

VIII. Foreign Policy. (See also the work on the Second World War.)

A. Goals.

1. The avenging of the humiliation of the First World War and the Versailles Settlement. The Settlement was to be overthrown, especially the limits placed on Germany's armed forces, and the Polish Corridor separating East Prussia from the rest of Germany.

2. The restoration of Germany's status as a great power. He hoped to make Germany the equal of the United States and the British Empire; to his successors would be left the task of making Germany the dominant power in the world.

3. The acquisition (with conquest the only means) of "Lebensraum" (living space) in the East, and the restoration of Germany's colonies. (In February 1939, he told the Reichstag he had "no territorial demands against England and France, apart from the return of the colonies".) He dreamed of large families, and a German population of 170 million instead of the nearly 70 million in the 1930s, settling in conquered territories in the East, where the Slavs would be allowed to die out.

4. The completion of the work of German unification begun by Frederick the Great (1740-86) and Otto von Bismarck (1862-90).

5. A limited war, or a series of limited wars, which would show clearly German superiority, but not a general war.

6. Defence against growing Soviet power and Communism.

B. Factors.

1. How far was he an "intentionalist" (that is, had everything planned out) and how far a "functionalist" (that is, was an opportunist)?

There is no agreement among the experts as to how far Hitler's "Mein Kampf", written in 1923 and 1924, was a blueprint. Hitler in 1936 described "Mein Kampf" as "fantasies from behind bars", and ordered the press

not to quote from it without permission. In general outline, Hitler remained remarkably true to "Mein Kampf", notably expansion to the East, although he deviated, especially with regard to implementation: for example, in "Mein Kampf", he wanted co-operation with Britain and opposed war on two fronts.

Hitler was clearly an opportunist and a gambler but there is no way of telling whether he would have risked war in 1939 had the circumstances not appeared favourable. For example, he had not invaded Austria in 1934, apparently because Mussolini had made it clear that such a move would not be tolerated, and had massed troops on the Brenner Pass border as a warning. Often, he seemed merely to be reacting to events, especially in the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939; in the case of Austria, the spontaneity is indicated by the way the German army had to fill up with petrol at Austrian garages and use maps from Baedeker guide books. He was not the man of iron he is often made out to be and was always very nervous before an adventure. His string of successes (and his survival of assassination attempts) seem to have convinced him that he was a man of destiny guided by Providence; he was thus like Napoleon, who had believed in what he called his "star", but Napoleon's fate should have been a warning.

2. How far was he a "continentalist" and how far a "globalist", that is, had aspirations outside Europe?

His "Second Book" produced in 1928, dealing specifically with Foreign Policy, makes no mention of global aspirations. However, Hermann Rauschning's records, published in England in 1939, of Hitler's conversations in the years 1933 and 1934 quote the Führer as dreaming of acquiring the Dutch colonial empire, and incorporating Brazil and the United States into a "German World Empire" as part of the "recasting of the world". Rauschning was an early Nazi who turned against Hitler and became an emigrÉ but Trevor Roper concluded that he was "completely reliable". World ambitions are certainly suggested by Hitler's "Z Plan" of January 1939 for a huge fleet by 1944-46 of 800 ships, based on Trondheim in Norway and capable of challenging any power. However, Hitler was a great dreamer and in 1939, when he thought he had not long to live, could scarcely have contemplated world domination in his lifetime, although he presumably expected his Aryan heirs to complete his work, for which he would have laid the basis.

3. How far were his policies new?

In some ways, for example Anschluss with Austria and the acquisition of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia, his foreign policy was a continuation of the German national unification undertaken by King Frederick II the Great (1762-86) and Otto von Bismarck (1862-1890), whom he greatly

admired and whose portraits adorned his office and bunker. His method was also the same as theirs, namely war.

Weimar leaders had worked to overthrow Versailles. For example, Hans von Seeckt, in charge of the German army after 1918, in about 1921 arranged a secret deal with the Russians to evade the military terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Above all, there was Gustav Stresemann, Foreign Minister between 1923 and 1929, who was able by his peaceful policy of "Fulfilment" to reverse much of the Treaty of Versailles.

Fear of Russia and communism was not new.

To some experts, the Second World War was merely the second phase of a Second Thirty Years' War (the first having been fought between 1618 and 1648), and the war aims of the Kaiser's government in 1914 and of Hitler were similar.

4. Hitler was cautious; for example, in 1936 German officers apparently had secret instructions to withdraw if they met any resistance in occupying the Rhineland. He chose his time very carefully, and honoured agreements only as long as it suited him. He acted quickly to present opponents with a *fait accompli*. He exaggerated German strength and was believed. He tried to get an agreement with Britain in 1939 to avoid civilian bombing, and he did not use gas.

However, he reached the conclusion that it was possible to win a war against another great power. In contrast, Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister between 1937 and 1940, and other European leaders believed that such a war would be pyrrhic and therefore impossible.

5. Foreign policy was useful for domestic reasons; for example, the March 1938 Anschluss (union with Austria) crisis distracted attention from the dismissals of Fritsch (Commander-in-Chief), Blomberg (Minister of War) and Neurath (Foreign Minister). In general until 1939, his foreign policy was popular inside Germany; in 1939, German propaganda worked to convince Germans that it was a defensive war caused by the Poles.

6. Until 1938, the Foreign Office and Ministry of War were generally left alone, as respectable *façades*. The Freiherr Konstantin von Neurath (a conservative career diplomat), the Foreign Minister, and Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, the Minister of War, had both been appointed in 1933 by President Hindenburg and were not Nazis. In February 1938, they were replaced, having opposed Hitler's plans. Hitler and the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the German High Command) replaced Blomberg, and Joachim von Ribbentrop became Foreign Minister. Ribbentrop was a former champagne

salesman, who had advised Hitler on foreign affairs and been appointed ambassador to London in 1936.

7. There was a widespread feeling, at least in Britain, that Germany had been badly treated at Versailles in 1919, especially with regard to national self-determination and disarmament.

C. In September 1933, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations and the League Disarmament Conference (approved October 1933 by plebiscite, with 96% in favour), partly as Britain and France were on the point of denouncing German infringements of the Versailles terms. Hitler, in January 1934, cleverly made a Non-Aggression Pact with Poland, hoping to calm general European fears (which might lead to some retaliation against Germany) and break the French alliance system with Eastern Europe.

D. 1935:

January, the people of the Saarland, in a free plebiscite supervised by a League of Nations force, voted to join Hitler's Germany.

March, Hitler repudiated the military clauses of the Versailles Settlement and openly rearmed Germany. An air force and a fleet were to be built up, and one year of compulsory military service was introduced for young men (extended August 1936 to two years).

May, Hitler offered to make bilateral non-aggression pacts with his neighbours.

June, signature of a Naval Agreement with Britain (see L below).

E. 1936:

January, denunciation of the 1925 Treaty of Locarno guaranteeing Germany's Western borders.

March, military reoccupation of the Rhineland, in violation of Versailles. This was ostensibly in response to the May 1935 Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance.

July, support for Franco and the Nationalists in Spain, despite opposition from the German Foreign Ministry. The war would divert European attention, including Italian, so the longer it lasted, the better. It was also a useful training ground for German forces.

1st November, Mussolini spoke of the "Rome-Berlin Axis", by which he meant Italian-German co-operation.

25th November the Anti-Comintern (that is, anti-Communist) Pact was made with Japan. (Comintern, short for the Communist International, had been established in 1919 by Lenin to co-ordinate communist advances throughout the world.)

F. 1938:

March, the Anschluss (union) - the Blumenkrieg (the Flower War, as many Austrians threw flowers at the Germans) - with Austria.

In July 1934, during the Nazi revolt in Austria, Hitler had perhaps contemplated intervention, but Mussolini had massed Italian troops on the Brenner Pass. Now, in 1938, the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg (following demonstrations in Austria by Austrian Nazis, led by Arthur Seyss-Inquart) had, on his own initiative, visited Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Hitler, prompted by Goering, saw and seized the chance, and by veiled threats got Schuschnigg to amnesty the Nazis and admit them to the government. Seyss-Inquart became the Minister of the Interior. When the Austrian Nazis took the offensive and demanded union, Schuschnigg announced a plebiscite, hoping to prove Austrian opposition to Nazism and to union with Hitler's Germany. Alarmed by this move, Hitler massed German troops on the border and presented Schuschnigg with an ultimatum that there should be no plebiscite. Schuschnigg resigned, and Seyss-Inquart became Chancellor, giving in to Hitler's demand that German forces should be invited into Austria to help end the disorder (which was largely the work of the Austrian Nazis!). The British and French governments protested at the entry of German troops into Austria and the subsequent union, which broke the Treaty of Versailles, but took no action. An Austrian plebiscite, no doubt rigged, approved union with 99.75% in favour. (nb. A 1921 plebiscite in the Tyrol and Salzburg had favoured union. From 1919, there were demands from both Austria and Germany for union, now that the Austrian empire was no more.)

October, occupation of the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. Hitler had supported and stirred the Sudeten Germans led by Konrad Henlein. In Czechoslovakia there were 7 million Czechs, 2,000,000 Slovaks and 3,250,000 Germans, mostly in the Sudetenland which until the First World War had been part of the Austrian empire. Operation Green was planned in December 1937 for the conquest of the Sudetenland, but the British Prime Minister Chamberlain negotiated the September 1938 Munich Agreement in which Hitler promised that the Sudetenland was his last territorial acquisition. Hitler was apparently disappointed that there had been no war.

G. 1939:

15th March, Hitler occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia, despite his earlier assurances that he had no more territorial claims. This showed clearly that his goal was not just to unite all Germans.

21st March, he seized Memel (German for Klaipeda) from Lithuania. Admittedly, Memel, although it had historically been Lithuanian, was predominantly German in population and had been seized by Lithuania in 1923 from the League of Nations.

28th March, he denounced the 1934 Non-Aggression Pact with Poland and made demands on Poland about the Corridor.

August, the Molotov-Ribbentrop or Nazi-Soviet Pact with the USSR. Following a trade agreement on 18th August, Germany and the USSR on 23rd August made a Non-Aggression Pact, agreeing not to attack each other, and to stay neutral if the other was at war. A secret clause, revealed only in 1945, arranged the partition of Poland.

24th August, German forces seized Danzig (modern Gdansk in Poland). Danzig was predominantly German in population and had been administered by the League of Nations.

On 1st September, German forces attacked Poland, ostensibly because of Polish intransigence over a deal on the Polish Corridor. To win over the German people to war, Hitler arranged matters to make it seem as if he was acting defensively and the Poles had begun hostilities by blowing up the German radio station at Gleiwitz (modern Gliwice in Poland), which was in fact blown up by SS men who left behind bodies in Polish uniforms. There thus started what became the Second World War, as Britain and France honoured their treaty promises and went to Polish assistance. Hitler gambled that Britain and France would do little or nothing and that the war would be a short one.

H. Relations with Italy.

1. Initially, despite Hitler's admiration for Mussolini, relations were poor. Mussolini despised Hitler, and at the same time, felt that Hitler challenged his power and had aspirations for German expansion into the Balkans, on which Mussolini had his eyes set. Thus in 1934, Mussolini warned Hitler against involvement in Austria, when the Austrian Nazis tried to take over in Vienna.

2. When in October 1935, Mussolini began his conquest of Abyssinia, it was Hitler alone who supported him. They co-operated again in July 1936, when the Spanish Civil War began, in particular helping to ferry Nationalist forces from North Africa to Spain. In 1936, Mussolini began to talk of the Rome-

Berlin Axis, his name for the co-operation. Mussolini had obviously concluded that he stood to gain more from working with Hitler than with Britain and France. In 1937, Italy joined the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact, made in 1936. A formal alliance came only in May 1939, with the Pact of Steel, which promised support, regardless of who caused the crisis. In September 1940, Hitler arranged an alliance with Italy and Japan, the Tripartite Pact for Mutual Aid.

3. Hitler was increasingly disappointed by Italian support. In September 1938, Mussolini worked to prevent war over Czechoslovakia, and helped bring about the Munich Agreement. Mussolini's attacks from April 1939 in the Balkans displeased Hitler, who would have preferred Mussolini to have turned his attention to North Africa; the Balkans were in general favourably disposed to Hitler's Germany, but Italian involvement would throw the Balkans into Anglo-French arms. Hitler was not convinced by Mussolini's reasons for not helping in September 1939, and was understandably suspicious of Mussolini's motives for becoming involved in May 1940 since the war looked as good as won.

J. Relations with Stalin (nb. There was a German tradition of co-operation with Russia.)

1. Initially, Stalin neglected rising Nazi strength, seeing it as a defence against apparent French power, and possibly as capitalism entering its final stage. For his part, Hitler at the start did not feel strong enough to challenge the USSR. Thus in 1933, the 1926 Neutrality Pact was extended for a further 10 years. It was only in 1934, when Hitler made his non-aggression pact with Poland, that Stalin became alarmed, and, for example, ended the secret military co-operation with Germany, which had been begun in the early 1920s, although he continued to supply Germany with raw materials, in fact right up to the German invasion in 1941.

2. In November 1936, Germany made the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan, to co-operate against the activities of Comintern. (Italy adhered 1937.)

3. Stalin urged a strong stand against Hitler, but the West was not willing to co-operate on Stalin's terms and Stalin was not prepared to act. Consequently, in 1939 Viacheslav Molotov became Soviet Foreign Minister in place of Maxim Litvinov, who was pro-British, and in August 1939, to general European surprise, Molotov and Ribbentrop agreed on a trade agreement and

the Nazi-Soviet or Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. This 10-year non-aggression pact had a secret clause for the partition of Poland.

Consequently, on 17th September 1939, Soviet troops occupied eastern Poland, following Hitler's invasion of western Poland on 1st September. On 19th September, Soviet and German forces met near Brest-Litovsk, almost coming to blows, which in the event were averted by the signature on 28th September 1939 of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty. Hitler had apparently taken Bismarck's advice "to cultivate the friendship of the barbarians (the Russians)" and could boast that "for the first time in history, we have to fight ... only on one front."

4. In June 1941, without any formal declaration of war. Hitler began Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia, There had been indications of an attack, but Stalin ignored these and, in an obvious attempt at appeasement, supplied Hitler with materials up to the last moment. Hitler had apparently decided to neutralize Poland and the West before attacking his main goal, Russia.

5. nb. The Berlin 1941 anti-Comintern Pact meeting in Berlin was called the First European Congress and the "Song of Europe" written. This propaganda line of European unity could probably have won many to real union, but no genuine effort was made.

K. Relations with Japan and China, which, of course, were not Aryan countries.

1. Nazi opinion was divided over whether to recognize Japanese control of Manchukuo (Manchuria, conquered 1931-33 from China), or to continue the previous German policy of support for Jiang Jieshi (formerly spelt Chiang Kai Shek) and the Chinese Nationalists. The Foreign Office and the Army favoured continued support for China, which provided raw materials (including iron and wolfram for tungsten) and markets, and where a number of German officers were already employed as advisers. Ribbentrop held secret negotiations with the Japanese 1935, but Hitler sided with the Foreign Office (being influenced by British coolness towards Japan), although he hoped for tolerable relations with Japan. Good Chinese-German relations were sealed by the 1936 Hapro Agreement, whereby China would provide raw materials in return for manufactured goods and arms.

2. However, later, in November 1936, German and Japanese representatives made the Anti-Comintern Pact, to co-operate against Comintern's activities, especially by the exchange of information. German-Japanese relations became closer, when Ribbentrop became Foreign Minister in 1938, and, for example, the Hapro Agreement was denounced. Ribbentrop favoured a simultaneous Japanese-German attack on Russia, but Hitler did not want Japanese power and competition in Russia and so encouraged the Japanese to attack the US, for example, by promising to declare war on the United States, although this was outside the terms of the Tripartite Pact of 1940.

L. Relations with Britain.

1. Hitler hoped for co-operation with Britain, or at least British neutrality, while he embarked on his adventures. In April 1933, Hitler made indirect approaches to Britain, which was not interested in an agreement. Once Hitler in 1935 began to rearm openly, Britain began to propose pacts to limit armaments, which Hitler rebuffed.

2. In June 1935, Britain and Germany signed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. By this, Britain agreed to the Germans' having a fleet that was up to 35% the size of the British one, even though this broke the terms of the Versailles Settlement and helped end the 1935 Stresa Front, in which the governments of Italy, France and Britain had agreed to co-operate against German aggression. (Hitler only turned his attention to a naval build-up in 1938, when his "Z Plan" envisaged a fleet, mainly of surface vessels, comparable to the British Royal Navy by 1945.)

3. Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister 1935-37, began rearmament, which would be in a state of readiness only by 1939. Chamberlain, Prime Minister 1937-40, continued rearmament, but also tried a more positive policy of appeasement, highlighted by the 1938 Munich Agreement, which, Chamberlain hoped, meant "peace for our time". The Sudeten crisis had brought real fear in Britain and elsewhere of a war against Germany.

4. In September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany, honouring its treaty obligations with Poland, although Britain was more interested in the balance of power than in Poland.

M. Relations with Poland.

1. The Poles were Slavs and Poland was the obvious route for an attack on Russia. Initially however, Hitler seems to have hoped for co-operation with the Poles over the Polish Corridor and against a common enemy, Russia, although what fate he had in mind for Poland after a Russian defeat is not known; it is unlikely that it would have been advantageous to the Poles!

2. In 1934, Hitler made a non-aggression pact with Poland, probably to help calm fears after German withdrawal from the League of Nations and the League Disarmament Conference, and possibly to facilitate a deal with the Poles over the Polish Corridor, which was an obvious affront to Germany.

3. The Poles proved unco-operative, and Hitler decided that they would have to be neutralized first, rather than the French, who, Hitler guessed, would not act to help the Poles if he attacked Poland.

4. In 1939, after months of recrimination about the frontier and the Corridor, Hitler drew up a moderate ultimatum to the Poles, but German soldiers dressed as Poles blew up the Gleiwitz radio station, so that the message was never transmitted. Hitler accused the Poles of blowing up the station, which he claimed meant a rejection of his proposals, and 1st September 1939, invaded Poland.

5. Already, on 24th August 1939, German troops had occupied Danzig, where the Nazi Albert Forster was made "Supreme Head"; Danzig had been administered until then by the League of Nations, which appointed a Commissioner (red 1931-33 from China), or to