?
- ▶ Did Low appear to believe that Hitler had a fixed plan for his foreign policy?

Appreciate:

The policy of settling disputes using peaceful rather than military methods. Usually associated with Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Britain, 1937-1940, who attempted to avoid war through negotiation with Hitler. The policy failed as Hitler interpreted it as weakness and continued to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, leading to war in 1939. It did, however, provide the Allies with time to build up their arms and in this respect was a useful delaying tactic.



- Returned to Germany after a plebiscite, January 1938 (people voted to remain German)
- Reintegrated, March 1938 (troops back in Rhineland)
- The Anschluss, March 1938 (Germany and Austria united)
- Gained from Czechoslovakia under the Munich Agreement, September 1938
- Occupied by Germany and turned into a 'protectorate', March 1939
- In name independent, but put under German 'protection', March 1939
- Handed over by Lithuania under threat, March 1939
- Occupied by Germany after the outbreak of war, September 1939
- Invaded by Germany, September 1939

German troops entered Czechoslovakia and annexed Bohemia and Moravia. Slovakia became a German protectorate. Britain and France took no military action, despite the Munich Agreement. They did, however, respond with guarantees of Poland's independence. This was the first time that Hitler had been faced with a serious obstacle, as he was clearly setting his sights on Poland next.



STEPPING STONES TO GLORY

The invasion of Poland

Poland was the last obstacle to Hitler's expansionist plans. He initially sought to neutralize Poland and turn it into a satellite of Germany by demanding Danzig and the Polish Corridor (see map). Boosted by the French and British guarantees following the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Poland refused. In May 1939, Hitler concluded the Pact of Steel with Italy which promised military assistance to either power in the event of war. In the same month, Hitler made his intention to crush Poland clear to the heads of his armed forces:

Source 9

There is...no question of sparing Poland and we are left with the decision: *To attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity.* We cannot expect a repetition of Czechoslovakia. There will be a war. Our task is to isolate Poland. Success in isolating her will be decisive...it must not come down to a simultaneous showdown with the West [France and England].

Hitler was about to take his biggest gamble yet. He realized that an invasion of Poland could provoke a European war. He convinced himself however that this was unlikely. This was partly the consequence of misleading intelligence reports on the military preparations of the Allies (Britain and France), which suggested that they were far from ready for such a conflict. In addition,

communications between Poland and the Allies suggested that Poland was under pressure to strike a deal with Germany as had happened with Czechoslovakia over the Sudetenland in 1938.

To bolster his position, Hitler concluded a pact with a most unlikely ally, Russia, in August 1939. The Nazi-Soviet Pact included an agreement not to attack each other and to remain neutral in the event of an attack on another country. It was a question of practicalities. Although the conquest of Russia was his long-term goal, Hitler needed her support in order to overcome opposition from the West European countries before he could turn his attention eastwards. He wanted to avoid a war on two fronts, so disastrous in the First World War, at all costs. Once the West was dealt with, the Pact could easily be abandoned. But why did Russia agree to the Pact? Ever since the Munich Conference, Britain and France had been flirting with Russia, but with little conviction. They were deeply suspicious of communism and concluded that, in any case, Russia had little to offer them militarily. This was, in hindsight, a mistake. Stalin, anxious to avoid war, saw the pact as short-term protection against German aggression. He also saw an opportunity to regain territories lost in 1917. The Nazi-Soviet Pact included a 'secret protocol' which promised to divide the spoils of any Nazi expansion into eastern Europe between Germany and Russia.

On 1 September 1939, Hitler made the fateful decision to invade Poland. To his surprise, this was followed by declarations of war by Britain and France. His luck had run out and he was now faced with a war for which he was not wholly prepared. The flaw in his view, according to one historian, 'was the failure to see that the Western Powers had reached their limit in 1939 (Overy, 1987).

Activity

Copy out your own version of the chart below. Using the information in this chapter, complete the chart. Use the timeline below to help you. The first event has been filled in for you.

Date	Event	Cause/motive and justification offered	Consequence
October 1933	Disarmament Conference		
January 1934	Ten Year non-aggression pact with Poland		
January 1935	Disarmament Conference in Geneva	Hitler protests at France's refusal to allow Germany equal military strength. Real reason is Hitler's desire to be free to rearm as much as he wishes.	Sympathy from Italy and Britain. Rearmament begins in earnest. Non-aggression pact with Poland in case of opposition.
October 1935	Disarmament Conference		Remilitarization of the Rhineland
January 1934	Ten Year non-aggression pact with Poland		Rome-Berlin Axis
January 1935	Disarmament Conference in Geneva		Hossbach Memorandum
January 1935	Disarmament Conference in Geneva		Invasion of Austria (Anschluss)
March 1938	Disarmament Conference in Geneva		Munich Conference
March 1939	Disarmament Conference in Geneva		German troops occupy the rest of Czechoslovakia
June 1935	Anglo-German Naval Agreement		Pact of Steel
October 1935	Italian invasion of Ethiopia		Nazi-Soviet Pact
September 1939			Invasion of Poland

Was Hitler in control?

There has been disagreement amongst historians about whether Hitler was in control of his foreign policy or whether he simply made it up as he went along, reacting to events as they happened. This is part of the debate about Hitler as a 'weak dictator' or 'master in the Third Reich' (see page 171). In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Hitler was regarded as a 'madman' and an opportunist, with no clear plan or set of aims. A.J.P. Taylor, writing in 1961, challenged the idea that Hitler was 'mad' (his only problem, according to Taylor, was that he was German and following the tradition of his predecessors) but agreed that he was basically an opportunist. Hitler's foreign policy, he argued, was essentially a reaction to the absence of firm action by other West European states. It did not follow a preconceived plan or 'blueprint'. This interpretation has since been challenged and through the debates which have followed, two schools of thought have emerged (the 'programme' and 'structuralist' schools).

The 'programme' school

Examples of historians: Hugh Trevor-Roper, Klaus Hildebrand, Gerhard Weinberg
Their argument: That Hitler had a consistent plan which was first outlined in *Mein Kampf*. The key elements of this plan were: achieving greater living space (*Lebensraum*), and expanding the German master race. Hitler was definitely in control of foreign policy.

Differences: Not all structuralists believe that Hitler was without a plan. Mason, for example, believes that Hitler did have a plan - but was unable to stick to it in the face of an economic crisis.

The 'structuralist' school

Examples of historians: Hans Mommsen, Martin Broszat, Tim Mason
Their argument: That Hitler did not have a specific plan in foreign policy. Instead, he reacted to events around him, both at home and abroad. Public statements of foreign policy intentions made by Hitler and others are explained in terms of propaganda.

Was Hitler really planning for total war?

Despite the priority given to the creation of a war economy during the 1930s, Germany seemed slow to adapt to the demands of war after 1939. Although swift victories in Western Europe did not place huge demands on German industry, the war against Russia forced Hitler to reappraise the organization of the economy and to take measures to increase arms production. This impression of being ill prepared has led to a debate amongst historians. Was Hitler actually planning for total war?

Activity

- 1 Read the 'Historical Debate' box on page 220 for important background.
- 2 Now read extracts A and B in the margin. How do they disagree?
- 3 Organize yourselves into two groups. Using the information on the next two pages, plus any other information you have, prepare to defend one of these arguments:
 "Hitler was clearly planning for total war but was expecting it later than 1939"
 "Hitler appeared to have no clear plan. He reacted to events and had to change his tactics when war lasted longer than expected."

Think about

The bias of individual historians affects their interpretation of Hitler's foreign policy. A.J.P. Taylor, by arguing that Hitler had no plan, attributes more blame to the Allies for not arming him sooner. Why might British or French historians also argue that Hitler did have a definite plan of action?

Extract A

For the first two years of the war the degree of economic regulation was no more rigorous than it had been in 1936. The production of armaments did not increase significantly, nor did that of consumer goods decline... Hitler was so pleased with the effectiveness of war on the cheap that he saw no reason to change it when he began to plan his invasion of Russia... He preferred to gamble on a short war, and to do so without allocating enough labour resources to war production...

Craig, *Germany 1866-1945*, 1981

Extract B

All the evidence on war preparations and military production plans confirms that the general expectation in Germany before 1939 was that any future war between the major powers... would be a total war from the start. The very nature of modern warfare made this imperative. War was now industrialised tasks, aircraft, modern communications equipment, all required an industrial effort on a scale hitherto unknown... By the spring of 1940, the German economy was set on the path towards full mobilisation.

Overy, 'Mobilisation for total war in Germany 1939-41' in *English Historical Review*, 103, 1988

Was Hitler planning for total war?

Source 10

Year	May 1940	May 1941	May 1942	May 1943
All industry	10.9	10.1	10.3	9.9
Iron and steel	0.35	0.33	0.36	0.36
Mining	0.59	0.58	0.61	0.62
Heavy manufacturing industry e.g. chemicals, metals, engineering	3.75	3.37	4.21	4.36
Building industry	0.91	0.71	0.72	0.51
Consumer e.g. textiles, food	3.58	2.94	2.84	2.54

Source 12

Year	Index of industrial workers working in military contracts
1939	100
1940	229
1941	249
1942	256
1943	278

Source 14

...the economy must be completely converted... No more place for printing presses, washing machines and the like, they must all make machine tools.

Goering in 1938

Source 10

The fact is that by 1939, women already constituted a very much larger part of the workforce than in other industrialised countries... it would be reasonable to argue that there simply was not a much larger pool of women to be absorbed in the German war effort, that Germany was already close to a ceiling on female employment by the outbreak of war.

Overy, 'Mobilisation for total war in Germany 1938-41' in *English Historical Review*, 103, 1988

Source 11

With effect from 28 August 1939, four days before the attack on Poland, a number of items of daily diet were rationed so that, as Goebbels insisted, food could be shared out equally among the German people. Ration cards had been printed in 1937 and were kept ready for immediate use.

Kitchen, *Nazi Germany at War*, 1995

Source 13

Throughout the winter of 1939-40 Germany received considerable economic and even military assistance from Soviet Russia. Russia's supplies of vital raw materials, the use of her railway system to transport rubber from the Far East and the protection given to German merchantmen all helped to neutralise the economic consequences of the British blockade... Ironically, it was probably only Russian assistance that prevented an early German economic collapse...

Williamson, *The Third Reich*, 1982

Source 15

a. Production of consumer goods (1928 = 100)

1938	108
1939	108
1940	102
1941	104
1942	93
1943	98
1944	93

b. Consumption of civilian products (per person) fell by 22% between 1939 and 1941 (In Britain it fell by 15%)

NB: some consumer goods were produced for the armed forces, such as uniforms

Source 17

The turning-point came in December 1941 with the Rationalization Decree. This should be simplified and streamlined in order to mass produce. This reorganisation ended the confused planning, poor co-ordination and wasteful duplication of the earlier years. Within two years, the productivity of the workers in the armaments sector almost trebled.

Jenkins, *Hitler and Nazism* 1998

Source 18

...the planners were almost unbelievably lackadaisical in preparing for the attack on the Soviet Union. The army which was thrown against the Soviet Union was only marginally larger and scarcely better equipped than that which invaded France the previous year. In many categories of weapons the losses in the first six months of the campaign greatly exceeded production.

Kitchen, *Nazi Germany at War*, 1995

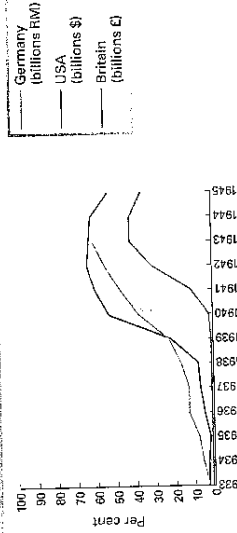
Source 19

...the planners were almost unbelievably lackadaisical in preparing for the attack on the Soviet Union. The army which was thrown against the Soviet Union was only marginally larger and scarcely better equipped than that which invaded France the previous year. In many categories of weapons the losses in the first six months of the campaign greatly exceeded production.



Source 20

...the planners were almost unbelievably lackadaisical in preparing for the attack on the Soviet Union. The army which was thrown against the Soviet Union was only marginally larger and scarcely better equipped than that which invaded France the previous year. In many categories of weapons the losses in the first six months of the campaign greatly exceeded production.



Did Hitler follow a plan?

As we have seen on the previous pages, there is a debate over the extent to which Hitler was following a plan. Was he in control or was he forced to change his plans due to other 'structural' factors such as domestic pressures? If he didn't have a plan as such, did he have any consistent aims at all? Or was he, as Taylor argued, simply an opportunist?

Interpretations exercise: Hitler's foreign policy

It is questionable, too, whether National Socialist foreign policy can be considered as an unchanging pursuit of established priorities. Hitler's foreign policy aims, purely dynamic in nature, knew no bounds... to interpret their implementation as in any way consistent or logical is highly problematic... In reality, the regime's foreign policy ambitions were many and varied, without any clear aims and only linked by the ultimate goal: hindsight alone gives them some air of consistency.

Mommsen, 'National Socialism: Continuity and Change' in Lequeur (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide*, 1978

He displayed a skill in propaganda and a mastery of deceit, a finesse in exploiting the weaknesses of his opponents and a crudeness in exploiting the strength of his own position which he had learned in the struggle for power in Germany and which he now applied to international relations with even more remarkable results. This is not to suggest that Hitler, any more than Bismarck in the 1860s, foresaw in 1933 exactly how events would develop in the course of the next decade. No man was more of an opportunist, as the Nazi-Soviet Pact shows. No man had more luck. But Hitler knew how to turn events to his advantage. He knew what he wanted and he held the initiative. His principal opponents, Great Britain and France, knew only what they did not want - war - and were always on the defensive. The fact that Hitler was ready to risk war, and started preparing for it from the day he came to power, gave him a still greater advantage.

Bullock, *Hitler A Study in Tyranny*, 1962

Hitler had no ready-made programme for proceeding [in foreign policy], no blueprint for action. The general thrust of policy was to appear conciliatory, tread warily, but rear up with all speed in order to be ready to seize the main chance when it presented itself. Germany's military weakness and diplomatic isolation offered in any case little alternative to such a strategy... Hitler's hallmark in the early years was less the nature of the foreign policy itself than his capacity to perceive the weakest point of opposition and to push diplomatic relations into completely new terrain through a bold forward move.

Kershaw, *Hitler*, 1991

Activity

1 Look back at page 229 on Hitler's aims. What aims did he outline in *Mein Kampf*? Underline what you think were his most important aims.

2 Now compare these aims with what actually happened. Which aims changed? Which aims did he not achieve? Which aims did he achieve?

3 Is it possible to argue that Hitler had consistent foreign policy aims from 1925 onwards?

Spelling

Various issues are picked up in the work *Mein Kampf* in no thorough or genuinely systematic fashion. One of these is the appropriate diplomatic and foreign aims of the German state. Hitler was always adamant that the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles had to be overturned and the Reich's lost territories (Alsace, Lorraine, and parts of Poland) returned to Germany. He was also aware that France would never surrender Alsace and Lorraine peacefully. Thus a coming war with France was already implicit in his thinking. However, Hitler's territorial ambitions did not end with the re-creation of the boundaries of Bismarck's Germany. Bismarck, after all, had deliberately excluded Austria and thereby Austrian Germans from the Reich that was created after the victories of 1866 and 1871. In contrast Hitler wanted the pan-German vision of a Reich which would include all ethnic Germans: *ein Volk, ein Reich* (one people, one empire)... Even these pan-German aims, however, were not sufficient to satisfy Hitler. He further believed that the population German people was being forced to live in a territorial area that was overcrowded and could not meet its needs... What the German people needed was *Lebensraum* (living space). In turn, of course, this then raised the question: where was such living space to be found?... Increasingly... Hitler came to believe that *Lebensraum* would have to be found in the east of Europe and in Russia in particular...

Gearty, *Nazism*, 1993

Activity

Question 4 can easily be turned into a whole essay. For inclusion into your key skills portfolio, ensure that you have read more extensively from at least two other texts. They could be one of the texts mentioned here, or other ones. Ideally, at least one should include images of some sort. Your teacher will advise you.

Activity

Was Hitler in control? Using the information in this chapter (or the completed table from the activity on page 236), find examples of when Hitler changed his plans. Put your findings into a table:

When did Hitler change his plans	Why did Hitler change his plans

Does your table suggest that Hitler was in control of his own foreign policy or not?

Exercise in critical evaluation

1 Comprehension in context

Using Source C and your own knowledge, explain the phrase 'his [Hitler's] capacity to perceive the weakest point of opposition'.

2 Comparing the sources

Compare Sources A, B, and C. To what extent do they offer similar interpretations about whether or not Hitler followed a plan in his foreign policy?

3 Assessing the sources

Source A's claim that Nazi foreign policy lacked any 'clear aims' seems to be contradicted by Source D. Does this mean that the interpretation in Source A is of limited value?

4 Making judgements

Hitler did not make plans - for world conquest or anything else. He assumed that others would provide opportunities, and that he would seize them' (Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 1991). Using all the sources and your own knowledge, explain how far you agree with this statement.

Conclusions

Although interpretations differ, it seems relatively safe to suggest that Hitler did have clearly identified aims in his foreign policy, but no fixed plan of how to achieve them. The historian Alan Bullock has described this combination as 'consistency of aim' joined with 'opportunism of method'. Hitler's actions were certainly influenced by circumstances both inside and outside Germany, but there is little evidence to suggest that he was forced to take actions that he did not want. If anything, these constraining or 'structural' factors, such as the reaction of Britain and France, speeded up his attempt to achieve his aims. But did Hitler expect a war in 1939? Again, this is an area of debate and it is ultimately up to you to decide.