

The Origins of World War II:

The Impact of Hitler:

- Tension began with appointment of Hitler as chancellor in January 1933. Concerns raised that Germany would soon rearm and challenge Paris Peace Settlement.
- International outrage as a reaction to Hitler's actions concerning Germany— he made speeches insisting that Germany wanted peace— Suggested at Versailles conference that major powers disarm to level of German armaments. He eventually withdrew from both World Disarmament Conference and League of Nations on grounds that neither France nor Britain would treat Germany on equal terms.
- Polish Non-Aggression Pact signed January 1934.
- 'Night of the Long Knives' (29–30 June 1934)— many in the SA brutally murdered.
- 2 August 1934, President von Hindenburg died. This strengthened Hitler's power in Germany— he abolished President, ended the Weimar Constitution, and declared himself as Führer of Germany.
- June 1935— Anglo-German Naval Agreement signed. This was a diplomatic triumph for Hitler— it recognised Germany's right to rearm, and revealed the hollowness of the Stresa Front.

The Collapse of The League of Nations, 1935-1937:

- October 1935— Italy invaded Abyssinia, the last independent nation state in Africa. Samuel Hoare, the British foreign Secretary, asked League of Nations to impose foreign sanctions on Italy. They were imposed, but proved ineffective, because many countries were not League members, and oil was not included in the sanctions.
- Hoare-Laval Pact— decided not to punish Italy too harshly, and allow Italy to gain most of land, except for small strip of land on the coast. Hoare forced to resign. Affair was disaster for Britain and France, destroyed Franco-Italian alliance, and alienated Mussolini.
- 7 March 1936— German troops marched on Rhineland. Again, League of Nations took no action due to 'peaceful solution' of Britain & France.
- Outbreak of Spanish Civil War, October 1936— allowed Germany and Italy to access important War materials, including iron ore, copper, zinc, tin and mercury.
- Japan 1937— China and Japan at war— China called on League to help, but League only imposed an international conference of power— no military help offered. Britain and US did provide financial assistance to China, but War dragged on.

Neville Chamberlain, appeasement and the road to Munich, 1937-1938:

- Chamberlain decided to use appeasement due to the following factors:
 1. There was a widespread horror at the idea of a Second World War.
 2. Too much faith had been placed in the League of Nations, which proved ineffective when faced with military aggression.

3. There was a widespread feeling that Germany had been punished too harshly by the Treaty of Versailles.
 4. British public opinion constantly opposed the rearmament of Britain.
 5. France, Britain's ally, had constantly deteriorated in the face of the growing Fascist threat.
- Appeasement was seen as the only choice if War was to be avoided.
 - **Hossbach Memorandum (5 November 1937)**— key aim of Germany was 'conquest in the East'. Hitler claimed that Austria and Czechoslovakia must be seized, and predicted that the actions might cause a war with France and Britain. January 1938— Hitler becomes War Minister, von Ribbentrop becomes foreign minister.
 - **The Anschluss**— 12 March 1938 German troops entered Austria— union between Germany and Austria achieved through bullying and intimidation. As a result of the Anschluss, the Treaty of Versailles was virtually destroyed, the balance of power in Europe turned in Germany's favour, and Czechoslovakia was now under grave threat.
 - **The Czech crisis of 1938**— Hitler met Chamberlain on 15 September 1938, and told him that he wanted the Sudetenland to be incorporated into the Third Reich— Munich Conference held on 29 September 1938 to decide fate of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain persuaded Hitler to sign piece of paper claiming that Britain and Germany would 'never go to war with each other again.' This was worthless to Hitler, but Chamberlain flourished it on his return to England.

The Road to Global War, 1938-1941:

- Hope of lasting peace in Europe did not last long. On 15 March 1939, Hitler invaded rest of Czechoslovakia, Bohemia and Moravia. Hitler claimed he was 'invited to restore order'. This crushed all hopes that Hitler could be appeased by concessions.
- 21 March 1939, Hitler seized Memel, on border of East Prussia and Lithuania and asked Poland to return the free city of Danzig to them. Britain and France pledged support to Poland in the event of War against them.
- 7 April 1939 Mussolini seized Albania. On 13 April, further British and French guarantees were given to Romania, Greece and Turkey.

The Role of the Soviet Union in the outbreak of War:

- Anglo-Soviet Alliance in 1939— failed talks, probably paved way for Nazi-Soviet Pact.
- Stalin was indifferent as to fate of Poland as Chamberlain had been towards Czechoslovakia a year earlier, and wanted to keep the Soviet Union out of a war with Germany if at all possible.

The Outbreak of War in Europe:

- USA remained spectator to events happening in Europe. Did things such as offered Lend-Lease, by which arms were supplied, to Britain by lease, sale or exchange. In the summer of 1941, the US banned oil supplies to Japan. It was a highly provocative move, by which Japan might have been provoked into War, and Roosevelt knew this. Japan either had to accept the US' demands, or seize oil supplies by advancing against British, French, and Dutch possessions in South East Asia.
- 7 December 1941, Japan attacked US Fleet at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. Eight US battleships, three cruisers, three destroyers, 188 aircraft destroyed. USA as a result entered the war. Churchill rejoiced, and said,
 "Hitler's fate was sealed. Mussolini's fate was sealed. As for the Japanese, they would be ground to powder. All the rest was merely the proper application of overwhelming force."