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5 D HISTORY. MR.O’ BRIEN.

CHP.7 NAZI FOREIGN POLICY 1933 TO 1939 THE DRIFT TO WAR.

TIMELINE + CHAPTER NOTES/ SUMMARY.

1. Aims and Objectives of Hitler’s Foreign Policy:

* An end to the Treaty of Versailles.
* Grosdeutschland – A Greater Germany to unite all German-speaking peoples in Europe.
* Lebensraum or Living Space – The movement of Germany’s borders eastwards.

1. October 1933 – Germany Leaves the League of Nations.

* At a 1933 disarmament conference in Geneva Hitler suggested that everyone disarm to the level set for Germany at Versailles.
* France strongly objected.
* Britain proposed a compromise. Germany would be given permission to rearm after a period of four years.
* Hitler rejected the compromise and withdrew Germany from the League of Nations.

1. 1934 Pact with Poland:

* January 1934 Hitler lulls the Poles into a false sense of security by signing a ten-year Non-Aggression Pact with them.
* Hitler agreed to respect Poland’s borders.
* Stalin seen as a greater threat to Poland than Hitler at this stage.
* Other European Powers interpret this as a sign of peaceful intentions by Hitler.
* Traditionally, German demands for the return of Danzig and the Polish Corridor to allow them access to the sea had always been seen as a serious threat to peace in Europe.

1. 1934 The Dollfuss Affair in Austria:

* A major setback for Hitler’s Foreign Policy.
* July 1934 Austrian Prime Minister Engelbert Dollfuss was murdered by Nazi sympathisers.
* Mussolini feared a Nazi coup d’état in Austria. An independent Austria would act as a buffer between Italy and Germany. Mussolini feared Hitler would take over the German speaking area of Northern Italy.
* 40,000 Italian troops marched to the Brenner Pass to prevent a takeover.
* Hitler ordered the Austrian Nazis to abandon their plans for a coup d’état.
* Hitler was unprepared for war at that stage and his image as a man of peace was damaged.

1. 1935 Germany Begins to Rearm:

* 1935 Hitler declares the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles should be abolished.
* Hitler announces the introduction of general conscription.
* Plans to increase army from 100,000 (Versailles Allowance) to 550,000.
* Other powers react by establishing the Stresa Front. They condemn Hitler’s plans.
* When Mussolini invaded Abyssinia, the unity shown by these powers crumbled and a rift formed between Italy and Britain and France.

1. 1935 The Anglo-German Naval Agreement:

* Britain decides to look after its own interests.
* 1935 Britain signs an agreement with Germany to limit the strength of its navy to 35% of the size of the British Fleet.
* U-boats were excluded from this – a major weakness of the agreement.
* Britain left itself open to accusations of breaching terms of Versailles Treaty.
* Hitler interpreted this agreement as a weakness in the British determination to prevent German expansion abroad.

1. 1935 The Saar Plebiscite:

* The Saar coal-mining area of Germany was to remain under League of Nations control for 15 years as agreed in the Treaty of Versailles.
* 1935 a plebiscite (people’s vote) was held to determine the future of the Saar region.
* A vast majority voted to return to German rule. This was seen as a major approval for Hitler’s policies.

1. 1936 The Rhineland:

* 1936 Hitler decides it’s time to make territorial gains.
* As Britain and France were busy with Italy’s actions in Abyssinia it was a good time to march into the demilitarised zone of the Rhineland.
* Under the Treaty of Versailles the Rhineland was to be demilitarised and Germany permanently forbidden to have armies or military fortifications in the zone.
* Hitler used 1935 Franco-Russian Pact as an excuse claiming Germany was threatened on both fronts and that the Rhineland was needed as a buffer zone.
* March 7th 1936 25,000 German troops occupied the Rhineland.
* Hitler ordered his troops to withdraw if France or Belgium resisted. They didn’t so he felt justified in his actions.
* The occupation of the Rhineland marks the beginning of a more aggressive German foreign policy.

1. 1936 to 1939 The Spanish Civil War:

* 1936 -1939 Relations between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy improved when they supported General Franco in the Spanish Civil War.
* Hitler sent 16,000 soldiers, 1 Tank Battalion and 11 Aircraft Squadrons to Spain.
* A right-wing dictatorship in Spain would weaken France.
* Military tactics were tested in Spain. Repeated aerial bombardment was very effective e.g. Guernica 1937. Stuka dive-bombers perfected their technique.
* Appeasement was tested.

1. 1936 to 1939 Appeasement:

* A policy that aims to settle disputes by diplomatic negotiations rather than war.
* British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his Foreign Minister Lord Halifax drive this policy.
* By the time Chamberlain came to power in 1937 the League of Nations was weakened by the departure of Germany, Italy and Japan.
* A new consensus (agreement) would have to be reached by European powers in order to avoid future conflicts.
* 1937 to 1939 sees Chamberlain seeking to answer German complaints by allowing Hitler to revise some of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.
* Britain and France not prepared for war.
* British public opinion thought the Versailles Treaty was too harsh on Germany.
* The Soviet Union was distrusted in Western Europe and Nazi Germany was seen by many as a safeguard against the spread of Communism.

1. 1938 Anschluss:

* Anschluss is the incorporation or unification of Austria into greater Germany.
* 1938 Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schusnigg became aware of a new Nazi plot to overthrow the government.
* He arranged a meeting with Hitler in an effort to stop it but Hitler demands that the Austrian Nazi Arthur Seyss-Inquart be given a place in government.
* To avoid a war with Germany Von Schusnigg gave in and Seyss-Inquart was appointed Minister for the Interior.
* Hitler directed Austrian Nazis to engage in large scale demonstrations and disruption to make Austria ungovernable.
* As a last ditch attempt Von Schusnigg arranged a plebiscite (people’s vote) on the question of a union with Germany.
* Hitler massed his troops on the border and demanded that the vote be cancelled.
* Von Schusnigg cancelled the plebiscite, resigned and left all power to Seyss-Inquart.
* Seyss-Inquart invited the Germans into Austria under the pretext of restoring law and order.
* March 12th, 1938 the German Army marched into Vienna where they were enthusiastically welcomed by most Austrians.
* In the subsequent plebiscite 99.75% voted in favour of the Anschluss or Union with Germany.

1. 1938 Czechoslovakia.

* The Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia contained over three-million Germans.
* 14 days after Anschluss Hitler met the Sudeten-German leader Konrad Henlein to discuss the ‘Sudeten Question’.
* In his speeches Hitler always emphasised the destruction of Czechoslovakia as an independent state.
* However, Czechs had a huge Army of 34 divisions, an excellent intelligence network and the impressive Skoda armaments works.
* The Sudeten Mountains act as a natural barrier against a swift German attack.
* 1935 Franco-Soviet Pact had promised to protect Czech independence by force if necessary.
* Czech President Eduard Benes soon learned that the country’s defences had some major flaws.
* French military leaders were not sure if Franco-Soviet Pact was practical as Germany had a lot of fortifications along the Rhine River.
* The British Army was too small to resist Hitler’s advances.
* The Soviet Union was willing to take a stance as long as France went along with them.
* April 1938 Hitler mobilised his army on the Czech border and triggers a crisis.
* The Czechs responded quickly and decisively and forced the Germans to retreat.
* Hitler put a brave face on it but resolved to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the future.

1. 1938 September – Chamberlain Intervenes:

* Chamberlain believed that some additional peace-making steps were needed to appease the Sudeten Germans.
* Chamberlain flew to Germany twice in September 1938 in an effort to resolve the Sudeten Question with Hitler.
* September 15th 1938 Hitler and Chamberlain met at Berchtesgarten and agreed that Germany could take possession of those parts of the Sudetenland where the population was more than 50% German.
* September 22nd 1938 after securing the support of French Prime Minister Daladier, Chamberlain met Hitler at Godesberg to finalise the deal.
* However, Hitler was now demanding that the entire Sudetenland be returned to Germany.
* Chamberlain was shocked and disappointed and returned to London.
* Europe prepared for a war.

1. Britain and France Prepare for War:

* Britain mobilised its reserve force.
* Anti-aircraft guns were mounted on Government buildings.
* Schoolchildren were evacuated to the countryside.
* In France, one in three Parisians fled the capital fearing a German aerial attack.
* Chamberlain addressed the nation in a BBC broadcast on September 27th, 1938 and expressed his horror at the prospect of war.

1. 1938 The Munich Agreement:

* Mussolini prompted by Hitler hastily arranged a conference in Munich on September 29th, 1938.
* Chamberlain (Britain), Daladier (France), Hitler (Germany) and Mussolini (Italy) attended the conference.
* Neither the Soviet Union nor Czechoslovakia were invited.
* The Munich Agreement contained all that Hitler had demanded of Chamberlain in Godesberg (Sept.22nd, 1938). The Sudetenland was to be handed over to Germany by October 10th, 1938. The borders of the remainder of Czechoslovakia would be guaranteed by all four powers.
* France informed the Czech representatives who were waiting in a nearby hotel that France would no longer abide by the Franco-Soviet Pact if they rejected the deal.
* Abandoned by their friends, Czechoslovakia had no option but to accept the agreement.

1. Peace With Honour:

* Chamberlain hailed as a peacemaker and hero when he returned home.
* He waved a copy of the Munich Agreement in the air and declared that it was ‘**peace with honour, peace for our time’.**
* Winston Churchill, a strong opponent of appeasement, was not impressed with the agreement. In October 1938 Churchill predicted that Hitler wouldn’t stop with the conquest of the Sudetenland.
* Churchill referred to it as ‘a total and unmitigated defeat’.

1. March 1939 - The Occupation of Prague.

* It soon emerged that Hitler was planning a takeover of all of Czechoslovakia.
* The remainder of Czechoslovakia began to crumble under pressure from Germany.
* Hitler encouraged Polish and Hungarian minorities within Czechoslovakia to seek unity with their mother countries. He supported the Slovaks in looking for an independent state.
* March 1939 Czech President Emil Hacha travels to Berlin to plead with Hitler not to interfere in Czech affairs.
* Hitler reacted angrily and called Czech internal disorder a threat to German security.
* Hitler threatened Hacha that if he didn’t place all of Czechoslovakia under German control that the German Airforce the Luftwaffe would bomb the Czech capital city of Prague.
* Fearing a massacre Hacha placed Czechoslovakia in German hands.
* March 16th 1939 the Nazis marched into Prague.
* The German occupation of Czechoslovakia marked a turning point in Hitler’s relations with the Western Powers.it was now clear that Hitler’s foreign policy was not solely about reuniting German-speaking peoples with Germany.

1. Changes in Western Policy:

* March 21st, 1939 Hitler took back the Lithuanian port of Memel.
* Britain and France responded by promising aid to those countries that seemed to be most at risk from future German aggression.
* The Anglo-French guarantees of aid were given to Poland, Greece, Romania and Turkey.

1. August 1939 – The Nazi-Soviet Pact:

* Future of Eastern Europe depended on Stalin’s reaction to the latest threats from Germany.
* Initially, Stalin was anxious to forge an anti-German alliance with France, Britain and the East-European states but he didn’t trust Britain and France because of the lack of consultation over the Munich Agreement.
* Negotiations with the Western Powers made little progress as Poland refused to give Stalin access to Polish territory in the event of a German invasion.
* Poland and the Western Powers didn’t trust Stalin to leave Poland following a war with Germany.
* While the Western Powers delayed Stalin turned to Germany in an effort to buy time.
* August 23rd 1939 German Foreign Minister Von Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow and within three hours a Non-Aggression Pact between the Soviet Union and Germany was signed.
* For Hitler this pact avoided the possibility of war on two fronts in the event that Britain and France declared war following an invasion of Poland.
* Stalin gained breathing space which allowed him build up his defences against a future German attack.

1. March 1939 – Danzig:

* March 21st 1939 Hitler demanded that the city of Danzig be returned to Germany.
* Under the Versailles Treaty Danzig was to remain a free city under the control of the League of Nations.
* Hitler also demands free access across the Polish Corridor to East Prussia.
* Britain and France pledge support to Poland in case of a German attack.
* Hitler responds by cancelling the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact.
* March 22nd, 1939 Hitler and Mussolini signed the ‘Pact of Steel’ in which each promised the other support in the event of a war.
* August 22nd, 1939 Hitler discusses his plan for the invasion of Poland with his Generals.

1. September 1939 – The Outbreak of War:

* Hitler hoped for an agreement with Britain and delayed his plans to invade Poland for a fortnight.
* August 25th, 1939 Hitler suggested to Britain that he guarantee the security of the British Empire in return for a free hand on the continent of Europe.
* Britain failed to respond.
* September 1st, 1939 Hitler proceeds with the German invasion of Poland.
* September 3rd, 1939 following Hitler’s failure to respond to a demand to withdraw from Poland, Britain and France declared war on Germany.
* September 3rd, 1939 World War Two had begun.