

Knowledge Organiser: Depression, war and recovery 1930-1951 (Unit 1)

Key Question 3: How effectively did Britain prepare for war?

Timeline of events

January 1933: Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany

March 1936: Hitler remilitarises the Rhineland

1937: Air Raid Wardens' Service created

March 1938: Anschluss with Austria

September 1938: Munich Conference

March 1939: Germany invades Czechoslovakia

1939: Military Training Act

1 September 1939: Germany invades Poland

3 September 1939: Second World War begins

1940: Neville Chamberlain resigns as Prime Minister and is replaced by Winston Churchill

Important concept

Britain was eager to avoid fighting another war. While Hitler continued to break the Treaty of Versailles, Britain operated a policy of appeasement, in the hope that war could be avoided. By the late 1930s, however, it was clear that preparations needed to be made. Building on the lessons learnt during the First World War, the British government ensured that the country was ready for air raids as well as attacks on the ground.

Key words

Remilitarised	Placing of military forces in an area.
Anschluss	A union between two countries.
Appeasement	Giving in to a potential enemy in order to avoid war.
Rations	A specific amount of food given to individuals during a time of shortage.
Radar	A system able to detect the presence, direction, distance and speed of aircraft and ships by using radio waves.

The threat from Germany

- Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933. As a result, German foreign policy changed dramatically. Germany was now seen as a threat to world peace.
- Hitler had promised to reverse the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. He wished to build up the strength of the German forces, as the Treaty of Versailles had only allowed 100,000 German soldiers. He also wanted the return of any German land that had been lost.
- In March 1936, German troops remilitarised the Rhineland, in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles.
- In March 1938, Germany united with Austria.
- By September, Hitler had turned his attention to Czechoslovakia. There were three million German speakers in the Sudetenland, and Hitler wanted them to unite with Germany.
- The Munich Conference of October 1938 between Hitler and Neville Chamberlain resulted in the Sudetenland being given to Germany on the condition that Hitler made no more demands.
- In March 1939, Germany occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakia.
- On 23 August 1939, Hitler signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact with the Soviet Union. This was to divide Poland between both countries, and clearly showed Hitler's intentions.
- 1 September 1939 – Germany invaded Poland.

Britain's policy of appeasement

- The horrors of the First World War were still clearly in the minds of the British people in the early 1930s. Many wanted to avoid another war at all costs, and if this meant giving in to Hitler's demands, then so be it.
- Many people believed that Germany had been treated too harshly after the First World War, and were therefore willing to accept Hitler's earlier actions.
- The 1930s were a time of great depression, and people were struggling with unemployment and poverty. Events taking place in Germany seemed far away.
- The British government wanted to avoid a war as it would be costly.
- Neville Chamberlain followed the policy of appeasement in the hope that war could be avoided. He hoped that Hitler would be reasonable, and for this reason gave in to many of his demands. He hoped that, with the Munich Conference, he had achieved peace.
- However, the policy of appeasement allowed Hitler to make even greater demands. It made Britain look weak and allowed Germany to expand at an alarming rate. It was becoming stronger, and politicians such as Winston Churchill wanted to see an end to the policy.
- With Germany's invasion of Poland, the policy of appeasement was abandoned and Britain declared war on Germany.

Preparations for war

- Most of the preparations for war took place in 1938 and 1939, when it became clear that Hitler would continue with his aggressive foreign policy.
- New warships were being built.
- The government ensured that the British public were informed about rationing, blackouts, gas masks and evacuation procedures.
- The Royal Air Force (RAF) were well-trained with good aircraft (the Hurricane and the Spitfire were the best fighter planes in the world), but the RAF's bombers were not as modern.
- People were encouraged to start planting vegetables.
- Working regulations and wages were discussed with Trade Unions.
- In 1937, the Air Raid Wardens Service was created, and by 1938, 200,000 people had joined. By September 1939, it had changed its name to the Air Raid Precautions (ARP), and 1.5 million were enrolled.
- Radar had been developed which could detect aircraft by the use of radio waves.
- Barrage balloons were placed in the skies above London to try and stop the German bombers from coming in too low - this reduced the level of success of the bombing campaigns.
- Anti-aircraft guns were also built to try to limit the potential damage that German bombers could cause.
- The Military Training Act of April 1939 made it compulsory for men aged between 20 and 22 to join the armed forces. In September 1939, the National Services Act made it compulsory for men aged between 18 and 41 to join. By the end of 1939 over 1.5 million men had been brought in to join the British armed forces.
- The Home Guard was put in place from 1940 onwards. These were volunteers who were armed and trained to defend the British towns and cities if the German forces successfully landed.