

# Causes of WWII

## slide 1 Economies and Treaties

### ***Narration Script***

Only twenty years after World War I, the war to end all wars, an even bigger war started involving more countries with more casualties.

Despite the hopes for peace, the terms that the victors of World War I laid out in the Treaty of Versailles - especially those that punished Germany - were a primary cause of World War II. The treaty made Germany accept sole blame for World War I. Germany also had to pay war reparations to Britain and France, which caused extreme inflation in Germany. Hitler won supporters by criticizing the terms of the treaty. He blamed the Weimar [VY-mar] Republic for signing the treaty which stripped Germany of some territories, and put restrictions on the country's military.

The Great Depression made economic conditions worse in Germany as well as much of the world. Given the desperate situation in the country with extremely high unemployment and economic collapse, many people were drawn to extremist political movements. They hoped that radical changes might help restore some stability to the world. Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini of Italy were two fascist dictators who were able to capitalize on people's misfortune to win supporters.

Hitler and Mussolini promoted a form of extreme nationalism which blamed others for the country's problems, such as Jewish people, or neighboring countries. These dictators looked to build empires that recalled the glory days of the past, such as the Roman Empire in Italy.

Meanwhile, the rest of the industrialized world in Europe and America was focused on their own internal problems that came from the Great Depression. These countries weren't very interested in problems that didn't directly concern them. As a result, they did little to stop aggressive actions by Germany, Italy or Japan.

## slide 2 Dictators and Appeasement

### ***Narration Script***

Aggressive actions by Germany, Italy and Japan started World War II. The other powers did little in response to these aggressive acts. The League of Nations was also powerless to stop the invasions of member countries.

When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, all the League did was condemn the action. There was no threat of military force to back up its words. Japan decided to leave the League and hold onto Manchuria. It then went on to conquer more of China in 1937.

In 1935, Mussolini sent the Italian army to invade Ethiopia, a fellow member of the League of Nations. When the leader of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie [HIGHLY sah-LAS-sie <http://www.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/audio.pl?bixhai02.wav=Haile+Selassie>], protested the invasion, the League did nothing but institute some limited sanctions against Italy.

In 1938, Germany started invading and annexing neighboring countries. First, Germany took over Austria without firing a single shot. Hitler then turned to the Sudetenland [sue-DAY-tin-land], territories in Czechoslovakia where a large number German speaking people lived.

The response from the world powers was weak. Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, met with Hitler and agreed that Germany could keep its new territories after Hitler said that he wouldn't invade any more territories. Britain's policy of giving in to Germany's demands in order to avoid war is known as appeasement.

During this time, many in Europe and the United States wanted to follow an isolationist approach toward foreign policy. Isolationism promotes the idea that countries focus on their own problems rather than get involved in issues in other countries. Since the border issues in Europe, Africa and China were so far from the U.S., isolationists argued these weren't America's problems and that the politicians should focus on fixing the economic problems instead.

There were others who opposed war for moral reasons. After World War I, some in the U.S. and Europe argued that the countries should not go to war because modern war was so violent and savage. This policy is known as pacifism.

[Image courtesy of German Federal Archives]

## **slide 3 Sudetenland Crisis**

### ***Narration Script***

In 1938, after taking control of Austria, Hitler continued his plans for expanding Germany. He demanded that Czechoslovakia give up control of the Sudetenland [sue-DAY-tin-land], territories inside Czechoslovakia that contained large numbers of ethnic Germans. This demand pushed Europe to the brink of war.

In order to defuse the situation, the major European powers met in Munich, Germany to discuss Hitler's demands. Hitler assured Britain's prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, that the Sudetenland would be his last demand and that he would not invade the rest of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain believed Hitler, and convinced France to appease Germany in hopes that the countries could avoid war.

The Munich agreement was signed by Nazi Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy. Czechoslovakia didn't even have a seat at the conference. Having sold out Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain famously declared that Europe had achieved "peace for our time."

Hitler saw Chamberlain's surrender to his demands as weakness, and six months later, invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia. The failures of appeasement to curb Hitler's aggressions became clear to everyone, and Europe began to search for new ways to contain Nazi Germany.

## **slide 4 Nazi-Soviet Pact**

### ***Narration Script***

In the Spring of 1939, Hitler demanded the return of the Polish Corridor, land taken from Germany after World War I.

Britain and France warned Germany that this time there would be no appeasement, and that they would defend Polish territory. Hitler, not willing to back down, began to prepare for war. With the threat of war near, Hitler did not want to fight a war on two fronts as Germany had during World War I. Fighting against the Russians and the Western powers had led to defeat in that war. Hitler wanted to remove the Soviet Union as a potential threat in the east.

Germany signed an agreement with the Soviet Union known as the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Under the terms of the agreement, each country pledged not to attack the other. In addition, the pact secretly divided Poland and parts of Northern and Eastern Europe between the Soviet Union and Germany.

Although fascism and communism were on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, Hitler and Stalin were still able to work out an agreement that benefited both countries. This pact was a shock to the rest of the world since Hitler's hatred of communism and the Soviet Union was well known.

## **slide 4 Blitzkrieg**

### ***Narration Script***

On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland using a combination of planes and tanks known as a "blitzkrieg" [blitz-kreeg] or lightning war. Poland was easily defeated by Germany's stunning military strength. Britain and France responded by declaring war on Germany, but sent no troops to Poland's aid. The war in Europe had begun. On September 17, the Soviet Union invaded the eastern half of Poland.

Germany wouldn't fight Britain or France on the battlefield for six months. Meanwhile the Soviet Union invaded Finland and other territories in Northern Europe, while Germany invaded the Northern European countries of Denmark and then Norway easily defeating both.

The threat of total war was on the horizon, and the British turned towards a new leader they felt was up to the task. Neville Chamberlain resigned as prime minister and was replaced by Winston Churchill, a man who had long urged standing up to Hitler.