German troops march into Poland following the start of hostilities on 1 September 1939

### 2.5 German expansion, 1938–1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anschluss declared with Austria after German troops march into Austria</td>
<td>1938 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany occupies the rest of Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>1939 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania gives up the port of Memel to Germany</td>
<td>31 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscription introduced in Britain</td>
<td>27 April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-French mission to Moscow</td>
<td>12 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Polish Treaty</td>
<td>24 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain and France declare war on Germany</td>
<td>1 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany invades Poland</td>
<td>3 September</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Sudeten crisis
Anglo–French guarantee of Poland
The Pact of Steel
Nazi-Soviet Pact

### Conceptual understanding

**Key concepts**
- Causation
- Change
- Perspective

**Key questions**
- Examine the ways in which Hitler went further than challenging the post-war settlement after 1937.
- To what extent was Hitler successful in carrying out his foreign policy aims?
- Discuss the consequences of Hitler’s actions for the international situation.

Following the shake-up of his military command in 1937 after the Hossbach Conference, Hitler was in a position to start taking more risks in his foreign policy. The first of these was the takeover of Austria; the next was the takeover of Sudetenland. These actions completed the revision of the post-war settlement and also put Hitler in a position to pursue his goal of Lebensraum in the East.
CHAP TER 2.5: GERMAN EXP AN SI ON, 1938–1940

Challenging the post-war settlement after 1937

Anschluss, 1938

Between 1938 and 1939, Hitler was able to achieve the aims that he had set out at the Hossbach Conference in 1937: the annexation of Austria and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. However, this was not achieved in the way that Hitler had anticipated; indeed, historian Alan Bullock sees Anschluss as “a striking example” of Hitler’s ability to combine “consistency in aim, calculation and patience in preparation with opportunism, impulse and improvisation in execution” (Bullock, 1967: 204).

Despite his failure to take Austria in 1934, Hitler had already made much progress in establishing Nazi influence in the country. In July 1936, an Austro-German agreement had been signed, which agreed the following:

- Germany reaffirmed its recognition of Austria’s independence.
- Both powers agreed not to interfere in each other’s internal affairs.
- Austria would conduct a foreign policy consistent with it being a “German state”.

In addition, secret clauses gave prominent Austrian Nazis, such as Arthur Seyss-Inquart, a role in the government.

However, in 1938 the opportunity to take over Austria directly arose due to the actions of Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg. Schuschnigg was alarmed by the activities of the Austrian Nazis and he requested an interview with Hitler. However, when Schuschnigg arrived at the meeting in Berchtesgaden on 12 February 1938, Hitler launched into an attack on Austria:

*Hitler: “The whole history of Austria is just one interrupted act of high treason. That was so in the past, and is no better today. The historical paradox must now reach its long-overdue end. And I can tell you here and now, Herr Schuschnigg, that I am absolutely determined to make an end of all this. The German Reich is one of the Great Powers, and nobody will raise his voice if it settles its border problems … Who is not with me will be crushed … I have chosen the most difficult road that any German ever took …”*

*Schuschnigg: “Herr Reichkanzler, I am quite willing to believe it … We will do everything to remove obstacles to a better understanding, as far as possible …”*

*Hitler: “That is what you say, Herr Schuschnigg. But I am telling you that I am going to solve the so-called Austrian problem one way or the other … I have only to give the order and your ridiculous defence mechanism will be blown to bits …”*

Chancellor Schuschnigg’s recollection of the conversations at Berchtesgaden, 12 February 1938, written shortly afterwards from memory.

Class discussion

Discuss the events that were happening in Asia at this time. What expansionist moves had Japan made by early 1938? Do you think events in Asia had any influence on the international response to German expansion?
Communication skills

Second question – 4 marks

With reference to its origin, purpose and content, assess the value and limitations of Schuschnigg’s account of his meeting with Hitler for historians studying the Austrian crisis of 1938.

Examiner’s hint:

*Here are some points that you could consider in your answer:*

**Values**

- A value of the origin is that Schuschnigg was present at the meeting and so would have first-hand knowledge of what was said.
- Schuschnigg wrote the conversation down soon after the meeting so it would have been fresh in his mind.
- The purpose is of value as Schuschnigg made a record of the meeting which he saw as important.

**Limitations**

- Schuschnigg’s account was written afterwards from memory, so he is unlikely to have been able to remember the conversation so precisely as it is here.
- His purpose would be to gain sympathy for his treatment, so it is possible that he might want to exaggerate Hitler’s attack on Austria.
- Certainly, the language used by Hitler here is very aggressive in contrast to Schuschnigg’s very reasonable tone which could support the idea that he is exaggerating.

After being submitted to two hours of abuse, Schuschnigg was forced to agree to a list of demands that included releasing all imprisoned pro-Nazi agitators, lifting the ban against the Nazi Party and appointing Seyss-Inquart as interior minister. Pro-Nazis were also to be made the ministers of war and of finance, and the economic systems of the two countries were to be assimilated. These demands would effectively end Austrian independence; Schuschnigg was told that if he did not agree, Hitler would march into Austria.

Schuschnigg attempted a desperate last action: he announced a plebiscite for 13 March 1938, in which Austrians were to vote on whether or not they wanted a “free and German, independent and social, Christian and united Austria”. Austrians could only answer “yes” or “no”; given the wording, along with the fact that Schuschnigg’s own political party was in charge of the plebiscite, there was a good chance that a Yes vote could be secured. This would then give him a chance to break free of his agreement with Hitler.

Hitler, therefore, decided to act before this could happen. Mussolini gave his assurances that he would not object to Anschluss and Hitler mobilized his army. When Schuschnigg found that no help was coming from Italy, Britain or France, he resigned. Hitler marched into Austria on 12 March 1938.
On 13 March, apparently in a spur of the moment decision following an emotional visit to his home town of Linz, Hitler announced the incorporation of Austria into the Reich. This was subsequently confirmed by 99% of the population in a plebiscite on 10 April.

Historian Klaus Fischer sums up the impact of Anschluss:

*The Anschluss and the methods that brought it about had far-reaching consequences. Hitler had gambled successfully again. He became convinced that his strategy of ruthless power politics had been vindicated and that it was the only effective policy against his war-weary and vacillating opponents. Aside from reinforcing Hitler’s belief in the effectiveness of international blackmail and intimidation, the Anschluss also had far-reaching consequences in the field of diplomacy. It promoted the friendship of the two Fascist tyrants – Hitler and Mussolini, and this further polarised European powers. Another consequence of the Anschluss was that Germany’s strategic position was greatly enhanced. With Vienna at his disposal Hitler had acquired direct access to the whole of south-eastern Europe. From Vienna it was only a footstep to Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia.* — Fischer, 1995

### Thinking and communication skills

Use Fischer’s analysis of Anschluss to add detail to your own copy of this mind map.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Germany's strategic position</th>
<th>The impact of Anschluss</th>
<th>Hitler’s position in Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changing international alignments</td>
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</table>

### Communication skills


Watch this Pathé News clip of Hitler entering Austria.

According to the commentary, what made it hard for anyone (inside or outside of Austria) to oppose this move?
The Sudeten crisis

*Hitler’s action against Czechoslovakia was a virtuoso performance, diminished only by the fact that his antagonists made things easier for him than he deserved.* — Craig, 1978

After the success of annexing Austria, Hitler turned his attention to Czechoslovakia. There were several reasons for this:

- Hitler considered Slavs to be *untermenschen* (racially and socially inferior).
- Many Czechs had resisted Austrian rule in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire and had fought for Russia during the First World War, rather than for Austria.
- Czechoslovakia was the only successful independent state created by the Versailles Settlement; it consisted of many different peoples and had therefore proved that ethnically diverse people could live together.
- One of the ethnic groups in the new Czechoslovakia was German. These Germans had formally lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and now lived in the area known as the Sudetenland, which bordered Germany (see its location on the map above).
- Czechoslovakia was an enthusiastic supporter of the League of Nations.
- Czechoslovakia was allied to France and Russia.

### Thinking and social skills

*In pairs, consider how each of the bullet points above would contribute to Hitler’s hostile attitude towards Czechoslovakia.*

### The Sudeten Germans

The Sudetenland – a mountainous area, rich in mineral resources – had been given to Czechoslovakia in order to give the new state a strong frontier and to ensure its prosperity. The Czechs had then further strengthened this frontier by building defences. In addition, Czechoslovakia had a strong arms industry and a well-organized army.
However, the Sudeten Germans themselves, some 3.5 million people, had not accepted their position in Czechoslovakia. As part of the former Austrian Imperial ruling nation, they resented their loss of status and regarded themselves as victims of Czech discrimination. With the impact of the Great Depression and high unemployment, their sense of grievance grew.

The leader of the Sudeten Germans, Konrad Heinein, became the mouthpiece for Sudeten discontent and for demands to the Czech government for self-government. He led the Sudeten German Party, which, from 1935, was funded by Nazi Germany. Hitler encouraged Heinein to make continual demands on the Czech government and to keep up a relentless programme of agitation and subversion. On 24 April 1938, Heinein presented the Czech government with his Eight Demands in the form of the Karlsbad Programme; these demands included autonomy and various special rights.

Initially, however, Hitler was reluctant to use force against Czechoslovakia. He told Heinein that he would solve the Sudeten issue “in the not too distant future”, but did not commit himself to any clear plan on how this was to be achieved. In addition, many of Hitler’s generals warned him that Germany was not ready for a war at this stage.

The May Crisis, 1938

Hitler changed his mind with regard to taking action against Czechoslovakia as a result of the so-called May Crisis. On 20 May, rumours started circulating that the Germans were making military preparations near to the Czech border. As a result, the Czech government ordered partial mobilization, and Britain and France sent warnings to Germany.

In fact, the rumours were unfounded and Hitler had to tell the powers involved that no such preparations to attack Czechoslovakia were underway. He found this action humiliating, as it looked as though he had responded to British and French threats. On 28 May, in what was known as Operation Green, Hitler told his generals: “It is my unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future”.

Throughout the summer of 1938, tensions increased in the Sudetenland as the Sudeten Germans, on instructions from Hitler, increased their violence against the Czech government. On 5 September, the Czech President Edvard Beneš agreed to all demands of the Sudeten Germans for self-government. However, Heinein was told by Hitler to reject this offer, thus proving that Hitler was interested only in conquest and not in justice for the Sudeten Germans. Meanwhile, the German press whipped up a frenzy of anti-Czech feeling by showing pictures and film footage of the apparent ill-treatment of Sudeten Germans.
Thinking and communication skills

Speech made by Hitler on 12 September 1938 at the annual Nuremberg Rally.

I am speaking of Czechoslovakia. This is a democratic State founded on democratic lines by forcing other nationalities without asking them into a structure manufactured by Versailles. As good democrats they began to oppress and mishandle the majority of the inhabitants ... If this were a matter foreign to us ... we would regard the case as so many others, merely as an interesting illustration of the democratic conception of self-determination, and simply take note of it. But it is something most natural which compels us Germans to take an interest in this problem. Among the nationalities being suppressed in this State there are 3,500,000 Germans. That is about as many persons of our race as Denmark has inhabitants ... That conditions in this nation are unbearable is generally known. 3,500,000 people were robbed in the name of a certain Mr Wilson of their right to self-determination. Economically these people were deliberately ruined and afterwards handed over to a slow process of extermination. The misery of the Sudeten Germans is without end. They are being oppressed in an inhuman and intolerable manner and treated in an undignified way ...

This may be a matter of indifference to the democracies ... but I can only say to the representatives of the democracies that it is not a matter of indifference to us, and I say that if these tortured creatures cannot obtain rights and assistance by themselves they can obtain both from us ...

We can quite understand that the French and British defend their interests in the world. I can assure the statesmen in Paris and London that there are also German interests which we are determined to defend in all circumstances ... You will understand that a Great Power cannot suddenly submit ... to such a base attack ... What the Germans demand is the right of self-determination which other nations possess ... if the Democracies, however, should be convinced that they must in this case protect with all their means the oppressors of the Germans, then this will have grave consequences.

In pairs, read Hitler’s speech and consider what evidence this document provides of:

- Hitler’s political views
- Hitler’s tactics with regard to taking over the Sudetenland
- the nature of Nazi propaganda.

Hitler’s speech at the Nuremberg Rally caused more unrest in the Sudetenland, but this was brought under control by the Czech government, which declared martial law.

Communication skills

Go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=hprV2n0Rvbc, or search for “The German people persecuted at Sudetenland”.

Watch this German propaganda film. According to the film, how are the Sudeten Germans being persecuted?
Chamberlain’s intervention

It was at this point that Britain decided to act. The full reasons and nature of this involvement are discussed in more detail in the next chapter. However, Chamberlain desperately wanted to avoid a war, and so now flew three times to meet Hitler to try to make a deal over the Sudetenland.

Berchtesgaden, 15 September 1938

At this meeting, it was agreed that the Sudeten German areas of Czechoslovakia should be transferred to Germany. Chamberlain persuaded his Cabinet and the French to agree to this deal. The Czechs finally agreed after two days of persuasion.

Godesberg, 22–23 September 1938

Chamberlain flew to Godesberg to tell Hitler the good news, but Hitler was furious. He wanted an excuse for a war with Czechoslovakia, not a peaceful handover of the Sudetenland. He insisted that the demands of the Hungarians and the Poles for territory in Czechoslovakia should also be met, and that German troops should be allowed to occupy the Sudetenland on 28 September.

It now seemed as though war was inevitable. The Czechs rejected Hitler’s terms and the French said they would support Czechoslovakia. As mentioned previously, the Czechs had good defences and a strong army. They hoped that with the help of their allies, France and the Soviet Union, they could resist a German attack.
Munich, 29 September 1938

With Britain and France now showing that they were prepared to fight, and with his own generals pointing out that Germany was not yet ready for war, Hitler agreed to a further conference. Mussolini stepped in as a mediator to prevent war, and a Four Power Conference was held in Munich. Here, a plan presented by Mussolini (though written by Hitler!) was agreed on.

The plan included the following points.

- The German occupation of the Sudetenland would take place by 1 October and an international commission would determine a provisional new frontier by 10 October. The international commission would also supervise plebiscites in areas of dispute.
- Czechs would be allowed to leave and Germans allowed to join the Sudeten territories (neither the plebiscites nor the transfer of populations actually happened).
- Poland was to be given Teschen.
- Hungary was to get South Slovakia.
- Germany, along with the other powers, guaranteed the independence of the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Neither the Czech President, Beneš nor the Soviet leader, Stalin were invited to the Munich Conference. The Czechs were told that if they resisted this agreement they would receive no help from Britain or France, even though France had guaranteed the Czech borders at Locarno. The Czechs therefore had no option but to agree. Beneš resigned a few days later.

Following the conference, Chamberlain got Hitler to sign a statement in which he agreed to settle all matters of international interest through consultation. Hitler, however, was determined not to be deprived of his war against Czechoslovakia. On 21 October, he gave orders for the “liquidation of the remainder of the Czech state”.

Source skills


Munich seemed to convince Hitler that he could do no wrong, and his policy now betrayed an impatience that had not characterised it earlier. In his search for new triumphs, economic factors no longer had the power to restrain him, for it was clear that the country’s readiness for war was as good as it could be without measures of domestic discipline that he was disinclined to take; and it seemed possible, in any case, that conquests might repair deficiencies. Moreover, the acceleration of Hitler’s campaign against the Jews at the end of 1938 contributed to the mounting pace of his external policy. One
of the complaints that he made against the government of Czechoslovakia was that “the Jews in Czechoslovakia were still poisoning the nation” against Germany and would have to be dealt with. As he turned to new objectives, it is clear that the conquest of space and the destruction of Jewry were inextricably connected in his thoughts.

First question, part a – 3 marks
According to Craig, what was the impact of the Munich Conference on Hitler?

Beyond the Treaty of Versailles: The liquidation of Czechoslovakia

Communication skills

As a result of the Munich Conference, Czechoslovakia lost 70% of its heavy industry, a third of its population and both the natural mountainous defences and the man-made fortifications of the Sudetenland. Slovakia and Ruthenia were given self-government for internal affairs, though were still ultimately controlled from Prague.

Clearly, Hitler saw the Munich Agreement as “a stepping stone to the liquidation of the Czech state” (Stackelberg, 1999: 173). From early 1939, Hitler encouraged the Slovaks to cause disruption and to ask for complete independence. He was willingly helped in this by Father Jozef Tiso, who was head of the fascist Slovak People’s Party.

As with Austria, Hitler was given the excuse to directly get involved when the new Czech President, Emil Hachá, moved troops into Slovakia to crush this agitation. Prompted by Hitler, Tiso proclaimed full independence for Slovakia and asked for German protection.
In the hope of saving Czechoslovakia, Hachá now asked to see Hitler. This, of course, was a mistake; Hachá was forced to sign over Bohemia and Moravia to Hitler.

On 15 March 1939, German troops occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia. On 16 March, Bohemia and Moravia were declared a protectorate of Germany; Slovakia was to be an independent state under the protection of Germany and Ruthenia was occupied by Hungarian troops.

This action led to a change in British policy towards Germany. On 18 March, Chamberlain told the British Cabinet that “no reliance could be placed on any of the assurances given by the Nazi leaders” (see page 223).

**German expansion: Poland**

It was now clear that Hitler’s next target would be Poland. Poland had been dismantled as a country in the 18th century and partitioned between Prussia, Russia and the Austrian Empire. However, following Wilson’s aims of self-determination at Versailles, it had been recreated as a nation. It was this part of the Treaty of Versailles that was probably most resented by the Germans, as West Prussia had been given to Poland to allow it access to the sea, thereby splitting East Prussia off from the rest of Germany. This piece of land, known as the Polish Corridor, also included the city of Danzig, which became a “free city” run by the League of Nations, allowing both Poland and Germany to use it as a sea port.

Less than a week after the occupation of Prague, the Germans proposed to Poland that Danzig should be returned to Germany, and that Germany should have direct access to East Prussia via a German-controlled road and rail link. This was actually a more legitimate demand than the German claim to the Sudetenland, which had not been part of Germany before the First World War. However, Poland’s foreign minister Colonel Beck refused, seeing this as the start of an attack on Polish territory.

**Britain’s guarantee to Poland**

In March 1939, Hitler asked the Lithuanian government to hand over Memel. Lithuania was a Baltic state that had been made independent from Russia in 1919; Memel was a city and strip of land bordering East Prussia that had a substantial German population. Lithuania was in no position to stand up to Hitler and the land was handed over four days later.
Britain now decided to act and, on 30 March, a guarantee was offered to Poland to give help in the event of a German attack:

In the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty’s Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power. They have given the Polish Government an assurance to this effect.

I may add that the French Government have authorised me to make it plain that they stand in the same position in this matter as do His Majesty’s Government.

The Anglo-Polish Treaty failed to make Hitler more cautious in his actions. Indeed, he was furious about this opposition to his plans, commenting, “I’ll cook them a stew that they’ll choke on”. Two days after the British guarantee to Poland, Hitler responded by declaring the Anglo-German Naval Agreement invalid and ending the 1934 Non-Aggression Pact with Poland. He then ordered his Chief of Staff, Keitel, to prepare for the attack on Poland. This was known as Operation White, and the plan was for a limited war on Poland rather than for a wider war involving Britain and France.

**Changing international alignments: The Pact of Steel, May 1939**

**Pact of Steel**

International tensions continued to rise with Mussolini’s invasion of Albania (see page 147). Although this action was caused by Mussolini’s attempt to show his independence of Hitler and to increase his own international importance, to Britain and France this looked like a coordinated action between the dictatorships. Thus, Britain and France immediately issued guarantees to both Greece and Romania.

The Germans supported Mussolini’s action in Albania, and Mussolini found that he needed Hitler’s support given the hostile reaction of Britain and France. He thus agreed to sign the Pact of Steel with Germany, whereby each power agreed to come to the aid of the other if it became involved in hostilities “contrary to its wishes and desires”. However, Mussolini was wary of getting involved in a full-scale conflict, and privately he made it clear to Hitler that Italy would not be ready for war for another three or four years.

Nevertheless, Hitler was intent on an immediate war with Poland. The day after the signing of the Pact of Steel, he told his generals: “we are left with the decision: to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity”. As Kershaw writes, “War for [Hitler] was no conventional military conflict. It represented the decisive step towards the fulfilment of his ‘idea’, the accomplishment of his ‘mission’” (Kershaw, 1991: 134).
Source A

The Italo-German Alliance, 22 May 1939 (the Pact of Steel).

The German Reich Chancellor and His Majesty the King of Italy and Albania, Emperor of Ethiopia, consider that the time has come to confirm through a solemn pact the close relation of friendship and affinity which exists between National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy.

... Firmly bound together through the inner unity of their ideologies and the comprehensive solidarity of their interests, the German and the Italian people are determined also in future to stand side by side and to strive with united effort for the securing of their Lebensraum [living space] and the maintenance of peace. In this way, prescribed for them by history, Germany and Italy wish, in a world of unrest and disintegration, to carry out the assignment of making safe the foundations of European culture ... have agreed upon the following terms:

**ARTICLE I.**
The Contracting Parties will remain in permanent contact with each other, in order to come to an understanding of all common interests or the European situation as a whole.

**ARTICLE II.**
In the event that the common interests of the Contracting Parties be jeopardized through international happenings of any kind, they will immediately enter into consultation regarding the necessary measures to preserve these interests. Should the security or other vital interests of one of the Contracting Parties be threatened from outside, the other Contracting Party will afford the threatened Party its full political and diplomatic support in order to remove this threat.

**ARTICLE III.**
If it should happen, against the wishes and hopes of the Contracting Parties, that one of them becomes involved in military complications with another power or other Powers, the other Contracting Party will immediately step to its side as an ally and will support it with all its military might on land, at sea, and in the air.

Berlin 22 May 1939 in the XVII year of the Fascist Era.

Source B

A photograph taken in Berlin, May 1939, following the signing of the Pact of Steel.

First question, part a – 3 marks
According to Source A, what common factors unite Italy and Germany?

First question, part b – 2 marks
What is the message of Source B?

ATL Thinking skills

Look at the articles of the agreement. Who do you consider would benefit the most from this alliance?
The Nazi–Soviet Pact

In the summer of 1939, both the Western democracies and Hitler approached the Soviet Union for an alliance. Despite Hitler’s loathing of communist Russia and his plans for Lebensraum in the East, an alliance with the Soviet Union at this stage was highly desirable. It would prevent the Soviets forming an alliance with Britain and France, and would secure Soviet neutrality in a war with Poland, thus preventing a two-front conflict.

In fact, the Soviet Union had initially favoured an alliance with Britain and France. In 1934, the Soviet Union had joined the League of Nations and, alarmed by the growing power of Hitler, had hoped that collective security would work to prevent Hitler’s aggression. However, the Western democracies were still suspicious of a communist government and had worked to appease Hitler. The French alone had signed a defensive pact with the Soviet Union in response to German rearmament in 1935, but this collapsed after the Munich Agreement.

Despite the Munich Agreement and what seemed to Stalin a capitulation to the Nazis, he renewed a proposal of a military alliance with the West following Hitler’s occupation of Prague. However, negotiations with the democracies dragged on, both sides ultimately distrusting each other (see Chapter 2.7). Meanwhile, Stalin had also made it clear to the Germans that he would welcome an agreement and as a result, on 24 August 1939, Germany pulled off one of the most controversial and cynical alliances in modern history: the Nazi–Soviet Pact.

Under this Non-Aggression Pact, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany each pledged to remain neutral in the event of either nation being attacked by a third party. In addition, the pact included a secret protocol dividing Northern and Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence: the Baltic states and Bessarabia in Romania were to be in the Russian sphere, and Poland was to be divided between the two powers.

Source skills

Source A

The Nazi–Soviet Pact, 23 August 1939

The Government of the German Reich and The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the U.S.S.R., and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April, 1926 between Germany and the U.S.S.R., have reached the following Agreement:

Article I. Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other Powers.

Article II. Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third Power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third Power.
**Article III.** The Governments of the two High Contracting Parties shall in the future maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests.

**Article IV.** Neither of the two High contracting parties shall participate in any grouping of powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.

**Article V.** Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

**Article VI.** The present Treaty is concluded for a period of ten years, with the proviso that, in so far as one of the High Contracting Parties does not advance it one year prior to the expiration of this period, the validity of this Treaty shall automatically be extended for another five years.

**Article VII.** The present treaty shall be ratified within the shortest possible time. The ratifications shall be exchanged in Berlin. The Agreement shall enter into force as soon as it is signed.

The section below was not published at the time the above was announced.

**Secret additional protocol**

**Article I.** In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and U.S.S.R. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna area is recognized by each party.

**Article II.** In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state, the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula and San.

The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish State and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.

In any event both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement.

**Article III.** With regard to Southeastern Europe, attention is called by the Soviet side to its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterest in these areas.

**Article IV.** This protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret.

Moscow, August 23, 1939.

Source B

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**First question, part a – 3 marks**

According to Source A, what measures were to be followed to maintain peace between the two countries?

**First question, part b – 2 marks**

What is the message of Source B?
For Hitler, this alliance meant that he could have a free hand in Poland and that he could avoid fighting a war on two fronts. He could also get valuable raw materials from the Soviet Union. He clearly regarded it as a short-term expedient due to his long-term plans for attaining Lebensraum in the East.

For Stalin, there were also considerable advantages, as follows.

- It would keep the Soviet Union out of a war. This was important as it faced a threat in the East from Japan, and the army was weakened after Stalin’s purges (see glossary box).
- There was always the hope that Germany and the West would weaken each other in the war and that the Soviet Union would emerge as the strongest nation.
- He got considerable territorial gains from the pact: half of Poland and the opportunity to take over Finland and the Baltic States.
- The Soviet Union could keep trading with Germany: Germany was to send mechanical goods to the Soviet Union in return for raw materials and foodstuffs (see Source B below for the importance of this to Germany).

Two contrasting views of the Nazi–Soviet Pact

**Source A**

Molotov’s comments to the Supreme Soviet on the ratification of the Non-Aggression Pact, 31 August 1939.

The chief importance of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact lies in the fact that the two largest States of Europe have agreed to put an end to enmity between them, to eliminate the menace of war and to live at peace one with the other …

Only the instigators of a general European war … can be dissatisfied with this position of affairs …

It is really difficult for these gentlemen to understand the purpose of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, on the strength of which the USSR is not obliged to involve itself in war either on the side of Great Britain against Germany, or on the side of Germany against Great Britain.

Is it really difficult to comprehend that the USSR is pursuing and will continue to pursue its own independent policy based on the interests of the peoples of the USSR and only these interests?

**Source B**

Comment by Dr Julius Schnurre, Head of the Economic Policy Division of the German foreign ministry, 24 October 1939.

The Agreement means a wide open door to the East for us. The raw material purchases from the Soviet Union and from the countries bordering the Soviet Union can still be considerably increased. But it is essential to meet the German commitments to the extent required. In view of the great volume this will require a special effort. If we succeed in expanding exports to the East in the required volume, the effects of the English blockade will be decisively weakened by the incoming raw materials.

**Questions**

1. What do Sources A and B indicate about the different ways in which the Soviet Union and Germany viewed this pact?
2. Does this pact support the idea that Hitler did not, in fact, have a clearly planned foreign policy, but was taking advantage of situations as they arose?
3. Which country do you consider gained most from this pact?
Source skills


The text reads: (Hitler to Stalin) “The scum of the Earth, I believe?”; (Stalin to Hitler) "The bloody assassin of the workers, I presume?".

First question, part b – 2 marks

What is the message of this source?

Examiner’s hint: Note that the cartoonist is making two key points here. What do the greetings that Hitler and Stalin are giving one another indicate about the true nature of their relationship? What is the significance of the dead body on the ground, which has come about as a result of the meeting or “rendez-vous” between the two dictators?

The outbreak of war

Despite Britain’s and France’s assurances to Poland, Hitler did not believe that they would take any action at all, let alone declare war. As historian Roderick Stackelberg writes:

Hitler could not conceive that Britain and France, having failed to fight for a militarily strong and democratic Czechoslovakia a year before despite the assurance of Soviet aid, would now fight to save a militarily weak and undemocratic Poland without the prospect of Soviet aid”. — Stackelberg, 1999
Hitler was therefore taken back when he heard that Britain and Poland had signed a full military alliance on 25 August. At the same time, Mussolini informed him that he was not ready for war. Hitler thus delayed his attack on Poland planned for 26 August until 1 September. Hoping to cause a division between Britain and Poland, he also gave a last-minute proposal to Britain. This involved guaranteeing the British Empire and trying to reach an agreement on disarmament on the condition that Britain give Germany a free hand in Danzig and the Polish Corridor. However, this was not taken up by Britain. The Poles also refused further negotiation.

On 31 August, Mussolini proposed that a conference should be held to resolve the crisis. However, Hitler wanted war and was not prepared to wait for any peace initiatives. That same evening, Germany claimed that one of its wireless stations near the Polish border had been attacked by Poles. In reality, SS soldiers dressed in Polish uniforms had staged the attack. To make it appear authentic, they left behind the bodies of convicted criminals who had been dressed in Polish uniforms, killed by lethal injection and shot. This so-called Polish attack was used as the excuse for war. At 4.45am on 1 September 1939, German troops invaded Poland and German planes bombed Warsaw.

On 3 September, the British government presented an ultimatum to Germany to call off the attack by 11.00am. When no response had been received by this time, Britain and France declared war. Hitler hoped that the war on Poland would remain a localized affair; in fact, he had unleashed the most destructive war of all time. As historian Donald Watt concludes:

What is extraordinary in the events which led up to the outbreak of the Second World War is that Hitler’s will for war was able to overcome the reluctance with which everybody else approached it. Hitler willed, desired, lusted after war, though not the war with France and Britain, at least not in 1939. No one else wanted it, though Mussolini came perilously close to talking himself into it. — Watt, 2001

Hitler’s actions after the declaration of war

Following the British declaration of war, Hitler launched an attack on Poland. Subjected to a “blitzkrieg” style of war, the Poles were quickly defeated, and Germany and the USSR divided up Poland along the so-called Ribbentrop–Molotov line as had been agreed in the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. The Germans were now able to transfer most of their forces to the west.

The phoney war

In October 1939, Hitler offered peace proposals but very few people in Britain now trusted Hitler, and these were not taken up. However, there was no direct action from Hitler against the West for the next few months. This was the period known as “the phoney war”.

Hitler takes over Europe

The calm of the phoney war was broken in April 1940. These are the key events, 1939–40:

• Hitler’s troops occupied Denmark and landed at the Norwegian ports in April 1940.
10 May, Germany attacked Holland, Belgium and France simultaneously. Again, Hitler achieved swift victories. The Dutch surrendered after four days; Belgium at the end of May. British troops had to evacuate from Dunkirk in June 1940 as the invading German troops swept through France.

After the British had left, the Germans moved southwards; Paris was captured 14th June and France surrendered 22nd June. The Germans occupied northern France and the Atlantic coast; unoccupied France was allowed its own government under Marshal Petain; however it had no real independence.

To secure the defeat of Britain in the planned invasion called “Operation Sea lion”, the Germans needed control of the air over the English Channel. This led to the Battle for Britain during the summer and autumn of 1940 as the British Royal Air Force fought Luftwaffe planes in the skies above the coast of Britain.

Although on the verge of defeating the RAF, Hitler switched to the bombing of London and other British cities. This marked the start of the Blitz. Hitler hoped that this would break the morale of the British, however by the middle of 1941, this was still not the case. It was at this point that Hitler decided to turn back to one of his main foreign policy aims: achieving lebensraum in the East. Thus, Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union in June 1941 with Britain still undefeated. Hitler anticipated that the attack against the Soviet Union would end in a speedy Soviet defeat, after which he would be able to return to finish off Britain. However, far from ensuring a victorious finale, the invasion of the Soviet Union would ensure that the war would go on for much longer and that Hitler would eventually be defeated.

### Self-management and thinking skills

**Task one**
Return to the question on page 161.
What new examples to explain Hitler's success in achieving his aims can you add to these headings?
- Hitler's tactical skill
- Luck
- The role the distractions and differences of the other powers played

What other factors played a role?

**Task two**
Review Hitler's actions between 1933 and 1939. Decide how far you agree with Bullock's claim that Hitler was able to combine "consistency in aim" with "opportunist and improvisation" in how he conducted his foreign policy.

**Task three**
How far had Hitler fulfilled his foreign policy aims?
In Chapter 2.2, we identified Hitler's aims were to:
- destroy the Treaty of Versailles
- unite all Germans
- gain more Lebensraum [living space] for the Germans
- gain Britain and Italy as allies.

For each of these aims, identify the extent to which it was achieved and give evidence for your conclusions.

**Task four**
You have read about the pacts and treaties signed by Japan, Italy and Germany between 1933 and 1939. Copy and complete the following table to consolidate your understanding of these agreements.