

mandate and membership made it likely to fail. As this is a 'to what extent' question, you will need to present a counter-argument. State this clearly in your introduction; for example, that the League was not inherently flawed but failed due to the impact of the Great Depression and the actions of the powers themselves.

Section 1: Always start with the argument presented in the question itself, i.e. that it was 'doomed to fail', and give arguments to support this view, such as:

- Weaknesses in structure, mandate and membership
- Failures to keep the peace in the 1920s.

Section 2: Now address an alternative view – that the League was not doomed to fail. Look at:

- Strengths in structure, mandate and membership
- Evidence of success in peacekeeping in the 1920s
- The international impact of the Great Depression.

Conclusion: Based on the weight of evidence in the main body of the essay, refer back to the question directly and state whether the League was doomed to fail or not.

THE CAUSES OF WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE: HITLER'S WAR

As you read this chapter, consider the following essay question:

- To what extent was World War II 'Hitler's War'?

As you have read, there were problems with peacekeeping in the 1920s, and there were aggressive and expansionist states that were threatening peace (Japan in Manchuria and Italy in Abyssinia) in the 1930s. Yet according to some historians, and according to Britain's wartime leader, Winston Churchill, World War II was primarily caused by the ambitions and policies of Adolf Hitler – the conflict was 'Hitler's War'.

Timeline to the outbreak of war – 1933–39

1933	Jan	Hitler becomes Chancellor in Germany
	Feb	Hitler introduces programme of rearmament
	Oct	Hitler leaves Disarmament Conference / announces intention to withdraw Germany from League of Nations
1934	Jan	Germany signs Non-Aggression Pact with Poland
1935	Jan	Plebiscite in Saar; Germans there vote for return of territory to Germany
	Mar	Conscription re-introduced in Germany. Stresa agreements between Britain, France and Italy
	Jun	Anglo-German Naval Treaty
	Oct	Italian invasion of Abyssinia
1936	Mar	Germany remilitarizes the Rhineland
	Jun	Hitler sends military support to Franco's Nationalists in Spain
	Aug	Hitler's Four Year Plan drafted for war
	Nov	Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan; Rome–Berlin Axis signed
1937	May	Neville Chamberlain becomes Prime Minister in Britain
	Jul	Sino-Japanese War begins
	Nov	Hossbach Memorandum; war plans meeting
1938	Mar	<i>Anschluss</i> declared after German troops march into Austria
	Sep	Munich Crisis; Sudetenland Crisis
1939	Mar	Germany occupies rest of Czechoslovakia; Lithuania gives up port of Memel to Germany Anglo-French guarantee of Poland
	Apr	Introduction of conscription in Britain
	May	Pact of Steel signed between Germany and Italy
	Aug	Anglo-French military mission to Moscow; Nazi–Soviet Pact signed between Germany and the USSR; Anglo-Polish treaty signed
	Sep	Germany invades Poland; Britain and France declare war on Germany

In his account of the causes of World War II, *The Second World War: Volume One, The Gathering Storm*, 1948, Winston Churchill asserted that Hitler had a master plan for the domination of Europe, which Hitler had outlined in his book *Mein Kampf* ('My Struggle'; 1925–26). Churchill went on to suggest that the 'granite pillars' of his plan had been to reunite Germans in a Great German Empire and to conquer Eastern Europe by force. War was inevitable to attaining these goals, and Hitler pursued these ambitions by creating



▲ A Nazi election poster from the 1930s. The text translates 'Break free now! Vote Hitler.'

a militarized nation. In Churchill's analysis, the turning point was 1935 when Germany rearmed; from that point on war was the only way to stop Hitler.

As you read through this chapter, consider whether or not you agree with Churchill's perspective on events leading to war in Europe.

Hitler's foreign policy aims: 1919–33

Hitler had fought in World War I, and the war left its mark on the young Austrian. He had been temporarily blinded in a gas attack, and it was while he was recovering in hospital that he heard of Germany's surrender. It was then, Hitler has stated, that he decided to 'go into politics'.

With the defeat of Russia on the Eastern Front, and the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1917, Germany had almost realized the domination of Eastern Europe (Poland and Lithuania became German territories). These gains, however, were lost when Germany was defeated on the Western Front. Nevertheless, as both the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires had fallen, Germany was left in a potentially dominant position in continental Europe, even after the peace settlements. If you look back to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles in Chapter 4, the perceived severity of the treaty meant that Germans, even democratic ones, wanted to reverse the settlement. Most could not accept the severe losses, particularly of territory to Poland. In addition, German commitment to making reparation payments was limited.

Nazi foreign policy was shaped by this historical context, but Adolf Hitler also had ambitions that went beyond redressing the outcome of World War I. In 1919, Hitler became the 55th member of a new political party, led by Anton Drexler, the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP; German Workers' Party), later renamed the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP; National Socialist German Workers' Party) in 1920. By 1921, Hitler had become party leader. This 'Nazi' Party set down a 25-point programme, which included key objectives such as the union of all Germans, an end to the Treaty of Versailles, a strong state, the creation of a national army and the exclusion of Jews from German society. The programme is clear evidence that Hitler had long-term objectives that would cause tension, and potentially conflict, in Europe.

In November 1923, Hitler and his Nazis attempted to seize power in a *coup d'état* in Munich – known as the Munich Beer Hall Putsch (*putsch* is the German word for coup). The attempt failed, and Hitler was sent to prison for nine months. It was while serving his sentence in prison that Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*. The book was a combination of autobiography and political philosophy – it covered racist and authoritarian theories and ideas for the direction of Nazi foreign policy. In this book, Hitler asserted the need for German racial purity and the absolute need to acquire 'living space' for the German population, known as *Lebensraum*.

Only an adequate large space on this earth assures a nation of freedom of existence... We must hold unflinchingly to our aim ... to secure for the German people the land and soil to which they are entitled.

From Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925

The historian Andreas Hillgruber suggested that the plans set down in *Mein Kampf* could be viewed as Hitler's *Stufenplan* or 'stage-by-stage plan'. The first stage would be the termination of the Treaty of Versailles, and the formation of an alliance with Britain and Italy. The second stage would be a war against France and her Eastern European allies; and the last stage would be a war with the USSR. Hitler, however, did not use the

Munich Beer Hall Putsch

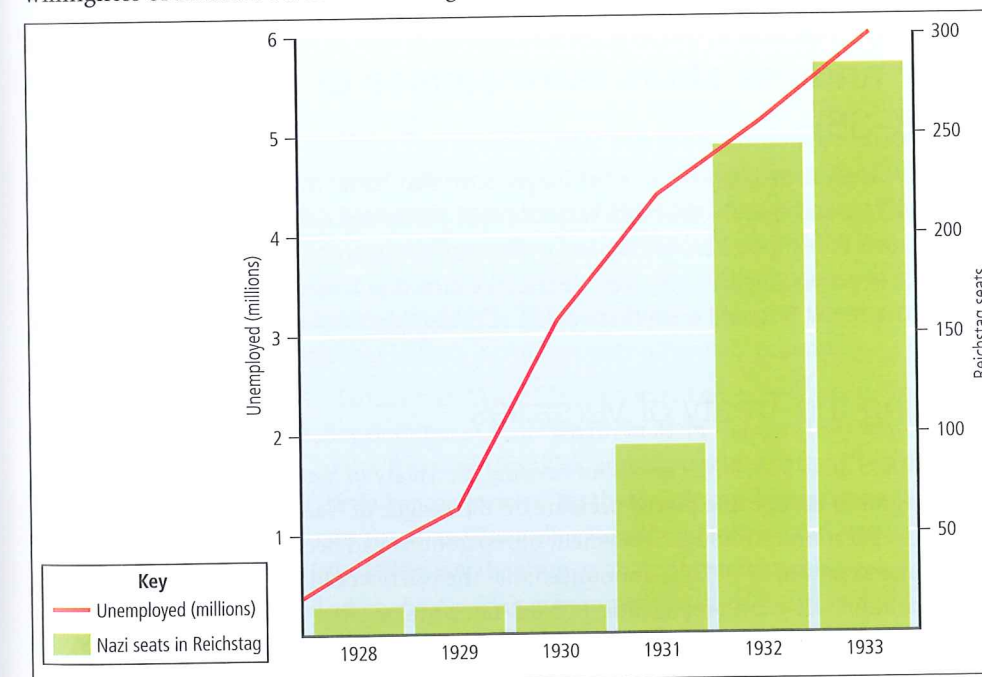
The French invasion of the Ruhr had led to an intensified feeling of nationalism in Germany. A right-wing plot was drawn up late in 1923 by the Bavarian state commissioner, the local Reichswehr commander, the chief of the provincial police and Hitler's NSDAP to overthrow the Republic. On 8 November, Hitler burst into a political meeting in a Munich beer hall and, supported by units of his *Sturmabteilung* (SA) guard, declared that a putsch was taking place. However, as they were outnumbered on the streets the following day, Hitler attempted to get the local *Reichswehr* to join him. As they marched to the barracks, their path was blocked and 16 Nazis were killed. The rest ran away. After the attempted putsch, Ludendorff, a supporter of Hitler, and Hitler himself stood trial. Ludendorff was released, but Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison. He served only one.

term *Stufenplan* in his book. Indeed, *Mein Kampf's* value as evidence of war planning by Hitler has been debated by historians. Statements like the quotation above were taken by many people as evidence of Hitler's clear intention for world domination. A.J.P. Taylor, by contrast, sees *Mein Kampf* as rather more irrelevant – just a work of wishful thinking by a then-failed revolutionary.

The Nazi Party did not do well in the German elections in 1928; Hitler retreated to Munich to dictate another book, *Zweites Buch*, known as the 'Secret Book' of 1928. This book provides historians with further evidence of Hitler's longer-term ambitions, and his more consistent foreign policy objectives. In the book, Hitler develops many of the foreign policy ideas he discussed in *Mein Kampf*, although he suggests that in the 1930s a final struggle would take place for world hegemony between the USA and the combined forces of a 'Greater Germany' and the British Empire. Hitler also wrote here about his admiration for Mussolini, and his anger towards the German Chancellor Gustav Stresemann, whose foreign policy ambition was to return Germany to its pre-1914 borders. Hitler saw this goal as far too limited. He restated his principal aim of attaining vast territories of *Lebensraum*, space to be taken from the USSR. The overthrow of Versailles was just the preamble to this objective.

Hitler's rise to power

As we saw in Chapter 5, there was a period of optimism in international relations in the 1920s. From Locarno in 1925, to the Kellogg–Briand Pact in 1928 and the commencement of the World Disarmament Conference in 1932, there had been a sense of international cooperation and accord, which was manifest in the new League of Nations organization. Indeed, Germany had signed or been involved with all these agreements. Yet the stability was fragile, and the weaknesses of the League to maintain peace by collective security had been tested and found wanting before Hitler came to power in Germany. The Great Depression undermined both the League's ability to resist aggressor states, and the willingness of member states to work together.



A graph showing unemployment in Germany and the seats won in the Reichstag by the Nazi Party, 1928–33.

The impact of the global economic crisis was particularly dramatic in Weimar Germany (see Chapter 4). The mass unemployment and despair that followed assisted Hitler's rise to power. Indeed, the Nazi Party's success at the polls directly correlated with the degree

of unemployment in Germany (see graph); the more unemployed there were, the more successful the Nazis were in elections. In the end, Hitler was able to come to power legally; a group of conservative politicians, including the President, General von Hindenburg, concluded that Hitler would be useful to have on their side. They believed that they would be able to control him. Thus, Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, democratically, in January 1933. He was now able to pursue his long-term ambitions.

It could be argued that Hitler had to pursue certain aggressive foreign policy objectives, as such aims had brought him to power. His attack on the Treaty of Versailles and those who had signed it meant that many Germans believed he and the Nazis would restore Germany's international prestige through crushing the treaty. In addition, Hitler had been brought to power with the assistance of other right-wing parties in the Weimar Republic; much of this support was gained because of the Nazis' stated foreign policy ambitions.

Between 1933 and 1934, Hitler consolidated his control in Germany. He gained the tacit cooperation of the army and the industrialists, who both believed Hitler would bring in a massive programme of rearmament. The Nazi regime was **totalitarian**, and the rights of its citizens were subordinate to the state. Ultimately, this meant that the Nazis could gear domestic policy to meet the needs of its expansionist foreign policy. Military conscription and rearmament, meanwhile, could relieve mass unemployment.

To access worksheet 6.1 on Adolf Hitler, please visit www.pearsonbacconline.com and follow the on-screen instructions.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review questions

- 1 From what you have read so far, what evidence is there that Hitler had a long-term plan that would lead to a general European war?
- 2 To what extent should a) German moderates and b) foreign governments have been aware of the potential danger of Hitler?
- 3 How far do you agree that the Nazis' popularity was due to the economic crisis in Germany?

Hitler and the short-term causes of World War II (1933–38)

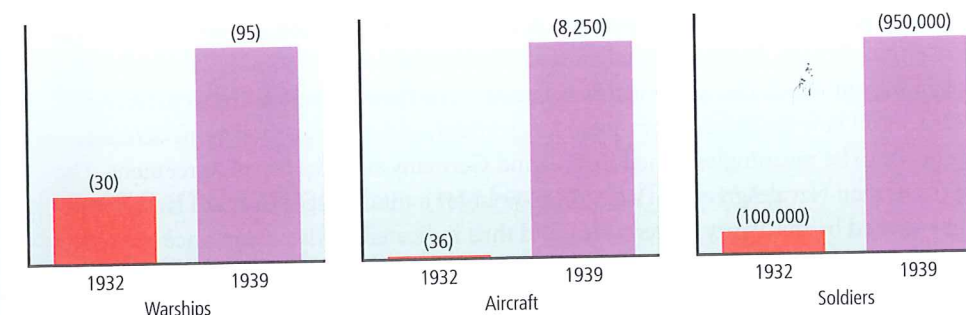
As we have seen, there is evidence in the longer term that Hitler had a consistent ambition to control 'race and space' – the Nazis wanted racial purity and *Lebensraum*. These themes are consistent in his speeches, writing and policy statements throughout the 1920s, and then, once in power, appear to be consistent in the direction Hitler steered Germany through the 1930s. It would seem that neither of these objectives could be obtained *without* war.

Revising the Treaty of Versailles

Between 1933 and 1935, Hitler set about revising the Treaty of Versailles, a process that led to tension in Europe and placed pressure on the League of Nations. Hitler began by attacking reparations. Although repayment of reparations had been suspended before Hitler came to power, in 1933 he announced that the Nazis would not resume payments. The declaration was good propaganda, but was not a major cause of international friction, as most powers had already accepted this. What did increase tension was Hitler's intention to rearm Germany. As we have seen, Hitler manipulated the reluctance of France towards embracing general disarmament to justify Germany's withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference in 1933. German military spending in the year 1934–35 increased fivefold when compared to that of 1933–34. Historian Ted Townley writes in *Hitler and the Road to War*,

'For whatever final purpose, Hitler worked at this time to create a German economy that would provide total industrial backing for the German military.'

GERMAN MILITARY EXPENDITURE	
Fiscal period	Million marks
1933–34	750
1934–35	4,093
1935–36	5,492
1936–37	10,271
1937–38	10,963
1938–39	17,247



German armed forces in 1932 and 1939.

Hitler again showed his contempt for the Versailles settlement when he withdrew Germany from the League of Nations in 1933. Leaving the League, plus open rearmament, had put Germany on a new path. The Weimar Republic had attempted to work with the international community and the League to rehabilitate Germany. Hitler's new course, by contrast, alarmed the other powers, who were still suffering the effects of the Depression and therefore had limited means to respond.

Germany's rearmament can be seen as the fundamental first step in facilitating Hitler's expansionist foreign policy. Hitler's next step was to sign the ten-year 'Non-Aggression Pact' with Poland in January 1934. Although Germany resented Poland on account of the 'Polish corridor' separating Germany from East Prussia, Hitler had gone ahead with this agreement to secure his eastern border. Some historians, for example William Shirer in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, regard this agreement as evidence of Hitler's plan to dominate Europe. The terms of the pact not only secured Germany's eastern border with Poland, it also undermined the French alliance system in Eastern Europe – the Little Entente – as it directly countered the Franco-Polish Alliance of 1925. To some extent, it also gave the impression to the international community that Hitler's intentions were ultimately peaceful.

Hitler's attention then turned to Austria. One of Hitler's stated objectives was to unify Austria with Germany, a policy outlined at some length in *Mein Kampf*. However, unification was forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles, and any attempt to achieve this might lead to confrontation with the European powers. Yet there were pro-Nazi groups in Austria, and in 1934 they murdered the Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss and attempted to seize power in a coup. Initially, Hitler saw the coup as an opportunity to obtain his goal of *Anschluss*, but was deterred when the Austrian government crushed the coup and Mussolini sent troops to the border with Austria to warn Germany off.

Some historians have focused on this episode as evidence of Hitler's 'improvisation' in foreign policy, and argue that it suggests he did not have a long-term plan. Others, however, argue that Hitler was not yet ready to pursue his expansionist ambitions. He was still developing the Nazi state within Germany.