

In 1933, Hitler began to rebuild the German military. This was a clear violation of the Treaty of Versailles. Many European countries including Great Britain and France did not object because they feared another war. Later the year, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations.

Meanwhile Spain had established a parliamentary democracy in 1931. In 1936 a group of army officers under the leadership of General Francisco Franco took control. A civil war broke out. Germany and Italy were quick to support Franco's troops. In 1939 Franco was able to capture Madrid and install a dictatorship in Spain.

Back in Germany in 1935, Hitler continued his policy of restoring Germany. His first action was taking back the Rhineland. In 1937 Germany signed an alliance with Japan. In early 1938 Hitler annexed Austria, and moved to reclaim the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia. The Munich Conference of 1938, which included Hitler, Mussolini, and Neville Chamberlain of Great Britain discussed more terms of expansion. Hitler was given the Sudetenland; in return for the land Hitler was to stop his expansion. This policy is known as appeasement, to give in to demands to avoid a war. This policy of appeasement worked for one year and in 1939, Hitler claimed the rest of Czechoslovakia.

The rest of Europe was shocked but did nothing to remove the Nazis from Czechoslovakia. In March 1939 Italy invaded Albania. But the Western powers did not help Albania; instead they signed nonaggression pacts with Greece, Turkey, Romania, and Poland. These agreements stated that if any country were to be attacked, they would all go to war.

The Germans signed the "Pact of Steel" uniting Germany and Italy in May 1939. Germany also signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939. They determined how Eastern Europe would be split among them. Germany would take Eastern Poland and Lithuania, and Russia would get the remainder of Poland, Finland and the Baltic States.

With a secure agreement with Russia, German forces marched into Poland on September 1, 1939. Two days later, Britain realized that diplomacy had failed and declared war on Germany, with France following suit. World War II had begun.

1. Why did the Western Powers allow Germany to rearm itself?
2. What happened at the Munich Conference?
3. What was the Nazi-Soviet Pact?
4. Why was it so important?