

What caused World War Two in 1939?

The Second World War broke out in Europe in September 1939 between the Allies (Britain, France and Russia) and the Axis (Germany and Italy). The war lasted 6 years and would later expand to war in the Pacific. It is still debated what was the main cause of the war – the policy of appeasement and Hitler’s aggression.

Appeasement – Policy of giving into Hitler’s demands in an effort to avoid war. In the 1930s, many remembered the devastating effects of WW1 and wished to avoid another war. In addition Britain didn’t have the soldiers/weapons ready for war.

Hitler’s aggression – One of Hitler’s aims as leader was to make Germany larger and more powerful. To achieve this, he gradually expanded his army and used this to get more land.

	Hitler’s aggression	Policy of Appeasement
1935	Hitler began secretly expanding his armed forces beyond limits set out in the Treaty of Versailles as soon as he came to power in 1933. This was made public in 1935.	Allies ignored Hitler’s rearmament, seeing the Treaty of Versailles as too harsh. Britain signed a Naval agreement with Germany allowing their navy to increase to 35% of the British navy.
1936	Hitler introduced conscription and reoccupied the Rhineland (area of Germany bordering France) with soldiers.	Not one shot was fired by Britain or France after the Nazis reoccupied the Rhineland. The French did not want to act alone. Britain agreed the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh.
March 1938	ANSCHLUSS: Hitler made Austria part of Germany. This was banned by the Treaty of Versailles but as Austria was part of the old German Empire many people argued it was a reasonable step to make as the countries had shared History and language. In a vote 99.75% of Austrians voted to be united with Germany.	The Austrian leader Schuschnigg asked Britain and France for help after he was forced to resign. They refused.
September 1938	Germany invaded and took over the Sudetenland (part of Czechoslovakia) because it had many Germans living there.	The French had promised to help Czechoslovakia and began to prepare for war. Britain was worried that there would be war if Hitler did not get what he wanted and engineered the MUNICH AGREEMENT . Chamberlain convinced Czechoslovakia to give up the Sudetenland in exchange for a promise that the rest of Czechoslovakia was safe. Chamberlain returned to England declaring it would bring “peace for our time”.
March 1939	Germany invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia.	Britain and France did nothing in response to Hitler’s invasion of the rest of Czechoslovakia but it was clear that Poland was next. Britain and France promised to protect Poland.
August 1939	The Nazi-Soviet Pact: Russia and Germany promised not to attack each other. They also secretly agreed to divide Poland between them.	
September 1939	German troops invaded Poland.	Britain and France declare war on Germany.