IB Internal Assessment in History

TO WHAT EXTENT DID ADOLF HITLER'S EXPANSIONIST POLICIES IN REGARDS TO THE SUDETENLAND ENABLE AND SIGNIFY A FIRM MAINTENANCE OF POWER IN GERMANY THROUGHOUT THE LATE 1930S?

Examination Session: May 2018

Word Count: 2200

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[**Bibliography**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PmhquwnZXkEDmBhNWuxnUBejHeEZdLhQ05F3LJX3SfY/edit#heading=h.joxycr184bbm)**…………………………………………………………………………………….** [**1**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PmhquwnZXkEDmBhNWuxnUBejHeEZdLhQ05F3LJX3SfY/edit#heading=h.joxycr184bbm)**2**

# **Part A: Identification and Evaluation of Sources**

This investigation seeks to answer “*To what extent did Adolf Hitler's expansionist policies in regards to the Sudetenland enable and signify a firm maintenance of power in Germany throughout the late 1930s?*” The focus is aspects of Hitler’s decisions regarding the Sudetenland, and the extent each aided power maintenance. The first key source is the "Munich Agreement", relevant by being the agreement signed by European powers regarding the Sudetenland. The second key source is *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, a book by William Shirer, relevant by describing Hitler’s foreign policy aims in the Sudetenland region.

**Source A**

The origin of source A is the "Munich Agreement" between Germany’s Hitler, Britain’s Chamberlain, France’s Daladier, and Italy’s Mussolini, signed 29 September 1938. A value of this origin is that a document signed by European leaders in 1938 accurately reflects agreed upon terms by each nation. The purpose of source A is declaring compromise among nations, appeasing Germany’s designs for the Sudetenland. A value of the purpose is goals and terms of the alliance being revealed to the world in regards to division of the Sudetenland and governmental actions of involved nations, showing representations of each nation’s intention through official wording.

A limitation of the origin is that, coming from government documents, source A cannot express emotions or motivations behind the pact, leaving historians lacking background knowledge and only documentation regarding terms of the pact. A limitation of the purpose is that, in declaring the agreement, the audience is the international community, so language of each article may be altered to achieve desired, satisfied responses from the world, enabling Germany to move ahead with designs for the Sudetenland unopposed. This leaves room for incorrect assumptions about each nation’s motives and involvement in the agreement.

**Source B**

The origin of source B is *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, a book by William Shirer in 1950. A value of this origin is that being written in 1950 and revised until 1992 enables hindsight, allowing events to be put into perspective, meaning foreign policy aims in the Sudetenland have time to be synthesized and analyzed. The purpose of source B is to discuss and inform academics of evidence regarding Hitler’s successes and failures in Czechoslovakia, interpreted by Shirer. A value of this purpose is, in reaching academic audiences, Shirer presents analyses of Hitler’s actions in the Sudetenland, developing accurate arguments supported by sophisticated evidence.

A limitation of the origin is the book's constant revision until 1992, suggesting difficulty pinpointing Hitler’s true intentions in the Sudetenland as interpretations may change over time, creating uncertainty as to accurate scenarios and events. A limitation of the purpose is Shirer’s book is framed to convince his audience of arguments regarding Hitler's intentional and manipulative actions towards the international community, and therefore may not accurately present alternative perspectives to Hitler’s actions. Historical facts regarding Hitler’s actions may be manipulated, creating false perceptions regarding the extent of success Hitler’s foreign policies fared during the Sudetenland Crisis.

Word Count: 500

**Part B: Investigation**

The ideas of imperialism and expansionism are typically aspects of foreign policy characterizing the 20th century, and often are seen as disgraceful aspects of history. Yet, the concepts were and still are explicitly polarizing; these policies enabled Adolf Hitler to maintain power in Germany during the late 1930s. In regards to Hitler’s actions in the Sudetenland, many perspectives differ on the extent to which power was maintained, with many arguing immediate benefits were outweighed by his ultimate demise, due to his early foreign policy actions in the region. Primarily, Hitler’s expansionist policies in the Sudetenland highlight a demonstration of German superiority, a uniting of the German people, and a gathering of strategic resources, all of which were of utmost significance to enable and signify a firm maintenance of power during the late 1930s.

The primary method Hitler maintained his power through expansionist policies in regards to the Sudetenland was extreme demonstration of superiority and ability to conquer and spread Nazi ideology outside Germany’s border, despite diplomatic opposition. As is well documented, Hitler met British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, and Italy’s Benito Mussolini in Munich to discuss designs in the Sudetenland. The Munich Pact, signed 29 September 1938, authorizes a German military occupation of four zones determined to be predominantly German within Czechoslovakia, which would precipitate in the first seven days of October.1 Even in the early stages of planning, Hitler’s intent was demonstrating German might; as leader, Hitler aimed to prove he could overcome diplomatic opposition, providing for German people. Kershaw claimed that military occupation of the Sudetenland enabled Hitler to maintain his own power, demonstrating sheer might to the international community, and proving the Nazi party was capable of spreading beyond its own border, boosting his own domestic popularity.2 Showalter compares Hitler’s designs in the Sudetenland to Bismarck's realpolitik, asserting that Hitler’s actions were more revolutionary in declaring his aims as “world domination” for Germany.3 Once again, radical approach to expansionist foreign policy goals in the Sudetenland proved critical in power maintenance, demonstrating the desire to spread German ideology abroad, which further bolstered support for Hitler’s leadership, and portrayed him as a force to be reckoned with to the international community. A demonstration of superiority and ability to conquer and spread Nazi ideology outside Germany’s border was a critical aspect to Hitler’s power maintenance, portraying Hitler as a powerful, superior leader, able to accomplish goals promised to German citizens.

However, Hitler’s claims of serving interests of German people were greatly exaggerated and exploited, as Sudeten Germans seemingly lacked legitimate ties to Germany and the Third Reich, which ultimately damaged his own power maintenance as he struggled to provide legitimate pretext for a costly invasion. William Shirer describes the Sudeten-Germans living in a state of harmony with Czechoslovakian neighbors, and demonstrates that, until Hitler, there was never any significant political movements calling for independence. Still, Hitler built an entire facet of foreign policy around serving their better interests.4 According to Leitz, this ultimately hindered Hitler’s power maintenance, as many in Germany were impacted by negative economic effects from his actions, triggering a souring of Franco-German economic relations and a “tendency towards boycott” from the international community.5 Hitler’s personal agenda contradicted his public declarations to serve Germany, potentially costing him the consent of leadership over his citizens. Furthermore, upon Hitler’s rise to power, the Sudeten German Party, or SPD, rapidly expanded in promoting its platform, due to immense expenditures of Nazi finances and other valuable resources.6 It can once again be inferred that Hitler’s action in the Sudetenland had negative impacts on his maintenance of power, as he squandered Nazi resources in the pursuit of developing illegitimate civil unrest in the Sudetenland. For example, Faber cites the fact that Hitler’s own military commanders, including General Hans Oster and Field Marshall Kleist prepared to lead a coup against Hitler in the event of further aggression in Czechoslovakia.7 Hitler’s downfall was strongly influenced by lack of resources, and therefore pouring heavy funding into the Sudetenland later damaged his power. Still, this argument bears many limitations, as Hitler seemed to convince his citizens of the Sudetenland’s importance, and maintained adequate power and resources to begin a war effort in Europe the following year.

Another powerful argument for Hitler’s expansionist policies in regards to the Sudetenland is that they were fueled by industrial resources characteristic of the region, which enabled Hitler to maintain and spread his influence throughout Europe. For instance, Czechoslovakia and Germany had history of long-standing economic competition, and by 1938 the Czechs pressed for nationalized values within their own economy, especially through their assets held in the hands of foreign nations.8 It stands to reason that Hitler’s foreign policy in Czechoslovakia would enable a firm maintenance of power simply by ridding the region of economic competition, allowing Germany, under his leadership, to thrive. Further evidence of economic potential is the fact that the Sudetendeutsche occupied the industrial regions - those of utmost importance to Czechoslovakia’s economy and defense.9 To maintain and assert power, Hitler was driven by these economic benefits to bolster Germany’s financial and production capability. Hitler also found opportunity to gain greater support by furthering foreign policy goals, weakening the neighboring Czechoslovakia. The extent to which a single region could impact Germany’s resources is debatable, but the potential economic benefits in the region easily allowed Hitler to establish a firm maintenance of power in 1938.

While an invasion of the Sudetenland offered economic benefits for Hitler’s maintenance of power, the results were rather minimal, and overshadowed by disruption of the interests of nations Hitler perceived as a threat to his power. Leitz wrote that, in the late 1920s, France built a system of security and alliances to preserve its interests, and by 1938 Czechoslovakia was the only reliable member of the alliance remaining.10 This fact is significant, revealing alternative strategies through which Hitler hoped to maintain power, in this case by weakening the power of a nation invested in Czechoslovakia - France. This evidence was one of many causes of Hitler’s expansion into Czechoslovakia, and reveals a willingness on the part of Hitler to achieve power by gambling his nation’s own economic interests in the pursuit of weakening an enemy. But France was not Czechoslovakia’s only regional ally. By 1938 the nation had established relations with the Soviet Union, and a French-Czech-Soviet military cooperation would prove a disastrous barrier in Hitler’s plans for aggression.11 From this, it is seen that Hitler was not expanding his power throughout Europe, but responding pragmatically to the possibility of threats to his power. If this interpretation holds true, expansionist policies in the Sudetenland in no way signify a firm maintenance of power, but instead reveal a serious threat posed to Hitler’s power. Yet, this argument is quite limited, as Hitler’s gambling of his own economic interests to weaken France benefitted his power maintenance (at least temporarily), and the possibility of military cooperation threatening Hitler never materialized, and therefore was of little concern to Hitler’s power.

Hitler’s expansionist policies in the Sudetenland highlight a demonstration of German superiority, a uniting of the German people, and a gathering of strategic resources, all of which were of utmost significance to enable and signify a firm maintenance of power during the late 1930s. While the perspectives citing numerous problems and risks the Sudetenland posed to Hitler’s power maintenance (such as his status among his citizens, a squandering of resources, and the minimal benefits reaped from the Sudetenland) are certainly viable, they offer no explanation as to the obvious historical success of the Sudetenland occupation. Most likely, Hitler’s expansionist policies in the Sudetenland immeasurably benefited his maintenance of power, as he demonstrated German superiority, united his citizens towards a common goal, and established control over a vastly important industrial region.

Word Count: 1300

**Part C: Reflection**

Through my investigation into Adolf Hitler’s foreign policy aims, I gained specific insight into methods employed by historians, and the challenges faced in their works. One of the most significant actions undertaken by historians is analyzing sources to formulate an argument regarding historical events. Following historians, I searched through web pages, academic journals, books, statistics and treaties to formulate arguments, and found that history offers a multitude of interpretations for singular events. The methods used by historians do not end with a search for appropriate sources, but requires construction of plausible meanings from evidence available. The way to accomplish this goal was carefully scrutinize over sources, deduce their central argument or purpose, and assess their strengths and weaknesses. Once these aspects have been analyzed, historians develop arguments, citing the strongest support for an event’s interpretation.

My investigation lead me to comprehend challenges faced by historians regarding historical investigations. The nature of history is that there is no “absolute truth” - the subject is based only on the surviving records, and historians therefore struggle in determining appropriate truths. For example, when searching for background information on the Sudetenland, I read Kershaw’s commentary stating that Hitler cited a desire to serve German people as justification for aggression. I was quite surprised to discover in Shirer’s *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: a History of Nazi Germany* that Germans in Czechoslovakia were satisfied, and lived peacefully outside Germany. This exemplifies a significant challenge for historians, as they seek the plausible despite numerous interpretations existing.

History is inevitably creative and interpretive, rather than scientific, as prejudice, social bias, and deliberate manipulation impact the record of events. My investigation lead to a conclusion about causality - it too is interpretive, as historians only make educated inferences in regards to cause-and-effect, and cannot definitively prove causality. For that reason, I investigated multiple implications for Hitler’s aggression, including the economic resources in the Sudetenland, and the desire to benefit German people. Both opinions are valid, yet due to the nature of history, the causal nature of these concepts can never truly be determined.

All in all, this investigation taught the methods of analysis employed by historians, and the challenges faced they face, leading to the revelation that it is impossible to capture the entirety of an event. Instead, historians detect limitations of evidence and, when varying perspectives are placed together, develop a plausible explanation for historical scenarios.

Word Count: 400

Endnotes

1. "Munich Pact September 29, 1938," The Avalon Project, accessed February 06, 2017, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/munich1.asp.

2. Ian Kershaw, "The Führer Myth: How Hitler Won Over the German People - Spiegel Online - International," Spiegel Online, January 30, 2008, , accessed April 29, 2017, http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-fuehrer-myth-how-hitler-won-over-the-german-people-a-531909.html.

3. Dennis E. Showalter, *History in Dispute*, vol. 4 (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson/Gale, 2002).

4. William L. Shirer, *The rise and fall of the Third Reich: a history of Nazi Germany* (Norwalk, CT: Easton Press, 1991).

5. Christian Leitz, *Nazi Foreign Policy, 1933-1941: the Road to Global War* (London: Routledge, 2004).

6. Thomas Ladenburg, "Munich: Anatomy of a Crisis," Digital History, , accessed February 06, 2017, http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/teachers/lesson\_plans/pdfs/unit10\_12.pdf.

7. David Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

8. Mark Cornwall and R J W Evans, *Czechoslovakia in a nationalist and fascist Europe, 1918-1948* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008).

9. Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II*

10. Christian Leitz, *Nazi Foreign Policy, 1933-1941: the Road to Global War*

11. Leitz, *Nazi Foreign Policy, 1933-1941: the Road to Global War*

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