

Outbreak of World War 2

Background: The Great Depression

- During the 1920s, after the 1919 Paris Peace Conference was a period that held that promise of new beginnings and lasting peace and cooperation between nations
- However, by 1929 events led to a rise in tensions in both Europe and the Asia-Pacific
 - One of first such events was the **Great Depression in 1929**

The Great Depression

Trade Boom (1920s)

World trade boomed in the 1920s.

- This brought prosperity and reduced international tensions
 - E.g. The Occupation of the Ruhr after US loans helped to stabilise the German economy
- However, this period of prosperity came to a end in October 1929 when the US stock market collapsed

October 1929

In October 1929, the US stock market crashed and the US economy entered a prolonged period of economic downturn.

- As a result, international trade declined sharply and many countries, including Europe, was also affected badly.
 - American bankers and businessmen recalled their loans in Europe, the economic crisis spread to Europe.
 - The United States also imported less European products, and therefore the income of European countries also decreased.

Examples of Impacts of the Great Depression

USA

- Top priority - sort out US economy
- Low priority - help sort out international disputes
- The Depression made the USA even more unwilling to support League of Nations sanctions because economic sanctions would make its own economy even worse.

Britain

- Top priority - protect the economy
- Low priority - international co-operation
- Adopted a policy of protectionism. This was achieved through tariffs (taxes on imports) in order to protect its own economy from foreign competition.
- Britain was one of the leaders of the League of Nations. But due to the Depressionm was unwilling to help sort out international disputes. For example, when Japan invaded Manchuria it did nothing.

France

- Top priority - protection from Germany
- Low priority - international co-operation
- Like most European countries, France was hit hard by the depression. Its own exports of food, wine, cars nad other goods declined.

- Became very concerned about the rise of Nazism in Germany. It began to rearm on a large scale and built a line of fortifications along the border between France and Germany (e.g. the Maginot Line)

Italy

- Top priority - resources and prestige
- Low priority - international co-operation
- Italy exported wine and food produce to the USA. Italy also produced cars and other manufactured goods. People in the USA cut back on fancy imported food during the Depression. All over the world, people stopped buying expensive goods like cars. Other states which imported Italian goods also cut back.
- As a result, Italy's economy suffered and unemployment rose
 - Italians found that their wages would buy less
- Their leader, Mussolini, had promised to make Italy a great power and build a colonial empire in Africa. By the early 1930s, many Italians believed that owning a colonial empire would be economically beneficial to the country.

Germany

- Top priority - tackle unemployment and reverse Treaty of Versailles
- Low priority - international co-operation
- Germany suffered terrible economic problems in the early 1920s. It recovered after 1924 because American banks gave loans to German businesses had to pay up.
- They began to collapse and unemployment soared to over 6 million. This was a major crisis
- Germany's democratic politicians just couldn't save the economy
 - Workers faced the humiliation of queuing up for food handouts
 - Many feared that they might starve.
 - Many middle class people were ruined
 - Banks collapsed and they lost their savings
 - Big business leaders worried that there might be a revolution in Germany.
- Almost everybody blamed the Treaty of Versailles and the reparations bill for Germany's problems
- Some German political parties (such as the Nazi party), started advocating for the expansion of German territory as a solution to some of the economic problems. These parties became popular in the wake of the Great Depression.

General Responses to the Great Depression

- The international cooperation of the 1920s was replaced by **economic nationalism**.

💡 **Economic Nationalism** - Implementation of economic policies which protected themselves but might harm other countries.

Protectionism

- Some countries (e.g. Britain, France and the USA) introduced tariffs to protect their own industries or stop imports.
 - This led to their trading partners to follow suit in retaliation
 - Overall trade volume fell.

Calling in Loans

- As the US economy struggled, US banks recalled loans
 - This led to the collapse of banks and businesses (both within the USA and other countries)
 - Caused mass unemployment

Rearmament

- Many countries (e.g. Britain, France, Italy, German, Japan, etc.) began rearming to boost industry and create jobs.

Radicalism

- In some countries, the Great Depression helped radical regimes come to power (e.g. the Nazi Party)
- In other countries, the Depression helped existing regimes to adapt more extreme and aggressive policies.

Emergence of Authoritarian Regimes

- Partially saw as a result of the Great Depression, the 1930s saw the rise of the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy

Germany

- The already weak Germany was destabilised by the Depression
 - Helped the Nazis rise to power
- The new Nazi regime wanted not only economic recovery but also...
 - Reclaim land lost under the Treaty of Versailles
 - Claim lebensraum for Germans in Eastern Europe
 - Destroy communism not only in Germany but wherever else it could be found.

Italy

- Mussolini used the Depression as an excuse to tighten his control over the country
 - Took over banks and industries
- Possessed long-held ambitions to build an Italian empire around the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa
- Seeing commonality with Nazi Germany, Mussolini increasingly sought an alliance with them
 - Alliance was formalised in 1939
- The desire of Germany and Italy to redraw their borders increased tensions and made peace fragile in the 1930s.

The Failures of the League of Nations in the 1930s

Failure of Disarmament

- One of the key aims of the League was to encourage countries to reduce their armaments.
- From as early as the 1920s, the League, along with other prominent state actors, led international talks to promote disarmament among all countries.

Washington Naval Conference, 1921

- Negotiated outside the League to limit the size and number of warships held by Britain, France, Japan, and the United States.
- Organized by the United States, which was not a League member.
- Ratio of tonnage of capital ships of Britain, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy set at 5:5:3:1:1.67:1.67.

Britain	United States	Japan	France	Italy
5	5	3	1.67	1.67

- Success.

Locarno Treaties, 1925

- Negotiated outside the League among Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.
- Germany accepted its western borders, including the demilitarization of the Rhineland.
- Weimar government agreed to settle any disputes with the above-mentioned countries through the League.
- Partial Success.

League Commission to prepare for World Disarmament Conference, 1926

- Britain and France refused to cooperate.
- Failure.

Kellogg-Briand Pact, 1928

- Negotiated outside the League among 15 countries, including the United States, France, Germany, Britain, Italy, and Japan.
- Agreement that force should not be used to settle disputes.
- No clear way to enforce the pact.
- Failure.

The World Disarmament Conference, 1932-1934

- Overall progress on disarmament was limited in the 1920s.
- By the early 1930s, increasing tensions in the world made world leaders more focused on and open to an arms race.
- The League managed to persuade the United States and almost 60 other states to attend the World Disarmament Conference in February 1932.
- The Conference focused on two agendas:
 - Limiting Offensive Weapons and
 - Dealing with Germany.

Limiting Offensive Weapons

- The Conference concentrated on trying to control the destructive power of offensive weapons.
- Resolutions were produced to prohibit the bombing of civilian populations and chemical warfare, as well as limit the size of artillery and the tonnage of tanks.
- Despite the positive start, the leaders could not agree on several matters.
- Difficulty in classifying offensive and defensive weapons.

- The resolutions passed did very little to ensure how the limitations on weapons would be achieved.
 - For example, the bombing of civilians was to be banned, but all attempts to agree to abolish planes capable of bombing were unsuccessful. Even the proposal to ban the manufacture of chemical weapons was unsuccessful.
- Individual countries used the Conference to raise their own particular issues.
 - For example, Italy demanded to have a navy the same size as that of France.

Dealing with Germany

- The biggest issue at the Conference was what to do with Germany, which had been in the League for six years.
- Most countries shared the view that the terms set out in the Treaty of Versailles should be fairer to Germany, particularly the terms limiting the size of Germany's military.
- There was disagreement on how a fairer arrangement should be achieved.
- There were two options discussed on how to make things fairer for Germany:
 1. The first option was for every country to disarm to a level that Germany had been forced to.
 2. The second option was to allow Germany to rearm to a level closer to that of the other powers.
- There was a lot of reluctance to allow either option. The experience of the disarmament attempts in the 1920s had shown that most countries would not disarm.

-
- France, which was wary of Germany due to its painful experience from WWI, pressured the League against taking up the second option.
 - **The French demanded that either France continue to have a much larger armed forces than Germany, or Britain and the United States would guarantee to fight alongside France if a war ever broke out between France and Germany.**
 - The disagreements continued.
 - **Britain and the United States were reluctant to commit themselves to guaranteeing France's future security.**

- **At the same time, Germany accused France and the other major powers of hypocrisy.**

- In July 1932, Germany put forward proposals for all countries to disarm down to its level.
- When in October 1933, the Conference failed to agree on the principle of "equality", the **Germans walked out and the Conference broke up.**

The Conference Reconvenes

- Although the Conference had broken up, the League's officials continued to work behind the scenes with Germany and the other powers.
- In December 1932, the other powers agreed to discuss equality for Germany.
 - **Germany agreed to return to discussions and the Disarmament Conference reconvened in February 1933.**
- By this time, Hitler had come to power in Germany
 - **Hitler agreed to attend the Conference and appeared to be genuinely interested in making progress on disarmament.**
 - **In reality, Hitler was pretending to engage with the other powers on the issue of disarmament while his military commanders were secretly making plans for rearmament.**
 - **In May 1933, Hitler promised not to rearm Germany if all other nations agreed to disarm in five years.**
- He was clearly trying to put pressure on the other powers, particularly France.
- The discussions continued throughout 1933 but there was little progress.

The Abyssinian Crisis, 1934-1936

- In 1935, the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, invaded Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia).

Background: Fascist Italy

- Italy had been under the control of the Fascists led by Mussolini since 1922.
 - He had long held ambitions to build an Italian empire, to bring back the glory days of the Roman Empire.
 - His view that established powers such as Britain and France were in decline was strengthened when the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933.
 - Mussolini felt that Italy had more to gain from friendship with Hitler's Germany and started to discuss an alliance.
 - **With this alliance, Mussolini became more aggressive with Italy's foreign policies.**

The Crisis Begins

- In 1896, Italian troops tried to invade Abyssinia but were defeated by a poorly equipped army of tribesmen.
 - Mussolini wanted revenge for this humiliating defeat.
- He also wanted...
 - The fertile lands and mineral wealth of Abyssinia.
 - Most importantly, he wanted glory and conquest.
 - **His style of leadership clamoured for military victories.**
 - The Abyssinian Emperor, Haile Selassie, appealed to the League for help, but was unsuccessful.
 - On the surface, Britain had the influence and resources to act decisively on Abyssinia's behalf.
 - In addition, the location of Britain's and France's colonies almost meant that both countries could send troops to defend Abyssinia.
 - However, they chose not to do so.

The Development of the Abyssinian Crisis

- In January 1935, Mussolini agreed to negotiate with the League over Abyssinia.
 - At the same time, he began moving his armed forces into Italian bases in Eritrea (in Africa) next to Abyssinia.

- While tensions between Italy and Abyssinia were escalating, Britain, France and Italy signed an agreement called the Stresa Front in April 1935.
 - It was a coalition formed to oppose Hitler's announced intention to rearm Germany, which violated the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.
- In October 1935, Mussolini's army was ready and he launched a full-scale invasion of Abyssinia.
 - Despite brave resistance, the Abyssinians were no match for the modern Italian army equipped with tanks, aeroplanes and poison gas.
- The League immediately set up a committee to discuss what sanctions to impose against Mussolini.
 - Sanctions would only work if they were imposed quickly and decisively.
 - Each delay would allow Mussolini to build up his stockpile of raw materials.
- Eventually, the League banned arms sales and all loans, as well as the export of rubber, tin and metals, to Italy.
 - It also banned all imports from Italy.
 - In February 1936, the League concluded that stopping oil sales to Italy would exhaust its supplies in two months.
 - **However, the League's delay in committing to a decision meant that it was all too late.**
 - **The United States refused to support a ban on oil sales and, instead, increased its supplies of oil to Italy.**
 - More importantly still, the Suez Canal, which was owned by Britain and France, remained open to Italy's supply ships.
- Both Britain and France were afraid that closing the canal would result in war with Italy.
 - This failure was fatal for Abyssinia.
- Only six countries officially protested against Mussolini's actions.
- **In May 1936, Italy finally conquered Abyssinia.**
 - The Abyssinian Emperor, Haile Selassie, went into exile.

The League of Nations' Loss of Credibility

- As the year wore on, there was public outcry in Britain against Mussolini.
 - Under pressure, the British Foreign Secretary, Samuel Hoare, made a speech to the League supporting collective security and the rights of small nations.
- Britain and France were anxious not to upset Mussolini because they saw him as a potential ally against Hitler's Germany.
 - As a result, there was no serious action taken by these two great powers or the League of Nations against Mussolini.
- On 4 September, after eight months of deliberation, **a committee reported to the League that neither side could be held responsible for the Wal-Wal Incident.**
 - The League put forward a plan that would give Mussolini some parts of Abyssinia.
 - **Mussolini rejected it.**
- Fearful of driving Italy into the arms of Germany, the foreign ministers of Britain and France, Samuel Hoare and Pierre Laval, secretly discussed the **Hoare-Laval Pact** with Mussolini in December 1935.
 - They wanted to give Mussolini two-thirds of Abyssinia. In return, Mussolini would call off the invasion.
 - This pact was made while the League was still discussing sanctions against Italy.
 - **Hence, when the details of the Hoare-Laval Pact were leaked to the French press, the people of France and Britain regarded the plan as an act of treachery against the League.**
- **Both Hoare and Laval were sacked and the plan was dropped.**

Outcome

- **The Abyssinian Crisis damaged the global confidence in the League for good.**
 - The leak of the Hoare-Laval Pact details damaged its reputation.
 - The failure to impose sanctions on Italy decisively led to the Italian takeover of Abyssinia.
- **Hitler was convinced that the League would not be able to hinder Germany's plan of expansion.**

- In the midst of the Abyssinian Crisis, German troops marched into the dematerialised **Rhineland in March 1936**.
- This was an act against the Treaty of Versailles but the League did nothing to stop it.
- By **November 1936, the Rome-Berlin Axis** was signed between Italy and Germany
 - The League also could do nothing
 - Its lack of authority in enforcing peacekeeping measures resulted in the collapse of collective security. This eroded its credibility and showed its ineffectiveness in resolving conflicts and maintaining world peace

Event	Impact on International Relations	Link
The World Disarmament Conference (1932-1934)	Damaged peace, collective security and the credibility of the League. Caused a lack of trust between Britain and France	The failure of the League to encourage disarmament and collective security damaged its credibility. The Conference also showed that France and Britain's interests were not fully aligned. Britain's refusal to put down guarantees for France's security further caused a lack of trust.
Abyssinian Crisis (1934-1936)	Damaged peace, collective security and the credibility of the League. Suggested Britain and France would not stand up to Hitler	The inaction of the League's two leading members to take decisive action against an aggressor reduced the League's credibility. It also showed that the League's members were interested in their own national interests instead of collective security. The reluctance of Britain and France to sanction Italy or take military action, such as the closing of the Suez Canal to Italian military shipping, emboldened Hitler as he believed that Britain and France would not intervene in any acts of aggression.

Event	Impact on International Relations	Link
Anschluss (1938)	Suggested Britain and France would not stand up to Hitler. Challenged the Treaty of Versailles	- Britain and France did not take any action against Anschluss and enforce the Treaty of Versailles. It suggested that Britain and France will not take action against German expansionism. The Treaty of Versailles prohibited a union between Germany and Austria. Anschluss, which resulted in Austria joining Germany, directly broke these terms of the Treaty of Versailles.
Munich Agreement (1938)	Worried the USSR. Caused Britain and France to be seen as untrustworthy allies	- The Munich Agreement allowed Germany to annex parts of Czechoslovakia. As the USSR was immediately to the east of Czechoslovakia, the expansion of Germany eastwards was seen as a threat to the USSR. Instead of defending the independence of Czechoslovakia, Britain and France traded Czechoslovakian land in return for peace, without consulting the Czechoslovakians. This made Britain and France appear untrustworthy.
Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (1939)	Challenged the Treaty of Versailles. Damaged peace, collective security and the credibility of the League	- The Pact enabled Hitler to invade Poland, which was against the Treaty of Versailles. The decision to sign the Pact further undermined the idea of collective security, as the USSR attempted to ensure its own safety.

Historical Development	Description	How this Development Caused the League to Lose Credibility
Non-membership of key states such as the USSR and the United States	The US Congress refused to allow the United States to join the League of Nations, while the USSR was not included in the League because it was Communist.	<p>This meant that two of the world's major powers, the United States and the USSR, were not part of the League. Along with this, a large proportion of the world's population was also not represented in the League. Without the United States in the League, economic sanctions would be difficult to enforce. Before the 1935 Neutrality Act, the United States could potentially continue to supply weapons and goods to aggressive countries even if the League imposed military or economic sanctions. The absence of the United States' military also made it difficult to take strong action against aggressive countries even if the League chose to do so as the other member states like Britain and France, severely weakened from WWI, had to bear a significant burden of being the world's policemen.</p>

Historical Development	Description	How this Development Caused the League to Lose Credibility
Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928)	This was an agreement between 65 nations not to use force to settle disputes.	There was no clear way on how to enforce the pact. It was also negotiated outside of the League of Nations, thereby undermining the League's authority and prestige as the guarantor of peace in the worle.

Historical Development	Description	How this Development Caused the League to Lose Credibility
World Disarmament Conference (1932–1934)	<p>The Conference was convened to deal with the issue of limiting offensive weapons and Germany. This was in response to the concerns over the increasing tensions in the world. The United States and almost 60 other states attended the Conference held at the League's headquarters. The Conference failed to come to any agreement over disarmament. Nations such as France, Poland, and Czechoslovakia refused to disarm due to fears of a potential German invasion. Other powers refused to disarm to the same level that Germany faced under the Treaty of Versailles. Conversely, many nations present were also reluctant to agree to German rearmament. Germany withdrew from the League of Nations while the Conference was ongoing.</p>	<p>The deadlock in negotiations showed that nations were more keen on putting their national interests ahead of world disarmament and collective security, thereby undermining the credibility of the League of Nations.</p>

Historical Development	Description	How this Development Caused the League to Lose Credibility
Abyssinian Crisis (1934–1936)	Italy launched an invasion of Abyssinia. Abyssinia appealed to the League for help.	<p>The Abyssinian Crisis damaged global confidence in the League for good. The leak of the Hoare-Laval Pact damaged the reputation of the League to be able to act against aggressor countries.</p> <p>Furthermore, the failure to impose sanctions on Italy decisively led to the Italian takeover of Abyssinia. As a result, Hitler was convinced that the League would not be able to hinder Germany's plan of expansion.</p>

Nazi Germany's Aggressive Foreign Policy

Hitler's Aims and Beliefs

- Nazi Party solutions to Germany's economic problems:
 - A massive rearmament programme
 - State control of industry and state investment in projects (e.g., road-building)
 - Overturning Treaty of Versailles (TOV) to end reparations and reclaim territories
- Hitler's foreign policy aims as outlined in Mein Kampf:
 - Abolish the TOV
 - Get lebensraum for Aryans

- Destroy Communism
- Enforce militarism (have the military dominate all aspects of the state)

Germany's Increasing Aggression, 1933-1937

- 1933: Leaving the League of Nations
- 1933-1935: Secret rearmament, no longer hidden by 1935
 - • By 1935, Hitler no longer bothered to hide rearmament e.g. Freedom to Rearm Rally in Berlin
- 1934: Leaving the League of Nations' Disarmament Conference
- 1935: Saar Plebiscite, leading to the region's return to Germany
 - Under the terms of Versailles, the coal-mining Saar region on the French and German border could hold a plebiscite on 13th January, 1935 after 15 years of League of Nations rule on who should control the region - Germany or France.
 - Hitler wanted the Saar plebiscite for 2 key reasons:
 - He wanted to show the world that German-speaking people wanted to unite together under the Nazi regime.
 - The area was rich in coalfields, which was a vital resource for industrial production and to build weaponry.
 - The result of the plebiscite was that 90 percent of the people voted to rejoin Germany.
 - Significance
 - The plebiscite was significant as it provided Hitler an excellent propaganda victory in justifying his actions in uniting all German-speaking people
 - Gained key resources to build German industry and weapons as preparation for war
- 1936: Remilitarization of the Rhineland, a gamble that went unopposed
 - The Rhineland was demilitarized by the TOV
 - In March 1936, Hitler sent troops into the Rhineland
 - It was a gamble as Germany was unprepared to face the French
 - However, France (as well as Britain and the League) were too preoccupied with the Abyssinian Crisis to intervene
- 1936: The Spanish Civil War, supported by Germany and Italy
 - A civil war between the Nationalists and the Republicans (largely leftists)

- The Nationalist leader, General Franco, had a similar ideology as Hitler and Mussolini
 - Germany and Italy supported him
 - Germany got to test out his army and the Luftwaffe
- Britain and France refused to intervene
 - Hitler increasingly believed Britain and France would not go to war to stop his aggression
 - The USSR (who supported the Republicans) increasingly felt the same
- 1936: The Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan against the Communist International
 - An agreement between Germany and Japan to oppose the Communist International (Comintern)
 - Comintern had been set up by the USSR with the goal of spreading communism by promoting uprisings
 - The signatories also agreed to not sign treaties with the USSR
- 1937: The Axis Alliance with Italy
 - Italy also signed the Anti-Comintern Pact
 - This marked the creation of the Axis Alliance

Factors Affecting Britain and France's Decision-Making in the 1930s

- **US isolationism in the 1920s and 1930s**
 - They could not count on US support against Hitler
- **Sympathy for Germany**
 - Many people in Europe (especially voters in Britain and France) thought that...
 - That TOV was too harsh
 - It was unfair that Germany had to disarm while other countries were unwilling to do so
- National Interest:
 - Britain
 - For most of the 1930s, more worried about USSR
 - Saw Germany as an buffer/ally against the USSR

- E.g. In 1935, signed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in violation of the TOV
 - Allowed Germany to build a navy up to 35% of the British navy
- France
 - Worried about Germany because of their shared border
 - Sought an alliance with Britain to counter this threat
 - Britain was unresponsive, forcing them to turn to the USSR in 1936 with the Treaty of Mutual Assistance
 - Alarmed the British and caused them to feel greater sympathy for Germany
- Misjudgment of Hitler
 - Could not see the real threat that Hitler and his ideology represented
 - Could not foresee the events that he caused (see below/pg. 135 of your textbook)

Source 4.10

Hitler had of course publicly stated his foreign policy “programme” in his book *Mein Kampf*. It is doubtful, though, whether the officials in the German Foreign Ministry had even read, let alone taken seriously, what he had written. And the officials in the French and British foreign ministries had certainly not read it or taken it seriously. It was assumed that the Nazis would be “tamed” by less radical elements inside Germany.

An adapted extract from the historian, Jeremy Noakes, writing in 1998.

Policy of Appeasement in the 1930s

Background

Instead of “getting tough” on Hitler in the 1930s, Britain and France adopted a policy known as appeasement, which involved giving in to Hitler's demands.

- In 1937, the new British PM, Neville Chamberlain, continued to pursue a policy of appeasement towards Hitler.
 - He was well aware of the threat of Hitler
 - However, realised that Britain was not yet prepared for war
 - Authorised massive spending on rearmament
 - Recognised Britain and France needed to support each other to face Hitler
 - Worked to strengthen their cooperation with each other

Anschluss with Austria, 1938

Background

- Hitler moved to unite the Germans of Austria with Germany
 - This was specifically forbidden by the TOV
 - Many Austrians wanted to be part of Hitler's new and successful Germany

What happened?

- In 1938, Hitler encouraged the Austrian Nazi Party to create disorder and agitate for union between Germany and Austria/Anschluss
- Proceeded to convince Austrian Chancellor, Kurt Schuschnigg, that only German troops could restore order

- Schuschnigg appealed to Britain and France for help
 - They did nothing
- In March 1938, Hitler moved troops into Austria
- In April 1938, Hitler held a plebiscite on Anschluss
 - 99.75% of votes were in favor
 - This was the result of voter intimidation and fraud

Consequences

- Germany's size and stature strengthened
 - Absorbed Austria's population, industry, and natural resources
 - Gained access to Austria's gold reserves
- Increased Hitler's power and standing
 - Violated TOV, but Britain and France did nothing
 - E.g. British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, even suggested to Hitler before the Anschluss that Britain would not oppose it
- Demonstrated that Britain and France found it hard to deal with a politician/government who simply did not care about the rules and traditions of international diplomacy
- They misunderstood and underestimated Hitler/Nazi Germany

Sudetenland and the Munich Agreement, 1938

Background

- Czechoslovakia's leader, Edvard Beneš, was horrified by the Anschluss
 - Feared his country would be Hitler's next target
 - Asked for *and received* promises from Britain and France that they would protect his country against Hitler

- His fears were warranted
 - The population of the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia was majority German
 - There was a small and active Nazi party
 - Similar to what happened in Austria, Hitler encouraged them to stir up trouble and demand Sudetenland be allowed to unite with Germany
- In May 1938, Hitler claimed that he would protect the Sudeten Germans
 - Threatened to invade Czechoslovakia if it did not hand over Sudetenland

Munich Agreement, September 1938

- Beneš was prepared to fight the Germans
 - He had a modern army
 - Had the support of Britain and France
- Neither Hitler nor Beneš were willing to back down
 - There were strong fears that war would break out
 - Examples
 - The British prepared for war by digging air raid shelters
 - Magazines carried advertisements for air raid protection, gas masks, etc.
 - Cards were distributed with instructions about how people could protect themselves from air raids
- By mid-September, the situation had reached a crisis point
- Chamberlain made on last effort to avoid war

Timeline

- **15 September**
 - Chamberlain flew to meet Hitler in Bavaria
 - Hitler moderated his demands
 - Only claimed parts of the Sudetenland with a German majority
 - Chamberlain convinced Hitler would be satisfied if his demands were met
- **19 September**
 - Britain and France convinced Czechoslovakia to meet Hitler's demands
- **22 September**
 - Hitler increased his demands. He now wanted the whole of the Sudetenland

- Chamberlain said Hitler was being unreasonable and requested a conference with him
- **29 September**
 - Leaders of Britain, France, Italy, and Germany met in Munich for a four-power summit (the **Munich Conference**)
 - Came up with the Munich Agreement
 - Gave in to Hitler's demands
 - Czechoslovakia and USSR not consulted
 - Hitler only had to give a pledge of peace
- **30 September**
 - The next morning, Chamberlain and Hitler published a joint declaration in which Chamberlain claimed that the Agreement would bring "peace for our time"

Reactions

- +ve
 - Media (newspapers, newsreels, etc.) presented the Agreement prevented war
 - Chamberlain was greeted by cheering crowds
- ve
 - Opinion polls in September 1938, showed that a majority of the British people did not think appeasement would stop Hitler

Invasion of Czechoslovakia, March 1939

- In October 1938, Hitler moved his troops into the Sudetenland
 - Aimed it was the end of his demands
- On 15 March 1939, German troops took over the rest of Czechoslovakia
- Reactions
 - For Chamberlain, it was a step too far
 - Unlike the Sudeten Germans, the Czechs were not separated from their homeland by the TOV
 - Believed if left unchecked, Hitler would target Poland next

- Britain and France threatened to declare war on Germany if Hitler invaded Poland

The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (1939)

Hitler's Concerns

- Hitler wanted to reclaim the Polish Corridor (Further reading (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Polish-Corridor>)) and the city of Danzig
 - Confident that the Polish forces could be defeated
- Hitler thought Britain and France would not go to war over Poland
- Hitler worried that USSR would oppose a German invasion of Poland
 - Poland bordered the USSR
 - If the USSR opposed it, there was a chance it might trigger Britain and France to do so as well
 - This would lead to a two-front war which would be disadvantageous for Germany

Stalin's Concerns

- Stalin's concerns over Hitler had grown over the 1930s.
- The USSR took steps to balance out Hitler's growing power:
 - In 1934, they joined the League of Nations (LON).
 - In 1936, they signed a Mutual Assistance Pact with France.
- Stalin saw that Britain, France, and the League had not resisted Hitler.
- His concerns spiked after the Munich Agreement.
 - He had not been consulted
 - Seemed like Britain and France were allowing Hitler to take over Eastern Europe

Signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact

- Stalin continued to attempt to negotiate an alliance with Britain and France in the first half of 1939
- However, at the same time, Stalin was also negotiating an alliance with Germany
- **On 23 August 1939, the USSR and Germany signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact**
 - Agreed not to attack each other
 - Secretly...
 - Divide Poland between them
 - USSR allowed to conquer Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia)
- In truth, neither Hitler or Stalin had any faith in the agreement
 - Stalin was just playing for time to get his armies ready to fight Hitler
 - Decided that Britain and France were too weak to help him against Hitler
 - Hitler got the guarantee he needed to invade Poland

The Invasion of Poland (1939)

Invasion of Poland

- Hitler's interest in the Polish Corridor and Danzig was due to...
 - Large German population in the area
 - Desire for a transportation line across the Polish Corridor that separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany
- Since April 1939, Germany had demanded the return of the Polish Corridor and Danzig
 - The Polish leaders rejected these demands
 - They did not trust Hitler and were even concerned about a German invasion
- Negotiations between them broke down

- **On 1 September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland**

- Hitler was confident the USSR would not oppose him because of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact
- However, Hitler miscalculated Britain and France's response
 - On 3 September 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany

- **World War 2 in Europe had begun**