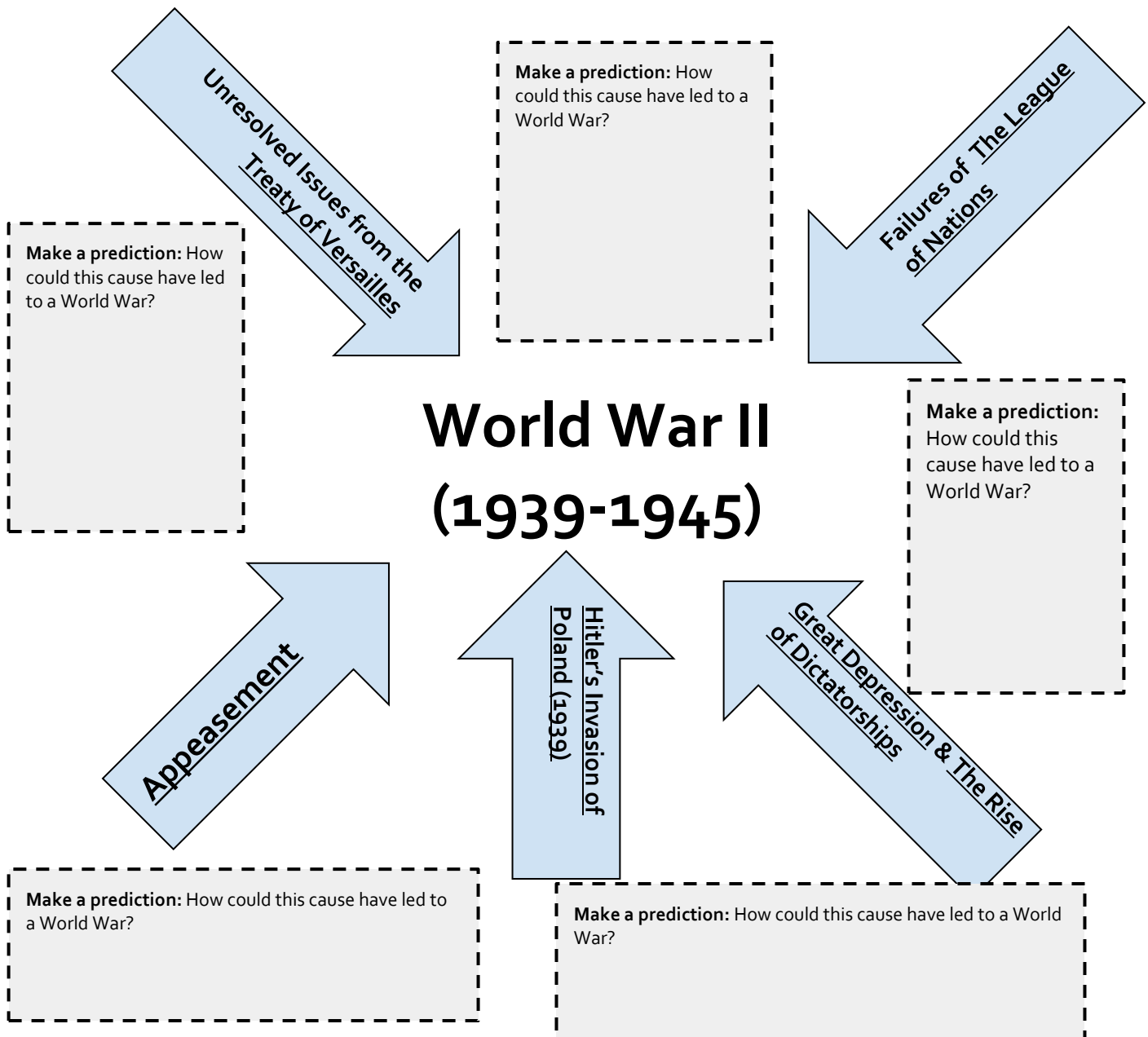


# What Factors Caused World War II to Come About?

World War II was a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945 involving over 30 countries. During the war, two opposing military alliances formed: the Allies and the Axis. World War II launched countries into a state of total war, and it became the deadliest conflict in human history with the loss of an estimated 50 to 85 million lives. Mass death was caused by the Holocaust and the atomic bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Watch this [History Channel Video on WWII](#) then answer the questions below about WWII.

Even though World War II began 21 years after the end of World War I, some historians believe that the two wars were part of one vast global conflict. Why do the historians in this clip argue that the wars were connected?



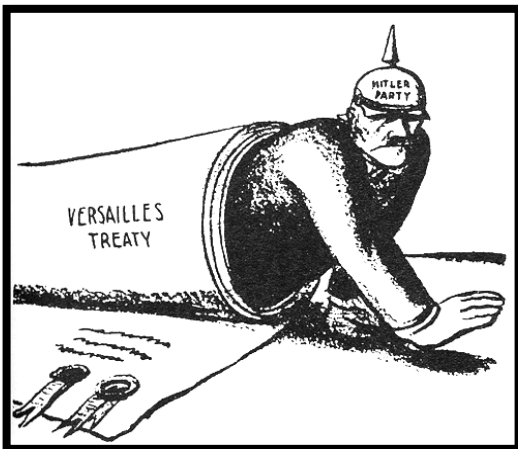
## THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE RISE OF DICTATORS (1920s)

One major cause of the global Great Depression was the American Wall Street Crash of October 1929.

America had given the Weimar Republic huge loans in 1924 to help with reparation payments. However, after the Wall Street crash, America needed these loans repaid to assist its troubled economy. Because Germany lost its loans from America, it was unable to make reparation payments. Germany's failure to make reparation payments meant that France and Britain were unable to make their loan payments. Throughout the world, trade began to slow down and production decreased. The Wall Street Crash had a ripple effect throughout the world that resulted in high unemployment throughout Europe. Unemployment forced many Europeans, especially in Germany, to rely on soup kitchens and other government support.

European governments seemed unable to handle the crisis. The traditional approaches to handling economic crises seemed to only cause more problems. With the current governments unable to ease the pain and suffering of unemployment and inflation, Europeans were drawn to **totalitarian** leaders who promised economic recovery. **Totalitarianism** is a system of government in which one party tries to rule with complete control over every aspect of the lives of its citizen. There have been a number of **totalitarian** rulers in history. While they all try to run their **totalitarian states** with complete control over the people that live in them, they often have different **ideologies** [beliefs] that guide their decisions. For example, the first totalitarian ruler you learned about, **Joseph Stalin**, was a **Communist**. He used totalitarianism to make Russia into the first state inspired by Karl Marx's ideas. **Adolf Hitler** and **Benito Mussolini** were other totalitarian rulers influenced by an ideology called **fascism**. Fascists also wanted complete control over their countries. While these totalitarian leaders in Europe were motivated by different ideologies, they were all deeply **nationalist** and **militaristic**, believing that they needed to fight for the survival and superiority of their nations while building up a strong military that could defeat other nations that may have attempted to take away their power. In Japan, **Emperor Hirohito** emerged as a nationalist and militaristic leader fixated on overseas expansion.

Together, Joseph Stalin (Russia), Adolf Hitler (Germany), Benito Mussolini (Italy) and Emperor Hirohito (Japan) were all **dictators** or rulers who have complete control over their countries. These dictators also aggressively sought control over other nations.



### Check for Understanding:

1. What caused the rise of dictators during the interwar period? What was the main focus of these dictators?

### Synthesis:

2. How could these dictators have caused the beginning of World War II in 1939?

What is the main idea of this cartoon?

## **AGGRESSION AND FAILURES OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS (1931-1939)**

The Treaty of Versailles included the planned formation of the League of Nations, an international forum and an international collective security arrangement. The nations that joined the League of Nations agreed to settle disputes rather than go to war. The **League of Nations** was set up after World War I to keep the peace, however, the U.S. did not join and other nations were too concerned with their own problems to take on global peace. When an issue of global peace did arise, the League of Nations did not have the power to do anything about it.

In the early 1930s, the invasion of Manchuria and Abyssinia (current-day Ethiopia) destroyed people's belief in the ability of the League to stop wars or keep any kind of peace. In both situations, the League acted slowly and made poor decisions about how to suppress aggressive nations. In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, a Northeastern region of China. The Chinese called on the League of Nations to condemn the act and stop the Japanese, but the League did not act and the Japanese left the League of Nations. In 1935, Italy, under the leadership of fascist leader Benito Mussolini, invaded Abyssinia (current-day Ethiopia) using poison gas. The Ethiopians called on the League of Nations to condemn the invasion. Instead, Britain and France signed a secret pact to give Abyssinia to Italy. By 1936, Italy had conquered Abyssinia and in 1937, Italy left the League.

While Manchuria and Abyssinia were being invaded, Hitler announced that Germany was leaving the League and in 1935, Hitler broke the Treaty of Versailles and started rearming Germany. The League calls a Disarmament Conference but it failed and Germany continued to arm. In 1936, in defiance of the League of Nations, Germany began to recapture territories lost under the Treaty of Versailles including the Rhineland. In 1938, Germany informed the League that in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany and Austria were uniting.

There were many effects of the League of Nations failures. First, small nations soon learned that they could not expect protection from the League of Nations and that aggressive totalitarian states could act without consequence. Second, the League of Nations inability to act and their slowness made the League appear incompetent, scared and ineffective. Third, by the 1930s, the four major powers - Japan, Italy, Britain and France - all betrayed the League's goals. Fourth, because Britain and France knew the League could not stop aggressive nations, they instead followed the policy of **appeasement** or giving Hitler what he wanted to stop Germany from going to war. This policy allowed Hitler to quickly advance with his plans.

1. How did the League of Nations respond to the crisis in Manchuria (1931) and Abyssinia (1935)?
2. How did the League of Nations respond to Hitler's violation of the Treaty of Versailles?
3. What was the purpose of the League of Nations after World War I?
4. Did the League of Nations meet its goals? Explain.
5. How could the failures of the League of Nations have led to the beginning of World War II in 1939?

## **APPEASEMENT (1935-1939): What is appeasement? Why did leaders take this route?**

In the 1930s, when Britain and France knew the League could not stop aggressive nations, they instead followed the policy of **appeasement** or the policy of giving aggressive or enemy nations what they want in order to avoid conflict. The term is most often applied to the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's actions towards Nazi Germany between 1935 and 1939. There are several reasons why several Western democracies like Britain and France appeased Hitler. First, the British were not prepared to go to war and wanted to avoid war at all costs. Additionally, having remembered the slaughter of World War I, many leaders thought another world war would destroy civilization. Finally, some thought that Hitler's complaints and ideas were reasonable. From 1935 until 1938, Britain and France gave Hitler what he wanted such as land, control over nations, and the freedom to remilitarize because they assumed that if they gave Hitler what he wanted, he'd eventually stop and war could be avoided. Instead, this policy of **appeasement** empowered Hitler to want more and take more. The greatest example of this appeasement policy is the **Munich Agreement**.

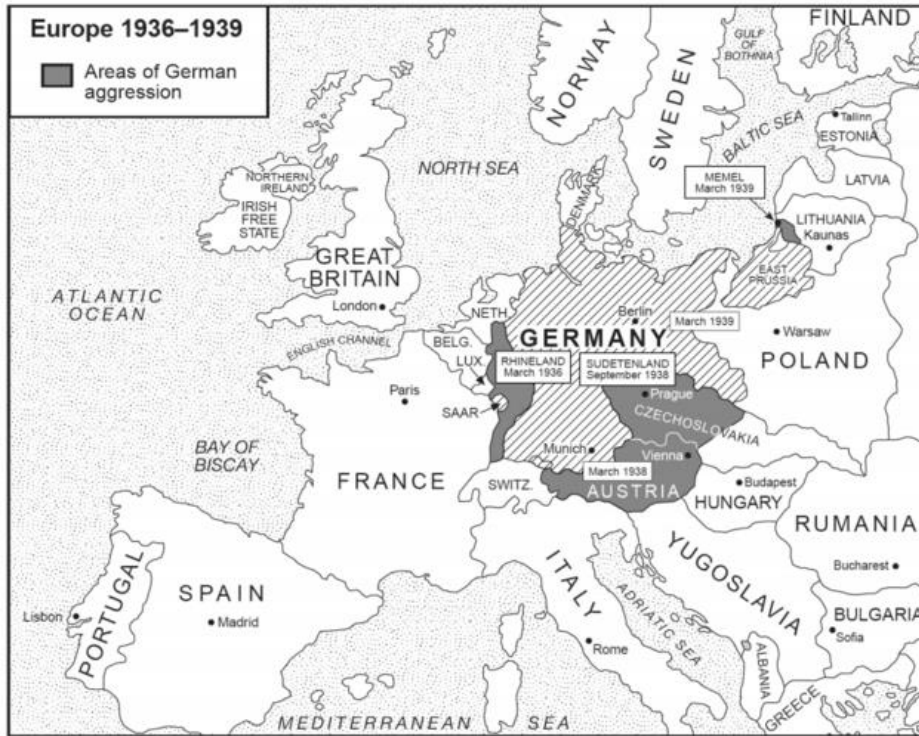
<b>1. What is appeasement?</b>	<b>2. Which nations appeased Hitler and Nazi Germany?</b>	<b>3. Why did these nations appease Hitler and Nazi Germany?</b>
<b>4. What do you predict are the dangers of appeasement? What are the possible benefits?</b>		

Hitler wanted to unite all German-speaking people into the Third Reich [Nazi Germany] and he began on the road to create a "living space" for German in Eastern Europe. To create the "living space" for Germany, Hitler believed that he should do whatever was necessary. One of his first steps in creating this "living space" was the **Anschluss** or union between Austria and Germany in 1938. Even though the Anschluss violated the Treaty of Versailles, Western democracies did nothing to stop Hitler. Having built confidence that he could not be stopped, Hitler turned to Czechoslovakia. In western Czechoslovakia, there was a region called **Sudetenland** where there were German-speaking people he believed needed to be reunited with their German homeland. Britain and France were not willing to go to war so a deal was reached on September 30 between Adolf Hitler, Neville Chamberlain (Britain), Benito Mussolini (Italy), and Édouard Daladier (France) called the **Munich Agreement**. The Munich Agreement permitted German annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland. Czechoslovakia was informed by Britain and France that they could either fight Germany alone or surrender to Germany. The Czechoslovakian government agreed to abide by the agreement because they knew they could not fight Hitler alone since Britain and France were unwilling to help them fight. The settlement gave Germany the Sudetenland and control over the rest of Czechoslovakia as long as Hitler promised to go no further.

**5. What did Hitler want? How did he go about achieving his goals?**

**6. What did Western democracies do in response to the Anschluss? The annexation of Czechoslovakia? What message might this send to Hitler?**

7. How is the Munich Agreement an example of appeasement?



Source: The History Department at the United States Military Academy (adapted)

8. Based on the information provided by this map, how did adopting the policy of appeasement at the Munich Conference in September 1938 change Europe?

After the signing of Munich Agreement, Chamberlain returned to Britain and announced, "My good friends, for the second time in our history, a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honor. I believe it is peace for our time."

9. Why do you think Chamberlain was so excited after the Munich Agreement? How might other nations have felt about the Munich Agreement? Why?

10. If you were Chamberlain, would you have signed the Munich Agreement? Explain.

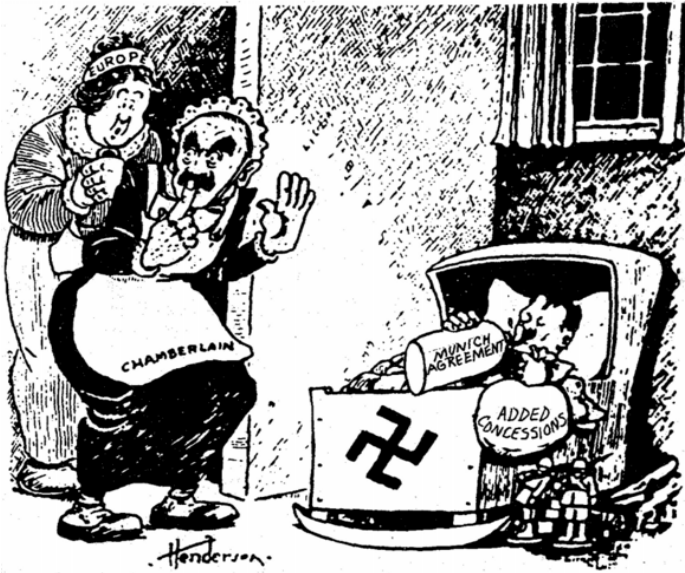
However Winston Churchill, a British statesmen and staunch opponent of Chamberlain's appeasement of Adolf Hitler, delivered a speech to the House of Commons in October 1938 where he stated,

I will, therefore, begin by saying the most unpopular and most unwelcome thing. I will begin by saying what everybody would like to ignore or forget but which must nevertheless be stated, namely, that we have sustained a total and unmitigated defeat, and that France has suffered even more than we have. [...] I venture to think that in the future the Czechoslovak State cannot be maintained as an independent entity. You will find that in a period of time which may be measured by years, but may be measured only by months, Czechoslovakia will be engulfed in the Nazi regime. [...] we are in the presence of a disaster of the first magnitude which has befallen Great Britain and France. Do not let us blind ourselves to that. It must now be accepted that all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will make the best terms they can

with the triumphant Nazi Power. The system of alliances in Central Europe upon which France has relied for her safety has been swept away, and I can see no means by which it can be reconstituted. [...] This is only the beginning of the reckoning. This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time.

11. What did Winston Churchill fear the impact of the Munich Agreement would be?

A



"SHH-HH! HELL BE QUIET NOW—MAYBE!"

B

'Remember . . . One More Lollypop, and Then You All Go Home!'



C

Summarize the main idea of each cartoon.

A)

B)

C)

STEPPING STONES TO GLORY



Source: David Low, *Evening Standard*, July 8, 1936 (adapted)