

THE GLOBAL
TRAGEDY & TRIUMPH
1939 – 1945

BY
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GRATIAE

I am most grateful for the assistance given me by numerous people; indeed they are perhaps too many to name. I nonetheless give them my grateful thanks for their assistance and guidance.

To my dear family I wish to pay special tribute for their patience and understanding during the good and difficult times. For this I am most fortunate.

I also wish to pay special tribute and am particularly grateful to my long-standing friend and former colleague Dr. Graham L Coggin for his outstanding editorial skills and constructive criticism throughout this project.

FOREWORD

'The Global Tragedy and Triumph; 1939–1945' takes a fascinating and highly informative look at some of the most glorious and less glorious episodes of what many consider to be the most terrible war in the history of mankind; resulting in the death of over fifty million people.

'The Global Tragedy and Triumph; 1939–1945' offers a wealth of absorbing narrative and anecdote that is always thought-provoking.

Also by Bill Brady
World War Two, Cause and Effect

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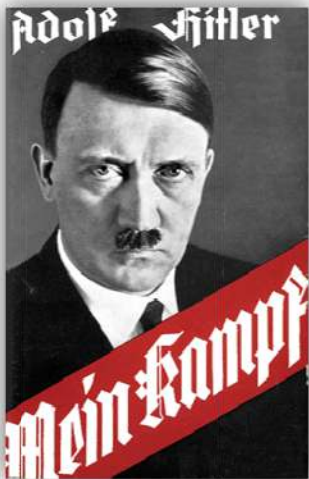
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CHAPTER ONE

HITLER'S NAZI REVOLUTION



On the evening of 30th January, 1933, Adolf Hitler, the newly appointed Chancellor of Germany, stood in a government building at an open window watching a torchlight parade of 25 000 Nazi storm troopers (SA) march through the streets of Berlin. Thousands of Germans cheered as they marched by, and Hitler was giddy with delight. "No power on Earth will get me out of here alive", he was heard to say.

Earlier that day, the President of Germany, Paul von Hindenburg, had appointed Hitler Chancellor. Having won more than 37 percent of the vote in the previous year's legislative elections, Hitler's Nazi party had enough power to effectively paralyse Germany's

democratic government, which had been in place since 1919. Hindenburg hoped that by appointing Hitler, he could satisfy Nazi legislators and break the deadlock, while maintaining control of the government behind the scenes.

His miscalculation led to disaster for Germany, for Europe, and for the world.

How was Hitler, probably the most ruthless dictator of the 20th century, able to come to power in a democratic Germany? And could something like it happen again? To think about these questions, it helps to understand the circumstances in Germany at the time that helped Hitler and his Nazi party gain power.

Paradoxically although much celebration followed Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, there was hardly any despondency among the opposition. After all Hitler was a 'legally' appointed Chancellor, and it was argued that when he had failed to solve Germany's problems he would be 'legally' dismissed like so many of his predecessors and replaced by someone else. With hindsight this was another colossal miscalculation that German politicians were committing, similar to the ridiculous miscalculation of Hitler's allies that good use could be made of the Nazis. Only much later did people realise that once in power it would take a gigantic upheaval to get the Nazis out. Indeed the very first measures taken by the Nazis after they came to power were certainly meant to perpetuate their power.

Göring, who was the Prussian Minister of the Interior and therefore responsible for immediate security in Berlin and elsewhere, dismissed 22 out of 32 police presidents; thousands of policemen were simultaneously purged and members of the SA drafted instead. (Göring, however, dismissed them as soon as they had performed their 'dirty' duties). In addition Göring issued orders to the police to show no mercy to the enemies of the state and use firearms if necessary. On 26th April 1933 he also established the Secret State Police (the notorious Gestapo) to carry out arrests and interrogations of political suspects, which henceforth held all the power of the judiciary in its own hands. It was obvious that the Nazis were in politics for good and would not observe the rules of the Weimar Republic.

Many army officers were most enthusiastic about the Nazis. A few weeks after becoming Chancellor Hitler convoked his generals and representatives of the Navy and spoke to them about future policies. He unfolded to them his vision of the expansion in the East. All the assembled officers pledged him their enthusiastic loyalty. Minister of Defence General von Blomberg issued a directive to the officers' corps in which he openly supported the Nazis. Keeping the military satisfied became Hitler's primary task.

More immediately Hitler and the Nazis applied themselves to the business of elections and Goebbels and the SA monopolised the means of communication and won the streets. Fifty-one people were killed during the election campaign, which was no more nor

less turbulent than the previous ones. However the Nazis were given an additional pretext for smashing their opponents when less than a week before the election the Reichstag building was burnt down. Controversy still surrounds the burning of the Reichstag, but there is a large consensus among historians that the fire was started by a half-crazed Dutch former Communist, van der Lubbe and that the Nazis made use of it to claim that it was part of an anti-state conspiracy which had to be suppressed. On the following day the President signed an emergency decree (the Enabling Bill) for the protection of the people and the state which in fact suspended all civil liberties.

The Enabling Bill gave the Nazi's full powers for four years to destroy 'the red peril' and consolidate the national revolution. Once Hitler finished with the Reichstag he had no use for the parties of which it was composed. The Communist party was dissolved before the election and its elected deputies were put en masse into 'protective custody' and sent to a concentration camp for the duration.

In the absence of the Communists only the Social Democrats were admitted to vote and opposed the bill. Their leader, Otto Wels, made a dignified speech in which he warned the assembled politicians and Germany at large of what to expect. However, when the vote was taken, all the other parties, even the Catholic Centre, voted for it: 441 to 94. Thus the Weimar Republic was voted out of existence, the Reichstag voted out of power, and the politicians voted

themselves out of politics. Wels left immediately for exile, followed by others swiftly disappearing into concentration camps set up specially to house the victims of the Enabling Act. But it must remain on record that Hitler was legally given a free hand to deal with his opponents.

The first moves to consolidate power in Nazi hands came even before the Enabling Act was passed. On the 8th March 1933 the Nazi Franz Ritter von Epp, took over power in Bavaria ousting the elected Catholic Premier, Heinrich Held. Held only managed token resistance, when he appealed to the Munich district Army Commander, General Wilhelm von Leeb, to intervene. Von Leeb declined to act on his behalf after receiving orders from Berlin. On 10th March the Nazi's had taken over Saxony, Wutemberg and Thuringia. Since Prussia was already under Göring's control, the German federation was in fact dissolved and the process which was called the Gleichschaltung (Streamlining) resulted. In fact in the Nazification of these administrative units and historical states, local Nazis were appointed Governors with powers to dismiss and nominate civil servants and police officers.

Next came the trade unions. The Catholic Trade Union leader was beaten up during the election campaign as well as many other trade unionists. The trade unionists appealed for protection to the President. No protection came from the Head of State, and Nazi vengeance was swift. They had previously declared 1st May as the National Labour Day. It was celebrated by all and sundry without political distinction. However on 2nd

May the SA broke into and occupied all left-wing trade union offices, arrested their leaders and officials and sent most of them into concentration camps. In June 1933 Christian trade unions received the same treatment and the Nazis instead, created the German Labour Front. Both employers and employees were forced to join this front whose function was to conciliate rather than advance demands.

On 22nd June 1933 the Social Democratic party was dissolved as an anti-state, subversive body and its property confiscated. A week later the German Nationalist Party attracted the wrath of the SA by organizing its own paramilitary formations. When the SA moved against them, the Nationalist leader, Hugenberg, resigned from the government and the party dissolved itself. The Catholic Centre followed them into voluntary liquidation and was in turn followed by the People's Party and Bavarian People's Party. Thereafter the government decreed (Act of 14th July 1933) that Germany was a One-Party state and the formation of any other party was judged a treasonable act punishable by imprisonment. The ease with which Hitler disposed of the trade unions and political parties conclusively proved how decayed these bodies must have become and how badly led they must have been. Gleichschaltung was carried out not only in the power sphere but affected the whole of national life.

As was usual with Hitler even racial Gleichschaltung was sanctioned by the law, albeit retrospectively. On 1st April 1933 the vitriolic anti-Semite Julius Streicher proclaimed a nation-wide boycott of Jewish shops and

was most efficiently backed by gangs of SA men who enforced it. In response to these pressures some 235 000 Jews departed from Germany; leaving the field of German science somewhat denuded. However, in Germany, Jews were expelled wholesale from all the liberal professions, be it medicine, law, journalism, fine arts, radio, cinema, music or civil service. Jewish university professors had their lectures disrupted by fanatical students and simply had to abandon their profession. Still the complex anti-Jewish legislation was passed only on 15th September 1935 (the Nuremberg Laws) and Jewish property was 'legally' confiscated on 3rd December 1938. From the very beginning the Jews were subjected to naked terror which increased with time (Crystal Night 1938), until it culminated in the 'final solution' in 1941 when they were to be all physically liquidated.

Only with the Communists was Hitler prepared to go as far as with the Jews, but even with them liquidation was applied gradually so as not to alarm domestic or international public opinion. The ultimate fate of the Christian Churches would probably have been the same as that of the Jews and Communists. Alfred Rosenberg made that most clear when he drew up the National Reich Church Program which proposed to replace the Bible by *Mein Kampf* and the Cross by the swastika, only a few rites were to be retained albeit in adapted form. The Catholic Church, which on the whole resisted the Nazis more successfully than the Protestant Churches, was treated with disdain. When the Cardinal-Archbishop of Cologne, protested against SA brutalities in 1933, he was ignored. On 20th July

1933 Hitler signed a Concordat with the Vatican and immediately broke it. Arrests of priests and nuns continued unabated, while many Catholic laymen found themselves in the numerous concentration camps. By 14th March 1937, Pius XI openly lamented the state of the Church in Nazi Germany.

In the sphere of culture the Gleichschaltung was instant. On 10th May 1933 bonfires were started with books of anti-Nazi writers. In September 1933 the Reichs Chamber of Culture was set up under the new Minister of Propaganda, Dr. Goebbels, and henceforth all manuscripts had to be submitted to the ministry before they could be published. As a result almost all the writers of any standing emigrated and Germany was left with party hacks whose works were foisted on the public. At this time Hitler's *Mein Kampf* sold in millions and he became a writer-millionaire, which was rare in Germany.

Although composers were much less bullied they were forced to sever all relations with Jewish and anti-Nazi associates and friends; otherwise they found themselves unperformed. In fine arts in which Hitler took a personal interest some 6 500 'decadent' paintings were removed from German museums and art galleries. Later, Hitler personally selected German paintings which were exhibited in the House of German Art in Munich but attendance was low. On the contrary the Ministry of Propaganda's exhibition of 'degenerate' art proved so embarrassingly popular that it had to be closed down.

The left-wing press was suppressed even before the March election; when Goebbels set up his Propaganda Ministry all the newspapers were published under the auspices of this Ministry. Daily instructions supplemented by oral orders were issued. As newspapers became 'coordinated' and their contents hardly differed from that of the official party newspapers, their circulation steeply declined and they went bankrupt. Subsequently they were bought by the giant party publishing house, and the party enjoyed virtual monopoly of the press.

The Reichsminister of science, education and popular culture immediately ordered all textbooks to be re-written in the Nazi spirit; overnight he had changed school and university curricula. However, after the initial expulsion of Jewish and left-wing elements, the teaching profession was hardly touched by the Nazis. Professors of medicine became particularly compromised, some of them serving not as savers of life but extermination of the feeble, incurable and 'inferior' races (Gypsies, Jews). Hardly anyone opposed the Nazis. In 1937 the Civil Service Act made the teaching profession the executor of the will of the Party-state and the perilous condition of education was exemplified by the halving of the student population in the six years that followed the Nazis' seizure of power.

In youth organisations the Gleichschaltung meant a wholesale takeover of all youth organisations by the Nazi youth movement, the Hitler Jugend. The Nazis seized the national offices of the Youth Association and dissolved the Catholic Youth Association; the rest were

incorporated into the Hitler Jugend. By 1938 its membership became compulsory; all youth, boys and girls aged 6-18 years had to join and were organised in a paramilitary manner, indoctrinated and marched up and down Germany. The results of this youthful indoctrination are incalculable.

In the economic sphere, Hitler had the good fortune of reaping the results of measures taken by his predecessors, Brüning and Papen, and of putting in charge of the economy an experienced expert, Dr. Schacht. Still the resulting economic order was somewhat new and the Nazis claimed uniquely their own. Thus no nationalisations were operated in Germany, but the capitalists lost their freedom of investment and fixing prices and wages. In addition Dr. Schacht proclaimed two four-year economic plans, one to run from 1933-7 whose aim was to revive the economy and eliminate unemployment. The second was to run from 1937 to 1941. In effect Dr. Schacht began to revive the economy by large-scale public works.

Schacht's original contribution was the way in which he financed the program: he issued special bills of exchange repayable in five years and easily achieved his objectives. While in 1933 there were six million unemployed, in 1935 there was only one million and by 1939 there was a labour shortage. To start with, the unemployed were put into the Labour Service and they began to build a new system of expressways (autobahns). Subsequently Schacht had it easy because the Nazis had cowed trade unions; he could direct

labour wherever it was needed and had wages and prices under his control. The economy was also helped by the re-introduction of military service, expansion of the civil service and party administration. Women vacated many jobs when they began to get increased family allowances.

Although there were large investments in equipment, the fastest expanding sector of the economy became the armament industry, after Hitler rejected the Versailles Treaty limitations. Naturally a lot of money had to be printed, but with import restrictions and confiscation of Jewish capital the first four-year plan was a success. However from the very beginning in 1933, this was a war economy, which inevitably led to war: therefore in political terms the economic success was reversed. During the second four-year plan serious failures became apparent; still by 1939 Germany was better prepared for war than any of its enemies, whose economies, either capitalist or communist, did not undergo the Nazi treatment.

In agriculture the Nazis proved inconsistent and less successful than in industry. In 1933 farmers solidly backed the Nazis after a decade of slump. However, loan repayments were most oppressive amounting to some 14 percent of the farmers' income. The Nazis also failed to distribute land to smallholders leaving the large feudal estates intact. They did enact two useful laws: one prevented further division of land and the other regulated farm production. But after the numerous promises that Hitler had made to the farmers his achievements were minor indeed.

Although agricultural production aimed at self-sufficiency, Germany by 1938 depended on imports (some 17 per cent of its consumption).

The government continued to meet erratically but no vote was taken on policies invariably announced by the Führer. In June 1933 Hitler decided to get rid of all non-Nazi ministries. Hitler strengthened his hand by appointing Rudolf Hess and Ernst Rohm as Ministers without Portfolio. The appointment of Rohm was of great significance, as head of the SA, used his thugs to terrify all non-Nazi's.

Throughout the summer of 1933 he complained about Hitler's evolution, while he would have preferred revolution. Since his SA were doing most of the dirty work he wanted some recompense for his underpaid three million members. Above all he wanted their position regularized by having them included in the military with corresponding ranks. Thus his appointment could only mean that he was intended to counter-balance the Minister of Defence, von Blomberg, and ultimately perhaps take over from him. In addition, the SA as a whole, while very busy enforcing the Nazification of Germany, mumbled increasingly loudly about the second revolution along socialist lines. So dear to Hitler in the early days of his movement. Thus difficulties with Rohm and his SA were the only real problem that Hitler encountered after coming to power. It could not be ignored and it would not go away as others had done. After much hesitation Hitler decided to solve the problem by force.

The SA had been turbulent, uncontrollable, and mutinous and above all they began to irritate the only institution that Hitler wanted to leave intact and non-Nazified, the military. By the end of 1933 violence was no longer needed from the SA and Hitler thought that Rohm would be satisfied with his ministerial position. For the time Rohm seemed content, but the SA as a whole continued to voice ideas about a real Socialist revolution. The objects of their hatred were threefold: the middle class, the junkers and the military. On 28th February 1934 Hitler deemed it politic to issue a warning to the SA and also make his position clear vis a vis the military; "the revolution was finished and the only people entitled to bear arms were the military". However instead of calming down the situation, Hitler's declaration only irritated the SA to such an extent that the military became restless.

Tensions culminated in June 1934 and at the end of that month Hitler decided to solve the SA problem once and for all: the Night of Long Knives took place. It was the SA who always dreamt of using their long knives on their 'petty' opponents, the bourgeoisie, Junkers and officers. As it turned out it was their party comrades, the SS, who put their knives to good use on them. In June 1934 rumours of another revolution reached such a pitch that the Vice-Chancellor, Franz von Papen, decided to make a public declaration on the subject. While Hitler was on a lightning visit to Mussolini in Venice, Papen addressed the University at Marburg in a speech in which he claimed that there would be no more revolution. This open call upset the SA no end, but also disquieted the dying President and the Army.

On his return from Italy Hitler went directly to President Hindenburg, ostensibly to report on his foreign visit but really to calm the President and the Army. Blomberg, who was also present, told Hitler that the Army "would restore order if necessary". However Hitler now decided to take the matter into his own hands.

It was at this time that Reichsführer SS, Heinrich Himmler, (who was an unknown in politics) told Hitler that Rohm was plotting his downfall and offered Hitler the SS to liquidate the plot. Whether Hitler believed him is immaterial, but since he had to solve the SA problem, he gratefully accepted Himmler's offer. The rumour of the Rohm plot was skilfully released; the Army also knew about it. On 25th June General Werner von Fritsch, the Army's Commander-in-Chief, put his troops on alert to prevent the SA from seizing power, but Hitler already had matters well in hand.

All the actors in this bloody drama were affecting innocence and Rohm agreed to meet Hitler on 30th June 1934; in the meantime he sent his SA troopers on a vacation. Hitler gave plenary powers to Göring and Himmler who, aided by Reinhard Heydrich, drew up the lists of people to be liquidated in the coming purge, for at the last moment Hitler decided not only to square his accounts with the SA, but also to avenge himself on all the other opponents from the past. On 29th June General von Blomberg stated that the Army was behind Hitler, as if to reassure him. At the same time Goebbels confirmed the conspiracy by accusing

the Berlin SA leader, Ernst, of planning a putsch. On 30th June the purge was launched.

On that day Hitler left by plane for Munich, where the putsch was supposed to take place. On landing in Munich Hitler ordered the arrest of the SA Munich leader, and he himself rushed off to Bad Wiessee where the top SA leaders were waiting for him. As they arrived Hitler's SS bodyguard found the SA leaders, who were all homosexuals, installed in a comfortable hotel, sleeping, some of them with their male companions. The SS shot some dead on the spot, arrested the rest and drove them off to prison in Munich. Some 150 leaders were arrested and summarily executed; execution squads were kept busy for three days.

Rohm refused to commit suicide and was executed by two SS men. Ernst of Berlin was taken off a boat at Bremen before he had time to leave for his honeymoon and was executed in Berlin. Hitler did make use of this opportunity to rid himself of anyone who had annoyed him in the past: General von Schleicher and his wife, General von Bredow and Gregor Strasser who allegedly were the pivots of the Rohm conspiracy. Papen himself was kept for four days under house arrest protected by the dying President. Immediately after the purge he resigned from the government and was sent by Hitler to Vienna as his special envoy. Many Catholic leaders were assassinated, among them the chairman of the Catholic Action. German émigré sources put the number of victims at 400; nowadays it

is thought that over 1 000 were assassinated during this fateful weekend.

As soon as the bloodletting was over, on 2nd July President Hindenburg from his death-bed thanked Chancellor Hitler for saving Germany from the conspiracy. On 3rd July General Blomberg echoed the gratitude of the army. On the same day a governmental decree laconically justified the executions as self-defence thus making them legal. At the time this bloody purge was considered as the President's victory over the rowdy SA; if it was Hindenburg's victory it was short-lived, for he died on 1st August. It was also thought a victory for the military; in fact with hindsight it appears a Pyrrhic victory. It is true that the SA never recovered after the purge; their elimination, in reality, marked the rise of a much more dangerous body, the SS. In the end the SS succeeded where the SA failed: by 1945 there were 33 SS divisions of this Party Army invariably better equipped than the Army itself. After the attempt on Hitler's life in July 1944 the Army came under direct control of the SS.

To Hitler, the time that Hindenburg took to die must have seemed an eternity. The frail old man was all that stood between Hitler and ultimate power. Finally, after a summer of reports that he was about to die, he did. Just three hours after his death, it was announced that the offices of President and Chancellor had been combined and that Adolf Hitler had become Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, as well as Chancellor. The office of President was abolished. Hitler was to be known as Führer and Reich

Chancellor. As the ultimate act of arrogance, Hitler demanded of the armed forces a sworn oath of allegiance not to Germany, but to him personally. No officer was excluded. The Generals were at last under control, and had lost their chance of overturning Hitler's dictatorship.

In a plebiscite on 19th August, more than thirty-eight million Germans voted their approval of Hitler's usurping the Presidency, an act specifically excluded by the Enabling Act of March 1933, which was the 'legal' basis for Hitler's dictatorship. On 4th September, Hitler heard amid the theatricality, the pageantry, the splendour and the Nazi salutes at the Party Congress in Nuremberg the Gauleiter of Bavaria proclaim that "The German form of life is definitely determined for the next thousand years". At forty-five, he was at the height of his power. Thus the real victor of the purge was Adolf Hitler. With the naked terror he unleashed, his opponents and allies alike were completely panicked. Hitler became a real dictator making all decisions, important and unimportant, himself. On paper everything in Hitler's Reich seemed institutionalised and legalised; in reality there was so much terror and confusion that Hitler could actually exercise this type of personal dictatorship most effectively.

In the first year of power the Nazis passed possibly more laws than any other regime; even assassinations were legalised. However much of this legislation was retrospective and Hitler's decisions were supreme even if they ran against the law. No one could make

headway in this legal confusion and this was possibly the real key to Hitler's personal power.

Thus Gleichschaltung had as its ultimate result the growth of the Führer's personal power. Apart from the Führer's activity quite a lot seemed to be happening in Nazi Germany, but no one could say who was making decisions, for obviously Hitler could not do nor be responsible for everything. This fact then serves to illuminate the Nazi revolution: it stirred up the people and many changes occurred spontaneously in an uncontrolled manner, the Nazi Party in a sense jumping on the bandwagon. Hitler for personal and power reasons wanted this type of development, providing it did not exceed certain limits. In contrast to Communist parties he did not want a huge bureaucracy to initiate and administer changes; therefore institutional chaos was the order of the day and he suffered it gladly.

Frequent changes in policies and redistribution of power among his followers were the means Hitler used to perpetuate this controlled chaos and to balance the power struggle among his subordinates thus making his personal power absolute. In the civil service Hitler invariably exploited tensions between the professionals and the party zealots to keep them all under firm personal control, and thus sacrificing administrative efficiency. The other means Hitler used were the badly defined legal competence of various state and party organs: the ambiguity of relations between state and party, state and government; the interdependence of industry, government and civil service; and finally the

rivalries of the various types of state and party police forces. In the resulting chaos Hitler could operate quite effectively, so the National Socialist state was a jumble of overlapping conflicts and inefficiency. Thus there was the most flagrant overlapping between the Wehrmacht and the Waffen SS, the Party Army, fatal for both; between the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht - created by Hitler) and the General Staff.

After the elimination of the SA in summer of 1934 Hitler more or less institutionalised this balance of power (chaos) and turned almost exclusively to a new sphere of interest, international affairs. Perhaps a little more surprisingly he was to prove most successful as well. However, since he could not employ the same divisive tactics in the international power struggle as in Germany, by 1939, when his gambler's luck finally ran out, Hitler launched Germany into a major war.

Though the practice of foreign affairs was relatively new for Hitler he seems to have taken to it as a fish to water and soon became such a practitioner as to score unexpected and un hoped for successes. Naturally even for Hitler foreign affairs were much more complicated than internal political affairs; in reality they were more complicated than he had ever imagined. In *Mein Kampf* he was on record for all to read: Germany was to become a world power whose interests and targets lay principally in Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia. Only after this continental empire had been built, in friendship with Great Britain, or at least with Britain's benevolent neutrality, would Germany expand overseas and confront the power of the United States,

having absorbed colonial empires on the way. All this Hitler hoped to achieve gradually without a major war by means of his dominant personality and willpower.

Although Hitler was the embodiment of the Nazi movement, different attitudes towards foreign affairs existed within the movement itself and it would be naive to brush them aside and say that Hitler managed to dominate them. Albeit he might have made use of them, all these party tendencies influenced him at different stages, and above all influenced foreign affairs independently of Hitler. It is true that ultimately Hitler's aims and obligations would have decided on his own two-phase foreign policy, raising the hopes of every one and satisfying no one. Thus in this first phase, Hitler decided on renouncing overseas colonies in order to achieve the mastery on the European continent. The first concession was obviously aimed at Italy whose alliance Hitler needed, if the continent was to be his. The second concession was aimed at Great Britain whose friendship he likewise needed. However in phase two Hitler intended to extend the power struggle overseas and in particular challenge the United States. Ultimately the German people would be supreme all over the planet Earth.

As early as 1933 Hitler made full use of foreign policy factors at home: with the rejection of the limitations imposed on Germany at Versailles. An armament boom satisfied the Army and the top capitalists who benefited most from this incursion into world affairs. However Hitler was determined on positive steps and sent a delegation to Geneva to attend the disarmament