**Both Hitler’s domestic and foreign policy could appear on Paper 3**. This guide will only deal with his foreign policy – you should have revised his domestic policy already for Paper 2. This unit is intended to focus on Hitler’s foreign policy up to 1939, but you will see there is a lot of overlap with the next revision guide that deals with collective security and appeasement (as well as some of the events encountered in Paper 1 and Mussolini). It is very important you identify which area of focus the essay questions are directing you towards in the actual exam.

By the end of your revision, you should be comfortable with the following ‘big picture’ questions:

**1. What were the key events and policies followed by Hitler in his foreign policy?**

**2. What evidence is there to suggest that he was an opportunistic gambler in foreign policy?**

**3. What evidence is there to suggest that he was a planner who followed a clear foreign policy throughout?**

**4. How successful was his foreign policy?**

Now use the TACKLED essay frames for some active revision.

In order to answer a question on Hitler’s foreign policy you will need to be very aware of the sequence of events and decisions made below. You must be careful not to regurgitate them as a narrative in the exam; the challenge will be to develop an analytical/evaluative argument, as addressed in the second section of this hand out.

**Hitler’s Aims in Foreign Policy**

If you are asked to judge Hitler’s success in foreign policy, you will need to set the criteria against which he should be judged. Luckily for us, Hitler was very clear from the mid-1920s about his aims; all we need to do is refer to *Mein Kampf:*

1) **Overthrowing the Versailles treaty** in terms of re-arming and recovering lost territory.

2) Gaining**Lebensraum** for Germany in Eastern Europe, which would involve a **future war** **with Communist Russia**.

3) **Unite all German-speaking people** in his ‘Third Reich’, including those in Austria, the Sudetenland, the Polish Corridor and Danzig .

4) Create a racially ‘pure’ German state that would the **dominant power in Europe.**

**Key Events in Hitler’s Foreign Policy**

**1. The Diplomatic Phase 1933-36**

When Hitler came to power in 1933, **Germany was in a particularly weak position**; suffering from severe economic problems and a military that was still limited by the Treaty of Versailles. He was in no position to provoke conflict – his diplomacy was cunning, always exploiting and creating divisions among the other European powers, at the same time keeping his rearmament programme ‘under the radar’.

|  |  |  |
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| **Event** | | **Explanation** |
| 1933  **End of Disarmament and exit from the League** | | Hitler comes to power in the midst of the Geneva disarmament conference - awkward for Hitler as France was on the verge of allowing Germany to have parity in military forces. Hitler refused to have any restrictions at all on re-armament and walked out before France could make public its concessions (which would have been difficult for Hitler not to agree to, given that this had been a key German demand throughout the 1920s). The following year he left the League completely (he saw it as the instrument of the T of V). He also secretly told his generals rearmament was Germany’s top priority; disregarding T of V once again. |
| 1934  **Non-aggression Pact with Poland** | | Hitler signs this agreement to allay the fears of GB, France and neighbouring countries about his intentions. Secretly tells his generals that it is of only “temporary significance”. |
| 1934  **Dolfuss Affair** | | Hitler mobilises his army after Austrian Chancellor assassinated – trying to take advantage of the situation to force Anschluss. Has to back down when Mussolini mobilises – over-reached himself, army still too weak and there was united opposition to his move. |
| 1935  **Conscription and air force & London Naval Agreement** | | Hitler publicly breaks T of V by announcing conscription and the development of an air force. Britain, France and Italy form the Stresa Front. However, Hitler at the same time negotiates the London Naval Agreement bilaterally with GB (who acts selfishly hoping to prevent an expensive naval race as before WW1) – this causes friction in the Stresa Front immediately. |
| 1935  **The Abyssinia Crisis** | | Hitler is able to exploit Mussoilini’s invasion of Abyssinia – the ineptitude of the League’s response and the diplomacy of GB and France towards Mussolini, allows Hitler to break Italy away from the Stresa Front. This is a key turning point: Mussolini was isolated by his former allies, the weakness of the League of Nations was fully revealed to all, the new friendship between Italy and Germany opened the way to Anschluss with Austria. |
| 1936  **The Re-occupation of the Rhineland** | | Taking advantage of the distraction of GB and France by the Abyssinia Crisis, as well as a political scandal in France, Hitler suddenly reoccupied the Rhineland. He knew his small army could easily be destroyed by the French, but no action was taken. Hitler’s prestige at home increased, strengthening his position (especially against some of his generals who had opposed the move), strategically it gave Germany a much more defensible frontier against France (therefore they would be less able to interfere in future moves to Anschluss / Czech), showed unwillingness of GB and France to uphold T of V. |
| 1936  **Spanish Civil War**    **The Rome – Berlin Axis**  **Anti-**  **comintern Pact** | Germany and Italy announce support for Franco – Fascist bloc emerging.  The ‘Axis’ powers established – the two agreements bind Germany to both Italy and Japan (worrying for GB and France who now face a potential threat to their colonies as well as in Europe – strategic move by Hitler)  A new balance of power now existed in Europe – Hitler’s separation of Italy from GB and France combined with Germany’s rapidly increasing military strength. | |

**Judgments on Hitler’s ‘diplomatic’ phase:**

**Evidence of success?**

- Successfully overturned **some elements of T of V** (re-militarisation of Rhineland, considerable re-armament, non-payment reparations)

- Created a **more powerful Germany** – re-armament accelerating, established a **new balance of power** in Europe (Mussolini turned from rival to ally), global influence of Germany expanded through Japan

- Revealed that **GB, France unwilling to use force**, also that their commitment to collective security could be undermined (e.g. London Naval Agreement) – also that the League could be ignored. What’s more, he was reassuring enough to keep GB and France from seeing the true direction of his policy (e.g. non-aggression pact with Poland).

All of this achieved with bluff, political cunning and instinct – Germany had **achieved a great deal with very little military power.**

**Evidence of failure?**

- Occasional errors in judgement – e.g. **Dolfuss Affair** led to an embarrassing back down.

- His key goal still yet to be achieved – the **territorial changes of the T of V remained untouched** (Anschluss, Sudetenland, Polish areas), lebensraum. He would not be able to achieve these ends without a more aggressive policy.

The **historiography** is outlined at the end of this booklet- can you find evidence of Hitler as an ‘opportunist/gambler’ or as a ‘planner’ in this phase?

**2. The ‘aggressive’ phase 1937-39**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1937**  **The ‘Hossbach Memo-randum’** | Hitler has a secret meeting with his top generals, laying out his plans to expand into Eastern Europe. Names invasion targets as Austria, Czech and Poland – no mention of Russia. General Hossbach’s notes of the meeting survive (hence the name) which is the only record – debate around how reliable a source this is in seeing into Hitler’s mind (i.e. was he always honest with his generals?) Used as evidence of Hitler as a planner. |
| **1938**  **Anschluss with Austria** | **Why:**  Unite German speakers  Smash treaty of Versailles  **How:**  Austro-German agreement ensured Anschluss.  In 1938 a plebiscite was held in Austria and the people voted in favour for Anschluss with Germany, probably because of severe economic problems in the Austrian economy.  Because of appeasement (see next section), GB and France did not resist Anschluss – Hitler’s earlier achievement in breaking up the Stresa Front was paying off – GB and France had no geographical connection to Austria and so military options were limited to full scale war only, which they were not prepared to do. Following Anschluss, Germany and Italy now shared a border, greatly increasing their strategic advantage over France (Germany could now invade through both the Rhineland and the South Eastern border with Italy). |
| **1938**  **Sudeten-land** | **Why:**  Unite with 3 million German speakers in the Sudetenland. Get Skoda armaments factories & natural resources to prepare for war. The Sudetenland region was heavily fortified – if that region could be taken the rest of the country was defenceless.  Czechoslovakia was a functioning democracy with a French alliance and a modern army – could be impediment to achieving lebensraum by going east. **How:**  In 1938, Hitler plans to annex Czechoslovakia, the army prepares. However, his plans are disrupted by strenuous diplomatic efforts by the British Prime Minister, Chamberlain – he is also perhaps worried by his generals’ assessment that the modern and effective Czech army would not be a walk over (runs the risk of being bogged down long enough to be attacked by France). Hitler is still presenting his policy as being limited to wanting to save the Sudeten Germans from (fictional) ‘oppression’ and so enters talks to keep this cover going.  At the subsequent Munich Conference, the Sudetenland is handed over to Germany (by GB, France & Italy) without the consultation of the Czech government and the USSR.  Hitler is actually annoyed despite this easy victory – lost his justification for invading the whole of Czechoslovakia (i.e. to save the Sudeten Germans). Any move into the rest of Czechoslovakia would make his public assurances that he is only trying to reunite Germans (see appeasement section) an obvious lie. |
| **1939**  **Rest of Czech and Memel** | Hitler further encouraged internal dissent in Czechoslovakia – in March, he gives the new president (Hacha) an ultimatum – he must dissolve his nation, the ‘Czech’ part to be absorbed into the Reich, Slovakia to be made independent (but must follow German orders). The president gives in, realising the without the Sudetenland he cannot defend his country.  Hitler cleverly ensures neighbours such as Romania and even Poland receive land, ensuring they are also implicated in the crime (preventing them from interfering but also muddying the issue in the eyes of GB and French public opinion).  At the same time, he demands the German speaking city of Memel from Lithuania (who had been given it in the T of V).  GB and France are finally moved to give a **military guarantee to Poland** as a result of this policy – appeasement no longer. |
| **1939 Nazi- Sovet Pact** | **Why**  Allows Hitler to deal with Poland without USSR interference. Stalin would be tricked into believing he was in no danger, before being eliminated next.  USSR was expected to ally with France and GB – a very clever and surprising alliance that completely wrong footed the western powers (more on this in appeasement section)  Hitler did not believe that Britain and France would actually fight for Poland, given their history of appeasement.  **How**  Focuses his demands only on the return of the city of Danzig, maintaining his pretence of only trying to reunite the German speakers.  Moltov-Ribbentrop Pact – this agreement essentially green lights the joint invasion of Poland that occurs in September. Poland is successfully split between the USSR and Germany.  France and Britain honour their assurance to Poland and declare war on Germany – Hitler is genuinely surprised! |

**Judging the success of Hitler’s Foreign Policy up to 1939**

**Evidence of success**

On the face of it, by 1939 Hitler **had achieved many of his goals** – in such a short space of time, with so little resources initially, this was a remarkable achievement.

- **Treaty of Versailles was completely overturned** – not only had all German territory in the East been won back, he had also begun the process of Lebensraum (taking over non-German areas in the east) and the **creation of the German Reich / Volksgemeinschaft** (Anschluss etc)

- The new territory also **vastly increased German military / industrial strength.** Upwards of 11 million Germans had been added to the Reich, large amounts of industry – notably one of the world’s largest armaments plants (Skoda in Sudetenland) and the Polish ship yards. Germany had become the **dominant single power in Europe**.

- **Strategically,** Hitler had separated France and GB from her natural allies against Germany (Italy and the USSR) and had effectively isolated Stalin without him even realising it. Alliance with Japan meant that war materials from the Far East poured into Germany (ironically through the USSR, with Stalin’s naïve approval as part of the Nazi-Soviet Pact!)

- All of this had been achieved **without any major conflict** – remarkable given the fact that GB and France were actually in a superior military position until at least 1937 and so could have stopped him. Hitler’s ability to cloak his actions in ‘reasonable’ goals (reuniting German people, revising unfair treaty), as well as being able to split apart rival alliances, showed real instinct for foreign policy.

- His successes greatly reinforced his image as a **‘man of destiny’** within the Reich, increasing his power dramatically – particularly over the heads of the army (who were often against his risky moves), over-awing them with his baffling string of successes.

**Evidence of failure**

- Hitler ultimately misjudged GB and France and ended up fighting, in the words of Kershaw, **“the wrong war”.** His Lebensraum aim should have led him into conflict with the USSR, ideally with a GB alliance, but he found himself in the reverse situation. He failed to recognise that appeasement was not simply weakness, but a working policy that, once he went too far, would lead to war.

- One could argue that Hitler’s success were **primarily due to the incompetent diplomacy** of the period (especially of GB and France, but the USSR and US too) – handed to him on a plate?

**Historiography**

Main interpretations around structuralist (gambler) and intentionalist (planner) – see the views below. Remember, use these ideas to help structure your essay and argument, not instead of it.

* **Hugh Trevor-Roper (1960), stressed that Hitler was a planner who deliberately sought and started the war for deeply-held ideological reasons**. He argued that Hitler had a clear, step-by-step plan to realise his goal of creating a racially pure German empire in Eastern Europe. Trevor-Roper uses Mein Kampf, written while Hitler was in prison in 1926, and the [1937 Hossbach memorandum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hossbach_Memorandum), to support his view that Hitler's foreign policy was based on clear objectives that were consistently and coherently followed once he came to power: Lebensraum in the East, and the 'final solution' to exterminate the European Jews. "To the end, Hitler maintained the purity of his war aims."
* **A.J.P. Taylor (1961), argued that Hitler was from being a planner in foreign policy, and in fact was an opportunist taking advantage of the situations presented to him**. This view of Hitler therefore reduces the extent of Hitler's responsibility for causing the war, and implies that Britain and France encouraged Hitler's opportunism through their policy of appeasement. Taylor also shocked his readers by arguing that Hitler was not a radically different German leader, but rather he was simply an 'ordinary statesman' following in traditional German foreign policy concerns - i.e. Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as proof that earlier German statesmen had ambitions in the East. "Far from wanting a war, a general war was the last thing Hitler wanted."
* **Alan Bullock (1964), and something of a synthesis of the above two positions:** yes, Hitler was a strategist with clear aims and objectives, but he pursued these using clearly opportunistic techniques. So Hitler as both a planner and an opportunist!