Why was Hitler's foreign policy so successful?

1933–9?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW
Hitler was remarkably successful in foreign policy in the 1930s. In this chapter you are going to examine the reasons for his success under the following headings:

A What were Hitler's aims and plans in foreign policy? (pp. 376–9)
B How did the situation in Europe in the 1930s help Hitler? (pp. 380–1)
C Key events and personnel in Hitler's foreign policy 1933–9 (pp. 382–3)
D Why was Hitler able to smash the Versailles settlement? (pp. 384–95)
E How did the major powers react to Hitler's foreign policy 1933–9? (pp. 396–9)
F Was Hitler a master planner or an opportunist? (pp. 400–1)
G Review: Why was Hitler's foreign policy so successful 1933–9? (pp. 402–5)

FOCUS ROUTE
1 What were Hitler's aims?
2 What methods did Hitler use to achieve his aims?
3 How did other powers react to his measures?
4 How successful was Hitler in achieving his aims?
5 Why was he successful?

SOURCE 20.1
A display poster for Mein Kampf.
This booklet was written by Hitler when he was in prison in 1924; it was published in 1925–6 and widely available from 1933. References to foreign policy are scattered throughout Mein Kampf, and Hitler stresses Russia as Germany's main enemy and Lebensraum as the main purpose.

SOURCE 20.2
Excerpt from Mein Kampf
The acquisition of new soil for the settlement of the excess population possesses an infinite number of advantages, particularly if we turn from the present to the future. For one thing, the possibility of preserving a healthy peasant class as a foundation for a whole nation can never be viewed highly enough. Many of our present-day sufferers are only the consequence of the unhealthy relationship between rural and city population. A solid stock of small and middle peasants has at all times been the best defence against social ills such as we possess today...

If land was desired in Europe, it could be obtained by and large only at the expense of Russia, and this meant that the new Reich must again set itself on the march along the road of the Tsarist Knights of old (a medieval religious order of knighthood), to obtain by the German sword soil [Schoenberg] for the German plough and daily bread for the nation. For such a policy there was but one ally in Europe: England... With England alone was it possible, our rear protected, to begin the new German march... But we National Socialists must go further: The right to possess soil can become a duty if without extension of its soil a great nation seems doomed to destruction... And must especially when not some little nigger nation or other is involved, but the Germanic mother of life, which has given the present day world its cultural picture. Germany will either be a world power or there will be no Germany... And so we National Socialists consciously draw a line beneath the foreign policy tendency of our pre-war period. We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west and turn our gaze towards the land in the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-war period and shift to the soil policy of the future.

If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vast, border states. Here fate itself seems desirous of giving us a sign... This colossal empire in the east is ripe for dissolution, and the end of Russia as a state.

Hitler's Second Book
Hitler dictated a second book as a sequel to Mein Kampf. He began to work on it in May–July 1928. It was then kept at the headquarters of the Nazi Party with orders that it was not to be published until after Hitler's death. The Americans discovered it in 1945, and it was authenticated and published in 1951 in German as Hitler's Zweite Buch (Hitler's Second Book) and translated and published in English as Hitler's Secret Book. It contains a far more considered view of foreign policy than the sporadic references in Mein Kampf. In it, Hitler stressed the need for Lebensraum in the east and his explanation of why he thought Britain would not oppose Germany in Europe, since Germany was no threat to the British Empire. He also talked more of the final struggle between German-dominated Europe and the United States of America.

SOURCE 20.3
An extract from Hitler's Secret Book
For this earth is not allotted to anyone... It is awarded by providence to people who in their hearts have the courage to conquer it, the strength to preserve it, and the industry to put it to the plough... Every healthy, vigorous people sees nothing sinful in territorial acquisition, but something quite in keeping with nature. The primary right of this world is the right to life, so far as one possesses the strength for this. Hence on the basis of this right a vigorous nation will always find ways of adapting its territory to its population size... For this, however, a nation needs weapons. The acquisition of soil is always linked with the employment of force.
The Four-Year Plan, 1936

This memorandum, rare because it was written by Hitler himself, was produced during the economic troubles of 1936 in order to justify continued massive rearmament, so as to be ready for war in four years.

SOURCE 20.4 The Four-Year Plan, 1936

Since the outbreak of the French Revolution the world has been moving with ever-increasing speed towards a new conflict; the most extreme solution of which is Bolshevism; and the essence and goal of Bolshevism is the elimination of those strains of mankind which have hitherto provided the leadership and their replacement by worldwide Jewry.

No nation will be able to avoid or abstain from this historical conflict. Since Marxism, through its victory in Russia, has established one of the great empires as a forward base for its future operations, this question has become a menacing one... The military resources of this aggressive will are... increasing from year to year... Germany will always have to be regarded as the focus of the Western world against the attacks of Bolshevism... we cannot... escape the danger... Apart from Germany and Italy, only Japan can be considered as a Power standing firm in the face of the world peril...

This crisis cannot and will not fail to occur; and... Germany has the duty of securing her existence by every means in the face of this catastrophe... For a victory of Bolshevism over Germany would lead not to a Versailles Treaty but to the final destruction, indeed to the annihilation, of the German people... In the face of the necessity of warding off this danger, all the other considerations must recede into the background as completely irrelevant.

SOURCE 20.5 Extract from the Hessbach Memorandum

The aim of German policy was to make secure and to preserve the racial community and to enlarge it. It was therefore a question of space... before turning to the question of solving the need for space... it had to be considered whether a solution holding promise for the future was to be reached by means of a partition or by means of an increased participation in the world economy.

The question for Germany was: where could she achieve the greatest gain at the lowest cost? Germany had to reckon with two hate-inspired antagonists, Britain and France, to whom a German colossus in the centre of Europe was a threat in the future, and both countries were opposed to any further strengthening of Germany's position either in Europe or overseas... Germany's problem could only be solved by means of force, and this was never without attendant risk... There remain still to be answered the questions 'when' and 'how'? In this matter there were three cases to be dealt with...

Case I: period 1941-43. (After this date only a change for the worse, from our point of view could be expected...) Our relative strength would decrease in relation to the rearmament which would by then have been carried out by the rest of the world... Nobody knew today what the situation would be in the years 1941-43. One thing only was certain, that we could exist no longer... If the Führer was still living, it was his unavoidable task to resolve Germany's problem of space at the latest by 1941-43. The necessity for action before 1941-43 would arise in cases II and III.

Case II: if internal strife in France should develop into such a domestic crisis as to absorb the French army completely and render it incapable of use for war against Germany, then the time for action against the Czechs had come.

Case III: if France is so embroiled by a war with another state that she cannot 'proceed' against Germany.

For the improvement of our political and military position our first objective, in the event of being embroiled in war, must he to overthrow Czechoslovakia and Austria simultaneously in order to remove the threat from our flank in any possible operation against the West...
German foreign policy 1933–45: a chronology

**CAUTION 1933–5**

1933
- October: Germany leaves League of Nations and Disarmament Conference

1934
- 26 June: Non-Aggression Pact with Poland
- 14–15 June: Hitler visits fellow Fascist leader Mussolini in Venice
- 25 July: Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Döfuss assassinated in attempted coup by Austrian Nazis

1935
- 13 January: In League of Nations’ plebiscite (held under terms of Treaty of Versailles), the Saar votes to return to Germany
- 9 March: Hitler announces expansion of the German air force
- 16 March: Hitler announces conscription
- 11–14 April: Strass Conference of Britain, France, Italy to unite opposition to German infringement of Versailles
- 18 June: Anglo-German Naval Agreement on an enlarged German navy
- 2 October: Italy invades Abyssinia. League of Nations votes for (defunct) sanctions; Mussolini begins to move away from Britain and France towards Germany

**ASSERTION AND EXPANSION 1936 to 23 Aug 1939**

1936
- 6 January: Mussolini ends Italian guarantee of Austrian independence
- 7 March: German troops occupy the demilitarised Rhineland
- 27 July: Germany starts to send military help to right-wing rebel nationalists in Spanish Civil War
- 19 October: Goering in charge of economic Four-Year Plan
- 1 November: Rome-Berlin Axis with Fascist Italy announced
- 25 November: Germany forms Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan

1937
- 27 April: Japan-China War
- 25–9 September: Mussolini visits Germany and is impressed
- 5 November: Hessbach memorandum records Hitler’s plans for major expansion
- 6 November: Italy joins Anti-Comintern Pact

1938
- 30 March: Ribbentrop becomes Foreign Minister. Generals Blomberg, Fröschl replaced
- 12 February: Hitler buddies Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg to include Nazis in his government
- 4 March: Austrian plebiscite on Anschluss announced
- 11 March: Germany invades Austria
- 13 March: Anschluss (German union with Austria)
- 24 April: German Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia demanded autonomy
- 18 August: German Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia demand autonomy
- 18 August: General Beck resigns
- 28 August: Great danger of war over Czechoslovakia

**WAR I Sep 1939 onwards**

1939
- 1 September: Germany invades Poland
- 3 September: France declares war on Germany
- 17 September: USSR invades Poland. Poland defeated and partitioned between Germany and the USSR

1940
- May–June: Germany occupies Denmark, Germany conquers Norway in two weeks
- May–June: Germany invades Holland, Belgium (fifteen days), France (four weeks)
- June: France capitulates. Germany occupies the north and west of France
- August–September: Germany plans to invade Britain but is defeated in Battle of Britain. Hitler prepares plans to invade the USSR

1941
- April: Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece
- June: Germany invades the USSR but is stopped at Moscow and Leningrad
- July: Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. USA declares war on Japan and Germany

1942
- May: Major German offensive at Stalingrad, USSR
- June: Germany and Italy attack Egypt

1943
- May: German surrender at Stalingrad. Hitler’s first major defeat
- Germans, Italians, surrender in North Africa. Germans lose last battle of Kursk in the USSR, general Soviet advance 1943–4
- July: Anglo-American invasion of Italy. Mussolini overthrown. Germans take over north Italy

1944
- June: Allies invade West France. General Allied advance 1944–5
- April: Germany is betrayed from east and west
- August: Hitler commits suicide

**SOURCE 7**

Hilter returning to Germany after the conquest of France, 1940

**SOURCE 8**

The percentage of Germans voting yes in plebiscites on Hitler’s foreign policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Plebiscite</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 1933</td>
<td>Leaving the League/ Disarmament Conference</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1936</td>
<td>After reoccupying Rhineland</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1938</td>
<td>Anchluss with Austria</td>
<td>99</td>
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