

IB History SL: Move to Global War — Notes & Exam Prep 2026

IB SL Study Guide

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How to Use This Guide

- **Prescribed Subject 3** covers two case studies: Japanese expansion in East Asia (1931–1941) and German/Italian expansion in Europe (1933–1940)
- **Paper 1** tests source analysis skills — OPVL, comparison, and evaluation — alongside factual knowledge
- **Exam Alerts** flag the traps that cost marks in both MCQs and source questions
- **IB Tips** highlight what examiners reward in extended responses
- **Practice Questions** mirror real Paper 1 structure, with model answers

A *igned to IB History SL Prescribed Subject 3 — current syllabus*

Videos on this page: Road to World War II — Causes · Appeasement & Munich Agreement

Section 1: Case Study 1 — Japanese Expansion in East Asia, 1931–1941

1.1 Causes of Expansion: Japan Before 1931

To understand why Japan expanded, you must understand the pressures it faced in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Economic pressures:

- Japan was heavily dependent on imported raw materials — coal, iron ore, and oil had to be bought abroad
- The **Great Depression (1929)** devastated Japan's export economy; silk exports to the USA collapsed by over 50%
- Mass unemployment and rural poverty created social instability
- Japan lacked the natural resources of Western imperial powers yet aspired to equal industrial status

Political pressures:

- Liberal parliamentary democracy was seen by many military officers as weak and corrupt
- **Ultra-nationalist** movements (pan-Asian ideology, emperor-worship) grew rapidly in the military
- The army and navy operated with significant independence from civilian government — they could appoint or bring down cabinets by withdrawing their ministers
- Young military officers increasingly believed that territorial expansion was the only solution to Japan's economic vulnerability

Strategic context:

- China was weak and fragmented — the Nationalist (Kuomintang/KMT) government under Chiang Kai-shek was fighting both regional warlords and the Chinese Communist Party
- The USSR was industrialising rapidly and viewed as a long-term threat in Manchuria
- Western powers (USA, Britain) were distracted by the Depression and unlikely to intervene militarily

MEMORISE THIS

The three driving forces behind Japanese expansion — LSRI:

- **L**ack of natural resources (raw materials, oil, food)
- **S**trong military with independent political power
- **R**ising nationalism and pan-Asian ideology
- **I**nability of weak/divided civilian government to control the army

1.2 Events: The Manchurian Crisis, 1931

The Mukden Incident (September 18, 1931)

On the night of 18–19 September 1931, officers of the **Kwantung Army** (Japan's garrison force in Manchuria) staged a false-flag operation: they blew up a small section of the South Manchuria Railway near Mukden (now Shenyang) and blamed Chinese saboteurs. Using this as a pretext, the Kwantung Army launched a full invasion of Manchuria — **without authorisation from the civilian government in Tokyo**.

The key point: this was a **military coup from below**. Junior and mid-level officers acted independently. The civilian government was presented with a fait accompli and chose not to reverse it, fearing domestic backlash.

Within five months, Japan had conquered the entire region of Manchuria — an area roughly the size of France and Germany combined.

Creation of Manchukuo (March 1932)

Japan declared the puppet state of **Manchukuo** on 1 March 1932, placing the last Qing emperor, **Puyi**, on the throne as a figurehead. Manchukuo was internationally recognised only by other authoritarian regimes — no democratic power recognised it.

Why Manchuria mattered:

Resource/FactorSignificance

Coal and iron oreEssential for industrial production and weapons

Agricultural landFood security for Japan's growing population

Strategic buffer Protected Korea (a Japanese colony since 1910) from Soviet threat

Railway network South Manchuria Railway was Japan's most profitable overseas asset

Psychological Proved the army could act without civilian permission and succeed

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Many students write that Japan invaded Manchuria because “Japan needed lebensraum” — this is mixing up Japan with Nazi Germany. Use the correct vocabulary: Japan sought **raw materials**, **strategic security**, and **imperial prestige**. “Lebensraum” is specific to Hitler’s ideology.

The League of Nations Response — The Lytton Commission

China appealed immediately to the **League of Nations**. The League dispatched a commission led by British diplomat **Lord Lytton**. The Lytton Report (October 1932) concluded:

- Japan’s military action was **not legitimate self-defence**
- The creation of Manchukuo was **not a spontaneous independence movement**
- Recommended that Manchuria be returned to Chinese sovereignty under League supervision

The League voted 42–1 to accept the Lytton Report in February 1933 (Japan cast the single dissenting vote).

Japan’s response: It **withdrew from the League of Nations** (March 1933) and kept Manchuria. The League imposed no sanctions, sent no troops, and took no further action.

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Students often claim the League “did nothing.” Be precise: the League did condemn Japan diplomatically through the Lytton Report and voted to reject Manchukuo. What it **failed** to do was impose economic sanctions or military force. The distinction matters for source questions asking about the League’s effectiveness.

1.3 Events: Escalation, 1932–1936

Following Manchuria, Japan pushed further into northern China:

- **January 1932** — Japan attacked **Shanghai** (the First Shanghai Incident), demonstrating it could strike China’s major cities. International pressure forced a ceasefire, but Japan faced no lasting consequences.
- **1933** — Japan occupied **Rehe (Jehol)** province and extended its control into Inner Mongolia and northern China through the **Tanggu Truce** (May 1933), which created a demilitarised zone favouring Japan.

- **1935–1936** — Japan pressured the Chinese government into the **He-Umezu Agreement** (1935), effectively removing KMT forces from Hebei province, and the **Doihara-Qin Agreement**, limiting Chinese influence in Chahar.

These agreements showed that Japan could extract territorial concessions from China without full-scale war — reinforcing the belief that aggression paid.

Domestically in Japan:

- February 1936: A failed military coup by ultra-nationalist officers (**February 26 Incident**) temporarily alarmed the government but ultimately strengthened the conservative military's grip on policy
- The army increasingly dominated cabinet decisions through 1936–1937

1.4 Events: The Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1941

The Marco Polo Bridge Incident (July 7, 1937)

On the night of 7 July 1937, shots were fired near the Marco Polo Bridge (Lugouqiao) outside Beijing between Japanese and Chinese troops during a routine Japanese military exercise. The cause remains disputed, but the incident rapidly escalated into full-scale war.

Unlike 1931, this time the **Chinese government refused to back down**. Chiang Kai-shek committed his forces, and within weeks the conflict became a massive conventional war.

Key phases of the war:

Period	Event	Significance
August 1937	Battle of Shanghai	Japan expected quick victory; China resisted for 3 months — 250,000+ casualties combined
December 1937	Nanjing Massacre	Japan captured China's capital; mass atrocities (estimates: 100,000–300,000 civilians killed, widespread rape) — international outrage
1938	Battle of Wuhan	Japan captures China's wartime capital, but Chiang retreats west to Chongqing
1939–1941	Stalemate	Japan controls cities and railways; KMT and Communists control countryside — Japan cannot force surrender

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: The Nanjing Massacre (called the “Rape of Nanking” in older sources) is a heavily debated topic in historiography. Japanese nationalist historians have tried to minimise or deny it; Chinese and most Western historians document it extensively. In a source question, if a Japanese government source from the 1930s or 1940s denies atrocities, you should note its **origin and purpose** create significant limitations.

Why Japan Could Not Win

Japan's military was vastly superior in the field but faced an insoluble strategic problem: **China was too large to conquer**. Key factors:

- China's population was enormous (450+ million) — Japan could not garrison every town
- Chiang Kai-shek pursued a strategy of **trading space for time**, retreating westward while waiting for Japan to overextend or for international intervention
- The Japanese army was locked down in China, consuming enormous resources
- Guerrilla warfare by Chinese Communist forces (led by Mao Zedong) tied down additional troops
- The war was economically draining — Japan needed to find new sources of oil and resources

1.5 Events & Responses: Japan and the Path to Pearl Harbor, 1940–1941

Japan's Strategic Dilemma

By 1940, Japan faced a critical resource crisis driven by the China quagmire:

- **80% of Japan's oil** came from the United States
- The USA was increasingly hostile to Japanese expansion — supplying China through the Burma Road and freezing Japanese assets
- Japan needed to either back down from China (politically impossible for the military) or find alternative oil sources

The answer was the “**Southern Resource Zone**” — the oil and rubber-rich colonial territories of Southeast Asia (Dutch East Indies, British Malaya, French Indochina).

Key Events 1940–1941

1940:

- June: France fell to Germany → French Indochina became vulnerable
- September: Japan occupied northern French Indochina (with Vichy French acquiescence)
- September 1940: **Tripartite Pact** signed between Japan, Germany, and Italy — the Axis alliance formalised

1941:

- April 1941: Japan signs a **Non-Aggression Pact with the USSR** — secures the northern flank, freeing Japan to move south
- July 1941: Japan occupies **southern French Indochina** — this was the tripwire

- July–August 1941: USA, Britain, and Netherlands impose a **total oil embargo** on Japan — Japan had roughly 18 months of oil reserves
- November 1941: Negotiations between Japan and the USA collapse; US demands Japan withdraw from China — Japan refuses
- **December 7, 1941: Attack on Pearl Harbor** — Japan simultaneously attacks Pearl Harbor (US Pacific Fleet), Malaya, the Philippines, and Hong Kong

MEMORISE THIS

The sequence that makes Pearl Harbor logical:

China War (1937) → Oil dependency exposed → Southern Indochina occupation (July 1941) → US oil embargo (August 1941) → 18-month oil countdown → Attack South + neutralise US Pacific Fleet = Pearl Harbor

IB TIP

IB Tip: Examiners reward students who link Pearl Harbor back to the Manchurian Crisis of 1931. The logic is continuous: each act of aggression created a new dependency (China war → resource drain → Southern Strategy → oil embargo → Pearl Harbor). This “chain of consequences” argument scores well in Paper 1 extended responses.

1.6 Timeline: Japanese Expansion 1931–1941

MEMORISE THIS

Critical dates to know:

Date	Event
18 Sep 1931	Mukden Incident — invasion of Manchuria begins
1 Mar 1932	Manchukuo proclaimed; Puyi installed as puppet emperor
Feb 1933	Lytton Report adopted by League 42–1
Mar 1933	Japan withdraws from League of Nations
7 Jul 1937	Marco Polo Bridge Incident — Second Sino-Japanese War begins
Dec 1937	Nanjing Massacre
Sep 1940	Tripartite Pact (Japan, Germany, Italy)
Apr 1941	Soviet-Japanese Non-Aggression Pact
Jul 1941	Japan occupies southern Indochina
Aug 1941	US/UK/Netherlands oil embargo on Japan
7 Dec 1941	Attack on Pearl Harbor; USA enters WWII

►Watch: The Road to World War II — Causes and Expansion

[VIDEO](#)

Section 2: Case Study 2 — German and Italian Expansion in Europe, 1933–1940

2.1 Causes of Expansion: Hitler's Foreign Policy Goals

Understanding Hitler's goals is essential for understanding every event from 1933 to 1939. His aims were clearly stated in **Mein Kampf** (written 1924, published 1925) and repeated consistently in speeches and the **Hossbach Memorandum** (November 1937).

Core foreign policy objectives:

Hitler did not hide his ambitions — he published them in 1925. Understanding his five stated goals explains why each crisis from the Rhineland to Poland was not a surprise but a predictable step in a sequence.

1. **Revision of the Treaty of Versailles** — repudiate the “war guilt” clause, recover lost territories (Rhineland, Sudetenland, Danzig, Polish Corridor), rearm Germany
2. **Anschluss** — union with Austria (forbidden by both Versailles and the Treaty of Saint-Germain 1919)
3. **Lebensraum (“living space”)** — conquest of territory to the East (primarily Poland and the USSR) to provide agricultural land and resources for the German Volk
4. **Destruction of “Judeo-Bolshevism”** — ideological war against the Soviet Union, linked to antisemitism
5. **German racial dominance** — establishment of German hegemony over Europe

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: The Hossbach Memorandum (1937) is a frequently used source in Paper 1. It records a meeting where Hitler outlined his intentions to his military commanders. Examiners test whether you understand its **limitations**: it is a summary written by an aide (Hossbach), not a verbatim transcript, and some historians (notably A.J.P. Taylor) disputed that it represented firm planning rather than speculation. Know both views.

MEMORISE THIS

Historiography shortcut — “intentionalist vs. structuralist” debate:

- **Intentionalists** (Trevor-Roper, Jackel): Hitler had a clear, consistent programme from *Mein Kampf* onwards; WWII was his deliberate plan
- **Structuralists/functionalists** (Mommsen, Broszat): Nazi foreign policy was improvised, responding to opportunities rather than following a master plan
- **Synthesis** (Ian Kershaw): Hitler had ideological goals but was also an opportunist who exploited circumstances

In a source question, this debate is useful for evaluating sources that claim Hitler either “always planned” a specific event or was “forced” into it.

2.2 Events: Rearmament and the Rhineland

Rearmament (1933–1936)

Hitler’s first priority on taking power (January 1933) was to rebuild German military power, in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles.

Key steps:

- **1933:** Germany withdraws from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations (October)
- **1935:** Hitler announces the existence of the **Luftwaffe** (air force — banned by Versailles) and introduces **conscription** — the Wehrmacht to be expanded to 550,000 men (Versailles limited Germany to 100,000)
- **1935:** The **Anglo-German Naval Agreement** — Britain agrees to allow Germany a navy 35% the size of the Royal Navy, including submarines. This **bilaterally undermined** Versailles without French or League consultation — a major diplomatic victory for Hitler

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: The Anglo-German Naval Agreement (June 1935) is one of the clearest examples of Britain’s appeasement policy predating the famous Munich Agreement. Many students start appeasement at Munich (1938) — begin it here. The Agreement also infuriated France and exposed the fragility of the Stresa Front (the brief anti-German coalition of Britain, France, and Italy formed in April 1935).

Remilitarisation of the Rhineland (March 7, 1936)

The **Rhineland** — the zone on both banks of the Rhine — had been demilitarised under Versailles and reaffirmed by the Locarno Treaties (1925), which Germany signed voluntarily. On 7 March 1936, Hitler sent approximately 3,000 troops into the Rhineland (with a further 19,000 in reserve).

Why it was a huge gamble:

- Hitler later admitted the 48 hours after the order was the most nerve-wracking of his life
- The German military was still weak — generals had contingency plans to retreat if France resisted
- France and Britain had the legal right and military power to expel German forces

Why no one stopped him:

- Britain: Legal opinion was divided on whether this violated Locarno; many Britons felt Germany had a right to troops in its own territory (“Hitler is only going into his own back garden”)
- France: Held elections in April 1936, governments were unwilling to risk war without British support; the military insisted on full mobilisation before any action
- League: Germany was not yet expelled; Britain and France preferred negotiation
- The USSR: Not trusted; still outside Western diplomatic arrangements

Consequences: Hitler concluded that France and Britain would not fight.

Remilitarisation was the single most important turning point in the road to war — had it been reversed, Hitler’s domestic prestige would have been destroyed and further aggression deterred.

IB TIP

IB Tip: When asked to evaluate which single event most emboldened Hitler, the Rhineland is the strongest answer because (a) Hitler himself said so, (b) France and Britain had the clearest legal and military justification to act, and (c) it established the pattern for all subsequent crises. Practice building a direct argument around this point.

2.3 Events: The Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939

Although not a direct case of German territorial expansion, the **Spanish Civil War** (1936–1939) is examinable as part of the context for the Move to Global War.

- Hitler and Mussolini supported Franco’s Nationalist rebels against the Republican government
- Germany’s **Condor Legion** tested new Blitzkrieg tactics and Luftwaffe capabilities — most infamously at **Guernica** (April 1937)
- Italy sent 70,000+ troops to Spain
- The Western democracies adopted a **Non-Intervention Policy** (Non-Intervention Committee, 1936) — widely seen as facilitating fascist victory
- The war deepened the Rome-Berlin Axis (formalised October 1936) and created the **Anti-Comintern Pact** (Germany and Japan, November 1936; Italy joined 1937)

2.4 Events: Anschluss with Austria, March 1938

Anschluss means “union” — the political merger of Austria into Germany. It matters because it was the first time Hitler absorbed a sovereign neighbouring state, demonstrated that the post-WWI treaty system could be dismantled by force, and removed the last barrier between Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Background

Austria's union with Germany had been Hitler's personal obsession since childhood — he was born in Austria. Versailles and the Treaty of Saint-Germain explicitly **forbade** Anschluss. Mussolini had previously blocked a German attempt in 1934 (when Austrian Nazis murdered Chancellor Dollfuss).

By 1938, however, the situation had changed:

- The **Rome-Berlin Axis** (1936) aligned Italy with Germany — Mussolini would no longer oppose Anschluss
- Austrian Nazis, encouraged from Berlin, were creating internal chaos
- Austrian Chancellor **Kurt Schuschnigg** was under intense German pressure

Events

- February 1938: Hitler summoned Schuschnigg to Berchtesgaden and bullied him into accepting Austrian Nazis in the cabinet
- March 9, 1938: Schuschnigg called a snap **referendum** on Austrian independence, to be held March 13 — hoping to get a public mandate
- March 11, 1938: Hitler issued an ultimatum demanding Schuschnigg cancel the referendum and resign; Germany massed troops on the border
- Schuschnigg resigned; Austrian Nazi **Arthur Seyss-Inquart** took over and “invited” Germany in
- March 12–13, 1938: German troops crossed the border; Hitler entered Vienna to massive crowds
- March 13: Austria was **annexed** (incorporated) into Germany — the term “Anschluss” means “union” or “connection”

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Many students write that Austrians opposed Anschluss. The historical evidence is more complex. Hitler received a genuinely enthusiastic reception in Vienna, and a subsequent (Nazi-supervised) plebiscite showed 99%+ approval. While this plebiscite was coerced, there was real popular support for union among many Austrians — partly pan-German nationalism, partly Catholic conservative support for Hitler against “Bolshevism.” A nuanced answer acknowledges both the coercion and the popular enthusiasm.

International response: Britain and France protested verbally. No action was taken. The League did nothing. Mussolini privately acquiesced (Hitler sent him a grateful telegram).

2.5 Events & Responses: The Sudetenland Crisis and Munich, 1938

The Crisis

The **Sudetenland** was a region of western Czechoslovakia with a German-speaking population of approximately 3.5 million. Czechoslovakia was a democratic state with a significant French-allied military — the **Maginot Line's eastern anchor** was essentially Czechoslovakia.

In April 1938, the **Sudeten German Party** (directed from Berlin) presented the Czech government with demands for autonomy that were designed to be unacceptable. Hitler's real aim was the **destruction of Czechoslovakia as a state**, not merely Sudeten autonomy.

Escalation:

- May 1938: False reports of German troop movements caused Czechoslovakia to mobilise; Hitler backed down temporarily but was furious — he accelerated planning for invasion
- Summer 1938: Hitler set a deadline of October 1, 1938 for “solving” the Sudeten problem
- France had treaty obligations to defend Czechoslovakia; Britain had no such treaty but Chamberlain intervened directly

The Munich Conference, September 29–30, 1938

As war seemed imminent, British Prime Minister **Neville Chamberlain** made three personal flights to Germany in September 1938:

1. **Berchtesgaden** (September 15): Chamberlain agreed in principle to Czech cession of Sudeten areas with >50% German population
2. **Bad Godesberg** (September 22–23): Hitler escalated demands — immediate military occupation, no international supervision. Chamberlain was shocked; Britain and France prepared for war
3. **Munich** (September 29–30): Four-power conference (Britain, France, Germany, Italy) — Czechoslovakia and the USSR were **excluded**

The Munich Agreement gave Hitler all his demands:

- Germany to occupy Sudeten areas by October 10, 1938
- International commission to supervise; plebiscites in disputed areas
- Britain and France “guaranteed” the remainder of Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia was presented with the agreement as a fait accompli.

MEMORISE THIS

Munich Agreement key facts:

Detail	Fact
Date	September 29–30, 1938
Signatories	Chamberlain (UK), Daladier (France), Hitler (Germany), Mussolini (Italy)
Excluded parties	Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union
Territory ceded	Sudetenland (3.5 million Germans, plus Czech fortifications)
Chamberlain's claim	"Peace for our time" (September 30, 1938)
Actual outcome	Germany occupied rest of Czechoslovakia by March 1939

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Chamberlain said "peace **for** our time" — NOT "peace **in** our time." Students misquote this constantly. Get the exact phrase right in a source question if it appears.

Interpretations of Appeasement

Appeasement was the British and French policy of making concessions to Hitler's demands in the hope that satisfying them would prevent war. It is studied not as an obvious blunder but as a genuine policy choice made under real pressures — understanding why intelligent leaders chose it is as important as understanding why it failed.

Appeasement is one of the most debated policies in modern history. IB Paper 1 sources regularly present different views.

Arguments that appeasement was justified (or understandable):

- Britain was militarily unprepared in 1938 — rearmament needed more time (the RAF was not ready; radar defences incomplete)
- British public opinion strongly opposed another war — memories of World War I were raw
- The Sudeten Germans arguably had a genuine grievance under Wilsonian self-determination
- Many in Britain believed the Treaty of Versailles had been unjust to Germany
- Chamberlain genuinely believed Hitler could be satisfied — it was not cowardice but a calculated policy
- The Soviet Union was distrusted as an ally; a German-Soviet war might be preferable to British involvement

Arguments that appeasement was a catastrophic mistake:

- Czechoslovakia had a strong, well-equipped army of 35 divisions and excellent fortifications — a stand in 1938 would have been more favourable than 1939
- Hitler's aims went far beyond revision of Versailles (Mein Kampf, Hossbach Memorandum)
- Each concession convinced Hitler that democracies would never fight

- The USSR was alienated — Stalin drew the conclusion that the West was directing Hitler eastward, contributing to the **Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact** (August 1939)
- Churchill famously said: “You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war.”

IB TIP

IB Tip: Never write that Chamberlain was simply “naive” or “stupid.” Examiners reward nuanced analysis. The correct framing is: Chamberlain’s policy was a rational calculation based on imperfect information and genuine constraints (military weakness, public opinion, economic pressures) — but it rested on the fatal assumption that Hitler’s goals were limited and rational. When that assumption proved wrong (March 1939), appeasement collapsed.

2.6 Events & Responses: The Collapse of Appeasement and the Road to War, 1939

March 1939: Occupation of the Rest of Czechoslovakia

On March 15, 1939, Hitler occupied **Bohemia and Moravia** (the Czech lands, not the Sudetenland). Slovakia became a puppet state. This destroyed the rationale for appeasement:

- For the first time, Hitler had taken territory populated primarily by **non-Germans** — this could not be defended as self-determination
- Chamberlain was publicly humiliated; British public opinion shifted sharply
- Britain and France issued **guarantees to Poland** (March 31, 1939) — the first time they committed to fight if an ally was attacked

The Danzig Crisis and Polish Guarantee

Hitler’s next target was **Danzig** (Gdansk), a German-majority city under League of Nations administration, and the **Polish Corridor** (territory separating East Prussia from the rest of Germany, awarded to Poland at Versailles).

Poland, unlike Czechoslovakia, refused German demands. With the Anglo-French guarantee, Poland stood firm.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, August 23, 1939

The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was one of the most shocking diplomatic events of the 20th century — two ideological enemies, fascism and communism, made a deal.

Why it happened:

- Stalin had offered collective security to France and Britain but was rebuffed or treated with suspicion

- Stalin was excluded from Munich — he concluded the West wanted to turn Hitler eastward
- The Pact gave the USSR time to rearm and secured the Baltic states and eastern Poland in secret protocols
- For Hitler, it eliminated the risk of a two-front war — he could attack Poland without Soviet opposition

Secret Protocol: The Pact contained a secret clause dividing Eastern Europe into German and Soviet “spheres of influence.” Finland, Estonia, Latvia, eastern Poland, and Bessarabia went to the USSR; western Poland went to Germany.

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Many students do not know that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had a secret protocol. This detail is often tested in MCQ and source questions. Also note: examiners sometimes ask whether the Pact made war inevitable — the answer is no, it made war over Poland almost certain, but war did not have to become a world war.

September 1, 1939: Germany Invades Poland

- September 1, 1939: Germany invades Poland (Blitzkrieg — armoured thrust supported by air power)
- September 3, 1939: Britain and France declare war on Germany
- September 17, 1939: USSR invades Poland from the east (per the secret protocol)
- September 28, 1939: Poland partitioned between Germany and the USSR

2.7 Causes & Events: Mussolini and Italian Expansion

Background: Mussolini's Goals

Benito Mussolini came to power in Italy in 1922 and developed a foreign policy of **Roman imperial revival** — Italy should dominate the Mediterranean (the Italian aspiration: “mare nostrum” — our sea) and build an empire in Africa.

Italy had two existing African colonies: **Libya** and **Eritrea/Italian Somaliland**. Mussolini wanted to add **Ethiopia (Abyssinia)** — avenging Italy's humiliating defeat at **Adwa (1896)**, when Ethiopia had repelled an Italian invasion.

The Abyssinian Crisis, 1935–1936

- **October 3, 1935:** Italy invaded **Abyssinia (Ethiopia)** after a border incident at Walwal
- The invasion used modern weapons — artillery, poison gas (mustard gas), aerial bombardment — against an army largely equipped with spears and older rifles
- Emperor **Haile Selassie** appealed to the League of Nations in a famous speech (June 1936)

League Response:

The League imposed **economic sanctions** on Italy — but they were fatally incomplete:

- Steel, coal, and arms were sanctioned
- **Oil was not sanctioned** — the most critical omission (British Foreign Secretary Hoare later admitted oil sanctions would have stopped Mussolini within weeks)
- The **Suez Canal** was not closed to Italian ships — Italy could supply its army through it
- The USA was not a League member and continued oil exports to Italy

The Hoare-Laval Pact (December 1935): British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare and French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval secretly planned to give Mussolini two-thirds of Abyssinia in exchange for peace. When leaked to the press, the public was outraged — both men resigned. The plan revealed that Britain and France were unwilling to enforce collective security even when they had begun the process.

- **May 1936:** Italy completed the conquest of Abyssinia; Haile Selassie fled to Britain
- League sanctions were lifted in July 1936 — the League's credibility was destroyed

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: The Abyssinian Crisis is the defining moment of the League's failure. The key analytical point is not that the League imposed no sanctions — it did — but that the **sanctions were selectively applied** to avoid actually stopping Italy, because Britain and France feared pushing Mussolini into Hitler's arms. This is a more sophisticated and accurate argument than "the League did nothing."

Italy, the Axis, and Albania

- **October 1936:** Rome-Berlin **Axis** formalised (Mussolini coined the term "Axis")
- **November 1936:** Anti-Comintern Pact (Germany and Japan; Italy joined 1937)
- **April 1939:** Italy invades **Albania** — a rapid conquest that shocked even Britain and France (response: guarantees to Greece and Romania)
- **May 1939:** Italy and Germany sign the **Pact of Steel** — a full military alliance

MEMORISE THIS

Italy's expansion timeline:

Date	Event
Oct 1935	Italy invades Abyssinia
Dec 1935	Hoare-Laval Pact — leaked and abandoned
May 1936	Abyssinia conquered; annexed as Italian East Africa
Jul 1936	League sanctions on Italy lifted
Oct 1936	Rome-Berlin Axis
Nov 1936	Anti-Comintern Pact (Germany-Japan; Italy 1937)
Apr 1939	Italy invades Albania
May 1939	Pact of Steel (Italy-Germany military alliance)

►Watch: Appeasement, the Munich Agreement, and the Failure of Diplomacy VIDEO

Section 3: International Responses (Prescribed Category: Responses)

3.1 The League of Nations — Structure and Inherent Weaknesses

The **League of Nations** was established by the **Paris Peace Settlement (1919–1920)** as the world's first international collective security organisation. Its Covenant committed members to resolve disputes peacefully, respect territorial integrity, and apply sanctions against aggressors.

Structural weaknesses from the outset:

Weakness	Explanation
USA absent	US Senate rejected membership; no US military or economic power behind the League
USSR absent	Excluded until 1934 (then expelled 1939 after invading Finland)
Germany absent	Initially excluded as a defeated power (joined 1926, left 1933)
No army	The League had no standing military force; relied on member states to contribute troops
Unanimity rule	The Council required unanimous decisions — any great power could block action
Self-interest	Major powers (Britain, France) used the League to serve national interests, not principles

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: A very common exam mistake is blaming the League's failure entirely on its structure. The structural weaknesses were real but the League also faced specific political failures — notably Britain and France's deliberate decisions not to enforce collective security when it conflicted with their interests. Examiners reward students who distinguish between structural problems and political choices.

3.2 Why Collective Security Failed

Collective security is the idea that countries protect each other by agreeing that an attack on any one of them is treated as an attack on all — so no aggressor faces just one opponent. In the 1930s this principle was supposed to be the League of Nations' main weapon against aggression, but it was never actually used.

Collective security is the principle that an act of aggression against one member is treated as aggression against all, triggering a collective response. In practice, it never worked because:

1. **Great power self-interest:** Britain and France were not willing to risk war or economic disruption to enforce collective security on behalf of distant countries (Manchuria, Abyssinia)
2. **No US participation:** The world's largest economy stayed outside the League; without US sanctions, embargoes were easily circumvented
3. **Fear of Communism:** Many conservative politicians in Britain and France preferred a strong Germany as a bulwark against Soviet communism
4. **Economic Depression:** The 1930s was a decade of economic crisis — governments were focused on domestic unemployment, not foreign adventures
5. **War-weariness:** The memory of World War I (1914–1918) — 10+ million dead — made populations and governments desperate to avoid war, which aggressors exploited
6. **Fragmented opposition:** Britain and France had different interests and rarely presented a united front

3.3 The Appeasement Debate in Historiography

Contemporary critics (1930s–1940s):

- **Winston Churchill:** Denounced Munich as “a total, unmitigated defeat”; argued that Hitler could have been stopped in 1936 or 1938 at lower cost than 1939
- **Duff Cooper:** Resigned from the Cabinet over Munich; believed Czechoslovakia was worth fighting for

Revisionist historians (1960s–1970s):

- **A.J.P. Taylor** (*The Origins of the Second World War*, 1961): Argued Hitler was an opportunist exploiting circumstances, not following a master plan; blamed the Western powers for poor diplomacy more than Hitler for aggression. Controversial and largely rejected by mainstream historians.
- **David Dilks, John Charmley:** Argued Chamberlain's policy was rational given Britain's actual military and economic constraints; war in 1938 would have been harder to win than war in 1939

Post-revisionist historians (1980s–present):

- **Richard Overy, Ian Kershaw:** Largely returned to a critical view of appeasement; argued that the military balance in 1938 actually **favoured the Allies** (Czechoslovakia's 35 divisions plus French/British forces vs. a Wehrmacht not yet fully prepared); appeasement was a miscalculation, not a rational policy

IB TIP

IB Tip: In a Paper 1 source question asking you to evaluate a source arguing appeasement was justified, you should: (1) acknowledge the genuine constraints Chamberlain faced, (2) note what the source omits (the military balance in 1938 — see Overy — the Hossbach Memorandum, Hitler's stated goals in *Mein Kampf*), and (3) conclude that while the policy was understandable, the evidence suggests it was based on a fundamental misreading of Hitler's nature and goals.

Section 4: Source Analysis Skills (Paper 1)

Paper 1 is a 1-hour exam with 4–5 sources and 4 questions. Sources may be written (speeches, diplomatic cables, memoirs, newspaper articles, government documents) or visual (cartoons, photographs, posters).

4.1 Understanding the Question Types

Question 1 (2–3 marks): “According to Source A, what was...?” — Content comprehension. Stay close to the text. Do not analyse, just identify what the source says.

Question 2 (4 marks): Evaluate the value and limitations of ONE source. Use OPVL.

Question 3 (6 marks): Compare and contrast TWO sources. Focus on both similarities AND differences in message/perspective.

Question 4 (9 marks): “Using Sources A–E and your own knowledge, evaluate...” — Extended essay using sources plus contextual knowledge.

4.2 OPVL Framework (Question 2)

OPVL is the structured method IB History uses to evaluate a source: rather than just summarising what a source says, you analyse where it came from, why it was created, and what that means for how much you can trust it. It is the single most tested skill in Paper 1 and the difference between a descriptive answer and an analytical one.

OPVL stands for: **Origin, Purpose, Value, Limitation**

Structure your response as follows:

Origin: Who created the source? When? In what context?

“Source B is a speech by Neville Chamberlain delivered to the House of Commons on 3 October 1938, the day after his return from Munich...”

Purpose: Why was this source created? What was the creator trying to achieve?

“Its purpose was to defend his agreement to the Munich settlement to a sceptical Parliament and British public, reassuring them that war had been avoided through reasonable concession...”

Value: How does the origin/purpose make it useful for historians?

“As a primary source produced by the key British decision-maker immediately after Munich, it is valuable for understanding how British leaders justified appeasement to themselves and the public. Chamberlain’s language reveals the genuine belief that Hitler could be satisfied — a belief central to appeasement policy...”

Limitation: How does the origin/purpose limit its usefulness?

“However, its value as evidence of Hitler’s actual intentions is severely limited — Chamberlain was arguing from incomplete knowledge of what Hitler had told his generals in the Hossbach Memorandum. As a public speech, it was also diplomatically calibrated rather than candid; Chamberlain’s private doubts (visible in his diary) do not appear here...”

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Students lose marks by writing “the author might be biased” without explaining **how** the specific origin or purpose creates a specific limitation. Vague bias claims score poorly. Always link limitation directly to origin or purpose: “Because this source was written as propaganda for the German home front, it omits any reference to military casualties and presents the invasion of Poland as a defensive operation — this specific omission limits its usefulness for...”

4.3 Comparing Sources (Question 3)

Structure for comparison (6 marks):

A strong comparison answer has:

- At least 2–3 explicit points of agreement OR difference
- Direct quotation from both sources in each point
- Explanation of **why** they agree or differ (context, perspective, purpose)

Example framing:

“Sources C and D both present the League of Nations as a fundamentally ineffective body, though they differ in their diagnosis of its failure. Source C, a 1936 editorial from The Times, attributes the League’s failure to the absence of major powers (‘a

body without teeth or spine'), while Source D, an excerpt from Haile Selassie's League speech, locates the failure in the deliberate political unwillingness of its members ('it is us today, it will be you tomorrow'). Both sources converge on the conclusion that collective security had collapsed by 1936, but Source C blames institutional design while Source D attributes responsibility to the moral failure of member states."

IB TIP

IB Tip: The phrase "it is us today, it will be you tomorrow" from Haile Selassie's 1936 League speech is one of the most quoted sources in IB History. If it appears as a source, the examiners expect you to know its context (Abyssinia, June 1936, Mussolini's conquest nearly complete) and to note the bitter irony that his prediction proved accurate — within three years, France and Britain were also facing invasion.

4.4 Using Your Own Knowledge (Question 4)

In Question 4, the sources alone are never sufficient — you must bring in historical context that **goes beyond** what the sources provide. Strategies:

1. **Identify what the sources collectively omit:** If all sources are from 1938, you should add context from 1936 (Rhineland) or 1937 (Hossbach Memorandum) that is not in the source set
2. **Evaluate sources against each other:** Use one source to challenge another
3. **Use historiography:** A brief reference to Taylor vs. Trevor-Roper, or the "appeasement debate," shows exam-level sophistication
4. **Structure:** Brief intro → source analysis (each source) → own knowledge paragraphs → conclusion with a direct answer to the question

How much own knowledge? Roughly one-third of the essay should come from your own knowledge, two-thirds from the sources. Do not write a pure essay ignoring the sources — that scores in band 4–5 maximum.

Section 5: Practice Questions

MCQ Practice (Paper 1 Style)

Question 1. What was the primary justification used by Japan for occupying Manchuria in 1931?

A. Japan needed agricultural land for its expanding population

B. Chinese saboteurs had attacked the South Manchuria Railway at Mukden ← CORRECT

C. The League of Nations had authorised Japanese intervention to restore order

D. China had invaded Korea, a Japanese protectorate

Why: The Mukden Incident was staged as a false-flag operation — Japanese Kwantung Army officers blew up a small section of railway and blamed Chinese nationalists. This was the pretext, not the real cause, of the invasion. Option A is an underlying reason but not the justification given. Option C is false — the League condemned Japan. Option D is invented.

Question 2. The Lytton Report (1932) concluded that:

A. Japan had the legal right to occupy Manchuria under existing treaties

B. Japanese military action in Manchuria was not legitimate self-defence ← CORRECT

C. China should compensate Japan for attacks on the South Manchuria Railway

D. The League of Nations should impose military sanctions against Japan

Why: The Lytton Commission specifically rejected the Japanese claim of self-defence and stated that Manchukuo was not a genuine independence movement. Option D is wrong — the Report recommended diplomatic solutions, not military sanctions, and the League voted on its findings without imposing military force.

Question 3. Which agreement most directly undermined the Treaty of Versailles in 1935?

A. The Rome-Berlin Axis

B. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement ← CORRECT

C. The Anti-Comintern Pact

D. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Why: The Anglo-German Naval Agreement (June 1935) explicitly allowed Germany a navy 35% the size of Britain's, including submarines — both explicitly banned by Versailles. Britain signed this bilaterally without consulting France or the League, directly breaching the Treaty. The Axis (1936), Anti-Comintern Pact (1936), and Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939) came later and addressed different issues.

Question 4. When Hitler remilitarised the Rhineland in March 1936, French and British leaders chose not to respond militarily because:

A. The Rhineland was already German territory and France had no treaty right to intervene

B. Britain and France lacked the military strength to oppose Germany in 1936

C. France was unwilling to act without British support, and Britain considered the action legally ambiguous and not worth war ← CORRECT

D. The League of Nations advised against military intervention

Why: France had both the legal right (Locarno Treaty) and military superiority to act, but required British backing. Britain's leadership argued Germany was "going into its own backyard" and that the Locarno violation did not justify war. Option B is incorrect — the military balance in 1936 strongly favoured France. Option D is wrong — the League was not driving British/French decision-making by this point.

Question 5. The Munich Agreement (September 1938) transferred which territory to Germany?

A. The Polish Corridor

B. The Sudetenland ← CORRECT

C. Bohemia and Moravia

D. Danzig (Gdansk)

Why: Munich specifically concerned the Sudetenland. Bohemia and Moravia were occupied in March 1939 in violation of Munich. Danzig and the Polish Corridor were the issue in 1939. The Polish Corridor was never transferred to Germany.

Question 6. Which of the following best explains why Britain and France did NOT impose oil sanctions on Italy during the Abyssinian Crisis?

A. The League Covenant did not permit economic sanctions against member states

B. Britain and France feared pushing Italy into alliance with Germany ← CORRECT

C. The USA had already signed a separate oil agreement with Italy that prevented interference

D. Italy had threatened to withdraw from the League if oil sanctions were imposed

Why: The key reason was geopolitical calculation: Mussolini had been part of the Stresa Front (1935) opposing German expansion, and both Britain and France feared that tough sanctions would push Italy toward Hitler — which is exactly what happened anyway. Option A is wrong — sanctions were explicitly part of the League Covenant.

Question 7. What was the significance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 1939)?

A. It created a military alliance between Germany and the Soviet Union

B. It ensured Germany would not face a two-front war when it invaded Poland ← CORRECT

C. It transferred the Baltic states to German control

D. It committed the Soviet Union to assist Germany if France declared war

Why: The Pact was a non-aggression agreement (not a military alliance — Option A is wrong). Its strategic significance was eliminating the risk of a Soviet response to German action in Poland. The Baltic states went to the Soviet sphere in the secret protocol, not to Germany. Option D is incorrect — the USSR did not commit to military assistance for Germany.

Question 8. The “Hossbach Memorandum” (1937) is significant because it:

A. Officially committed Germany to war with France by 1939

B. Recorded Hitler outlining plans for aggressive expansion to his military commanders ← CORRECT

C. Revealed that the German military was planning to overthrow Hitler

D. Documented German-Japanese military cooperation plans

Why: The Hossbach Memorandum is the record of a November 5, 1937 meeting where Hitler told his top military and diplomatic leaders that Germany must expand by force and that war should be expected. It is used by historians as evidence of Hitler’s intentional planning for war. Option A overstates it — Hitler set contingency timelines, not firm dates. Option C is the opposite of what it contains.

Question 9. Why did Japan attack Pearl Harbor in December 1941?

A. To honour its obligations under the Tripartite Pact after Germany declared war on the USA

B. Japan believed the USA was planning a pre-emptive strike on the Japanese home islands

C. Japan needed to neutralise the US Pacific Fleet while seizing resource-rich territories in Southeast Asia ← CORRECT

D. The attack was ordered by the Japanese civilian government to prevent the military from launching an even larger offensive

Why: The logic of Pearl Harbor flows from the oil embargo: Japan needed to seize the Dutch East Indies (oil), Malaya (rubber/tin), and the Philippines (strategic position) — and needed to prevent the US Pacific Fleet from interfering. Option A is wrong — Germany declared war on the USA after Pearl Harbor, not before. Option D is the reverse of what happened (the military drove the decision).

Question 10. Which of the following events most directly demonstrated that the policy of appeasement had failed?

A. The remilitarisation of the Rhineland (March 1936)

B. The Anschluss with Austria (March 1938)

C. The Munich Agreement (September 1938)

D. The German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia (March 1939) ← CORRECT

Why: The occupation of Bohemia and Moravia was the turning point because for the first time Hitler seized non-German territory — destroying the self-determination argument used to justify Munich. Chamberlain acknowledged the policy had failed and issued the Polish guarantee. Options A–C could all be interpreted through an appeasement lens (revising Versailles, uniting Germans, etc.); Option D could not.

Source-Based Practice Questions

WORKED EXAMPLE

Source-Based Question 1

Read the following source, then answer the questions below.

Source A: Statement by Neville Chamberlain outside 10 Downing Street, London, after returning from Munich, September 30, 1938.

“The settlement of the Czechoslovakian problem which has now been achieved is, in my view, only the prelude to a larger settlement in which all Europe may find peace. This morning I had another talk with the German Chancellor, Herr Hitler, and here is the paper which bears his name upon it as well as mine... We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.”

Question 1a (3 marks): According to Source A, what does Chamberlain believe Munich represents?

Model Answer:

According to Source A, Chamberlain believes Munich is “only the prelude to a larger settlement” for all of Europe, suggesting he sees it as a foundation for broader peace rather than a one-off agreement. He also presents the meeting with Hitler and the paper they both signed as evidence of a shared desire by the British and German peoples “never to go to war with one another again.” He implies that the Czechoslovakian “problem” has been solved through negotiation and that this sets a precedent for resolving other disputes similarly.

Question 1b (4 marks): Evaluate the value and limitations of Source A for historians studying the appeasement policy.

Model Answer:

Origin and Purpose: Source A is a public statement by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, delivered outside 10 Downing Street on September 30, 1938, after his return from Munich. Its purpose is primarily rhetorical — to reassure the British public and justify the Munich Agreement to a domestic audience that had been bracing for war.

Value: As a primary source by the architect of appeasement produced at the precise moment of its greatest triumph, the source is highly valuable for understanding how British leaders framed the policy. Chamberlain’s language — “symbolic of the desire of our two peoples,” “prelude to a larger settlement” — reveals the fundamental assumption of appeasement: that Hitler’s grievances were negotiable and his ultimate goals were limited and rational. This assumption is central to explaining why

appeasement was pursued at all, making the source essential for historians studying British strategic thinking.

Limitations: The source's value is limited by its public and performative nature. As a speech to a relieved crowd after a crisis, Chamberlain was speaking diplomatically rather than candidly — his private diary entries from this period reveal considerably more doubt and anxiety than appear here. Furthermore, the source reflects Chamberlain's ignorance of key evidence available to historians: the Hossbach Memorandum (November 1937) in which Hitler outlined plans for aggressive expansion, and *Mein Kampf*'s explicit statement of goals that far exceeded Sudeten autonomy. The source thus tells us much about the perception that drove appeasement but little about whether that perception was accurate.

 WORKED EXAMPLE

Source-Based Question 2

Source B: Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, address to the League of Nations Assembly, Geneva, June 30, 1936.

“I assert that the issue before the Assembly today is not merely a question of the settlement of Italian aggression. It is collective security; it is the very existence of the League of Nations. It is the confidence that each State is to place in international treaties. It is the value of promises made to small States that their integrity and their independence shall be respected and assured. In a word, it is international morality that is at stake... It is us today. It will be you tomorrow.”

Question 2a (3 marks): According to Source B, what does Haile Selassie argue is ultimately at stake in the Abyssinian Crisis?

Model Answer:

According to Source B, Haile Selassie argues that the Abyssinian Crisis is not merely about Italy’s aggression against Ethiopia — it is about the survival of the League of Nations as a credible institution and the value of international treaties. He specifically identifies “collective security,” “the confidence each State is to place in international treaties,” and “international morality” as what is at stake. His closing warning — “It is us today. It will be you tomorrow” — argues that if small states cannot rely on collective security, all states (including the great powers) will eventually face unchecked aggression alone.

Question 2b (6 marks): Compare and contrast Source A (Chamberlain at Downing Street, 1938) and Source B (Haile Selassie at Geneva, 1936) as evidence for the failure of collective security in the 1930s.

Model Answer:

Sources A and B both document key moments in the collapse of collective security, but they offer sharply contrasting perspectives: Source A represents the appeasers’ confidence that bilateral negotiation could replace collective action, while Source B articulates the view from the victim of that approach.

Points of agreement: Both sources reflect the crisis of international order in the 1930s. Both implicitly acknowledge that existing international institutions were failing — Chamberlain’s enthusiasm for his bilateral “paper” with Hitler (Source A) reveals that he had effectively bypassed the League, while Haile Selassie’s speech (Source B) directly diagnoses the League’s failure to respond to aggression. In different ways, both sources show that collective security was being replaced by bilateral deals.

Points of difference: The sources differ fundamentally in tone and conclusion. Source A is optimistic — Chamberlain presents bilateral Anglo-German agreement as a sufficient substitute for collective security, asserting that a paper signed by two leaders can guarantee peace. Source B is a desperate appeal for collective action precisely because bilateral deals between great powers had already failed the smaller nations. Haile Selassie implicitly condemns the approach Chamberlain celebrates.

They also differ in their implied audience and purpose. Chamberlain addresses a British public that wants reassurance; his purpose is to justify a concession as a triumph. Haile Selassie addresses the very institution that had failed him, seeking to shame it into action by making the case that its own survival depends on enforcing collective security. The prophetic quality of Source B's closing warning — proven correct within three years — gives it a retrospective force that Source A lacks.

Together, the sources illustrate the central tension of the 1930s: between a small-state view that the League must enforce collective security or die, and a great-power view that managed bilateral agreements were a safer path to stability. The events of 1939–1941 vindicated Source B's analysis.

Source-Based Question 3

Source C: A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (1961), Chapter 7.

“Munich was a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British life; a triumph for those who had preached equal justice between peoples; a triumph for those who had courageously denounced the harshness and short-sightedness of Versailles... It is impossible to judge Chamberlain’s policy by events after Munich. The question is whether, given the circumstances of September 1938, there was an alternative to what he did.”

Question 3 (9 marks): Using Sources A, B, and C and your own knowledge, evaluate the argument that appeasement was a reasonable policy given the circumstances of the late 1930s.

Model Answer:

The argument that appeasement was “reasonable given the circumstances” has serious historical grounding, but the weight of evidence — from the sources and from broader historical knowledge — suggests it was ultimately a miscalculation rooted in a fatal misunderstanding of Hitler’s goals.

Source C (A.J.P. Taylor) provides the most forceful defence of appeasement. Taylor argues that Munich reflected “all that was best and most enlightened in British life” and that judging Chamberlain requires evaluating the alternatives available in September 1938, not the hindsight of 1945. Taylor’s argument has partial validity: Versailles had treated Germany harshly, particularly regarding the Sudetenland (where 3.5 million Germans lived under Czech administration), and there were genuine self-determination arguments for revision. Moreover, as Taylor implies, British rearmament was incomplete in 1938 — the RAF’s radar defences were not yet operational, and British military planners advised that war was not winnable in that year.

Source A (Chamberlain, 1938) reveals the sincere belief underlying appeasement — that Hitler was a negotiating partner, not a conqueror, and that a personally signed agreement between leaders could substitute for institutional collective security. This belief was not obviously irrational in September 1938: Hitler had, in the preceding months, been partly constrained by international pressure (the May 1938 war scare had briefly deterred him), and there were British officials who genuinely believed his territorial ambitions would stop at unifying ethnic Germans.

However, the case for appeasement being “reasonable” is undermined by several factors outside the sources. First, the Hossbach Memorandum (November 1937) had explicitly recorded Hitler telling his military commanders that Germany must expand by force in Europe, going far beyond revision of Versailles — Chamberlain did not have access to this document, but it shows that Hitler’s privately stated goals negated

the entire premise of appeasement. Second, recent historical research (particularly Richard Overy's work) has challenged the military-weakness justification: Czechoslovakia had 35 well-equipped divisions, excellent mountain fortifications, and Franco-British forces that together outnumbered the Wehrmacht in September 1938. The military balance may have favoured intervention, not avoidance.

Source B (Haile Selassie, 1936) offers a prescient counterpoint to both Sources A and C. Selassie argued as early as 1936 that the failure to enforce collective security against Italy meant "it will be you tomorrow." His warning proved accurate: each capitulation (Manchuria 1931, Abyssinia 1935, Rhineland 1936, Austria 1938) emboldened the aggressors and devalued deterrence. From this perspective, appeasement was not reasonable because it rested on the premise that aggressors could be satisfied — a premise repeatedly falsified by events.

The decisive counter-evidence is March 1939: when Germany occupied Bohemia and Moravia (Czech, non-German territory), even Chamberlain acknowledged appeasement had failed, issuing the Polish guarantee. This collapse of the policy's own logic reveals its central flaw — it worked only if Hitler's goals were limited to self-determination for ethnic Germans, but they were not.

In conclusion, appeasement was understandable given the constraints of 1938 — military unpreparedness, public war-weariness, genuine Versailles grievances — and Taylor's warning against pure hindsight is methodologically important. But "understandable" is not the same as "reasonable." The policy was based on a fundamental misjudgement of Hitler's nature that was already available to Chamberlain through *Mein Kampf* and consistent patterns of behaviour since 1933. The sources, taken together, suggest that the strongest argument against appeasement is not military weakness but political diagnosis: by 1938, there was sufficient evidence that Hitler could not be permanently appeased.

Section 6: Key Timeline

MEMORISE THIS

Master Timeline — The Move to Global War

Date	Event	Significance
1929	Wall Street Crash/Great Depression begins	Economic context for all subsequent aggression
18 Sep 1931	Mukden Incident — Japan invades Manchuria	First major test of League collective security — League fails
1 Mar 1932	Manchukuo proclaimed	Puppet state; Versailles/Washington System challenged
Oct 1932	Lytton Report published	League condemns Japan but takes no action
Jan 1933	Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany	German foreign policy radicalised
Mar 1933	Japan withdraws from League	League loses major power; collective security undermined
Oct 1933	Germany withdraws from League and Disarmament Conference	Rearmament accelerates
Oct 1935	Italy invades Abyssinia	Second major League test — selective sanctions fail
Mar 1936	Remilitarisation of Rhineland	Hitler's boldest gamble; France/Britain do not respond
Jul 1936	League sanctions on Italy lifted	League's credibility destroyed
Oct 1936	Rome-Berlin Axis	Germany and Italy formally aligned
Nov 1936	Anti-Comintern Pact (Germany-Japan)	Germany-Japan-Italy Axis taking shape
Jul 1937	Marco Polo Bridge Incident — Second Sino-Japanese War	Full-scale war in Asia; Japan bogged down
Dec 1937	Nanjing Massacre	International outrage; China continues to resist
Nov 1937	Hossbach Memorandum	Hitler's war plans documented
Mar 1938	Anschluss — Austria annexed by Germany	Versailles formally buried; appeasement continues
Sep 1938	Munich Agreement	Sudetenland ceded; "peace for our time"
Mar 1939	Germany occupies Bohemia and Moravia	Appeasement ends; Polish guarantee issued
Apr 1939	Italy invades Albania	Mussolini imitates Hitler's aggression
May 1939	Pact of Steel (Germany-Italy)	Full military alliance
Aug 1939	Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact	Nazi-Soviet agreement; war over Poland now certain
1 Sep 1939	Germany invades Poland	World War II begins in Europe

Date	Event	Significance
3 Sep 1939	Britain and France declare war on Germany	The global war begins
Sep 1940	Tripartite Pact (Germany-Italy-Japan)	Global Axis formalised
Apr 1941	Soviet-Japanese Non-Aggression Pact	Japan's northern flank secured
Jul 1941	Japan occupies southern Indochina	Tripwire for US oil embargo
Aug 1941	US-UK-Netherlands oil embargo on Japan	Japan's 18-month countdown to war begins
7 Dec 1941	Pearl Harbor — USA enters the war	Global war complete

Key Figures Reference

MEMORISE THIS		
Person	Role	Key Action
Hirohito	Emperor of Japan (1926–1989)	Symbolic head of state; extent of his personal involvement in war decisions is historically debated
Chiang Kai-shek	Nationalist Chinese leader	Pursued “trading space for time” strategy against Japan; fled to Chongqing 1938
Haile Selassie	Emperor of Ethiopia	Led Abyssinian resistance; appealed to League of Nations (1936)
Adolf Hitler	German Chancellor/Führer from 1933	Architect of German expansion; set out goals in Mein Kampf
Neville Chamberlain	British Prime Minister 1937–1940	Chief architect of appeasement; signed Munich Agreement
Édouard Daladier	French Prime Minister 1938–1940	Co-signed Munich Agreement; privately more sceptical than Chamberlain
Benito Mussolini	Italian dictator 1922–1943	Conquered Abyssinia; coined “Axis”; signed Pact of Steel; invaded Albania
Winston Churchill	British MP, then PM 1940	Led opposition to appeasement in 1930s; “total, unmitigated defeat” (Munich)
Maxim Litvinov	Soviet Foreign Minister 1930–1939	Championed collective security; replaced by Molotov to signal shift toward Nazi Pact
Vyacheslav Molotov	Soviet Foreign Minister from 1939	Signed Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Ribbentrop
Lord Lytton	Led League commission to Manchuria	Lytton Report (1932) condemned Japan's actions
Puyi	Last Qing Emperor	Installed as puppet emperor of Manchukuo by Japan

Common Exam Mistakes — Final Checklist

EXAM ALERT

Most common errors that lose marks — review before the exam:

1. **Mukden = staged.** Never write it was a genuine Chinese attack. It was a Japanese false-flag operation by Kwantung Army officers acting without government approval.
2. **Chamberlain's quote.** "Peace FOR our time" — not "peace IN our time."
3. **Munich excluded Czechoslovakia and the USSR.** Many students write it was a four-power agreement "including" all affected parties. Czechoslovakia and the USSR were excluded — this is highly significant and often tested.
4. **League did impose some sanctions on Italy.** It was not total inaction — oil and canal sanctions were the crucial omissions, not all sanctions.
5. **Anschluss was not purely imposed.** Many Austrians welcomed it. The 1934 attempt (blocked by Mussolini) and the 1938 Anschluss had different contexts.
6. **The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was not a military alliance.** It was a non-aggression pact. The secret protocol is a separate element — know both.
7. **Appeasement ≠ cowardice or stupidity.** Frame it as a policy resting on a rational (but incorrect) set of assumptions. Show you understand why Chamberlain chose it.
8. **Japan vs. Germany vocabulary.** Japan sought "raw materials," "strategic resources," "imperial expansion." Germany sought "Lebensraum," "Anschluss," "revision of Versailles." Do not mix vocabulary between the two case studies.
9. **"The League did nothing."** Too vague. Specify what it did (Lytton Report, partial sanctions on Italy) and what it failed to do (oil embargo, military force, expel Japan immediately).
10. **Hossbach Memorandum date.** It was written in November 1937, describing a meeting that day — not 1938 and not 1936. If it appears as a source, note that the author (Hossbach) was writing a personal summary from memory, which creates a specific limitation.

Mixed Practice — Exam Style

IB TIP

How to use this section: Unlike topic-specific practice, these questions are interleaved — they mix all topics from this guide in random order. Before answering,

identify *which concept or topic area* the question is testing. This is exactly the skill you need on Paper 1, where source questions can draw on any part of the prescribed subject and you must quickly identify the relevant context.

1. **[Japanese Expansion — Causes]** Which of the following was the most immediate trigger for the Japanese seizure of Manchuria in September 1931?
 - A. A formal declaration of war by the Japanese government against China
 - B. The Mukden Incident — a staged explosion on the South Manchurian Railway used by Kwantung Army officers as a pretext for military action, without prior government approval
 - C. A Chinese military attack on Japanese forces stationed along the railway zone
 - D. A League of Nations resolution authorising Japan to establish a buffer zone in Manchuria
2. **[German Expansion — Appeasement]** The Munich Agreement of September 1938 is best described as:
 - A. A four-power agreement (Britain, France, Germany, Italy) that transferred the Sudetenland to Germany in exchange for Hitler's promise of no further territorial demands; Czechoslovakia and the USSR were excluded from the talks
 - B. A bilateral agreement between Britain and Germany that granted Hitler all of Czechoslovakia
 - C. A League of Nations-brokered compromise that divided Czechoslovakia into German and French spheres
 - D. An agreement that successfully deterred further German aggression until 1942
3. **[Source Skills — OPVL]** A historian is evaluating a document written by a Japanese army officer in 1932 justifying the creation of Manchukuo. Which limitation is most relevant to assess?
 - A. The document was written in Japanese, which is difficult to translate accurately
 - B. As a serving officer who participated in the Manchurian operation, the author has a strong personal and professional interest in justifying the army's actions; his perspective is likely to be partial and self-serving
 - C. The document was written too long after the events to be reliable
 - D. Japanese army officers had no authority to comment on foreign policy
4. **[German Expansion — Key Events]** The Anschluss (March 1938) refers to:

A. Germany's reoccupation of the Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles

B. The union of Germany and Austria, which was also prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles; many Austrians welcomed it, though the 1934 attempt had been blocked by Mussolini

C. Hitler's annexation of the Memel region from Lithuania

D. The formal alliance between Germany and Italy (the Pact of Steel)

5. **[Japanese Expansion — League of Nations]** The League of Nations' response to Japanese aggression in Manchuria (1931–1933) is significant because:

A. The League successfully expelled Japan and imposed an oil embargo, demonstrating its effectiveness

B. The League sent the Lytton Commission, which condemned the Japanese action; Japan responded by withdrawing from the League in 1933. The episode revealed the League's inability to enforce its decisions against a major military power.

C. The League authorised a military intervention by Britain and France that halted Japanese expansion

D. The USA led a diplomatic boycott of Japan through the League, damaging Japanese trade

6. **[Historiographical Perspectives]** The intentionalist historiographical view of Hitler's foreign policy argues that:

A. Hitler had no long-term plan; his foreign policy was a series of opportunistic responses to events as they arose

B. Hitler followed a clear, long-term programme (identifiable in *Mein Kampf* and the Hossbach Memorandum): the destruction of Versailles, union with Austria, Lebensraum in the East, and war with the USSR

C. Hitler's expansionism was primarily driven by economic pressures rather than ideology

D. Hitler's foreign policy was controlled by the German military, not by Hitler personally

7. **[Key Dates — Distractor]** A student writes: "The Hossbach Memorandum was written in 1938 and records Hitler's plans for immediate war." Identify the two errors in this statement:

A. There are no errors — the student is correct

B. The memorandum was written in November 1937 (not 1938), and it records Hitler's stated intentions for future expansion — not a plan for "immediate" war. It was also a personal summary written by Hossbach from memory, not an official government document.

C. The memorandum was written in 1936, and it records a peace agreement with France

D. The memorandum was written in 1938, but it records naval plans, not territorial expansion

8. **[Causes of WWII in Europe — Appeasement]** Which argument best supports the view that Chamberlain's policy of appeasement was a rational, defensible choice at the time (rather than cowardice or naivety)?

A. Chamberlain correctly calculated that Hitler would stop at the Sudetenland

B. Appeasement was based on the reasonable assumptions that Germany had legitimate grievances from Versailles, that Britain was militarily unprepared for war in 1938, that public opinion opposed another war, and that buying time allowed British rearmament to continue

C. Chamberlain had intelligence reports proving Hitler would not go to war

D. The policy was endorsed by France, the USA, and the USSR, making it a multilateral diplomatic strategy

9. **[Turning Points — Asia]** The Marco Polo Bridge Incident (July 1937) is significant because:

A. It marked Japan's first military action outside the Japanese home islands

B. It triggered the full-scale Second Sino-Japanese War, expanding Japan's conflict from Manchuria into China proper, and is considered the start of the broader Asian theatre of World War II by many historians

C. It was the first use of Japanese air power against civilian targets

D. It directly led to the USA imposing a full oil embargo on Japan in 1937

10. **[Paper 1 Source Skills — Comparison]** A Paper 1 question asks you to "compare and contrast" two sources on the causes of Japanese expansion. Which approach will earn the most marks?

A. Summarise each source in turn: write one paragraph on Source A, then one on Source B

B. Integrate the comparison: identify specific points of agreement and disagreement, quoting from both sources within each point, and comment on why the sources differ (authorship, purpose, date)

C. Evaluate each source's reliability separately using OPVL, without comparing their content

D. Identify the longer source and argue it is more reliable because it contains more information

► Show Answers

This guide covers Prescribed Subject 3: The Move to Global War, aligned to the current IB History SL syllabus. All key events, historiographical debates, source analysis frameworks, and practice questions are designed to prepare students for IB Paper 1.