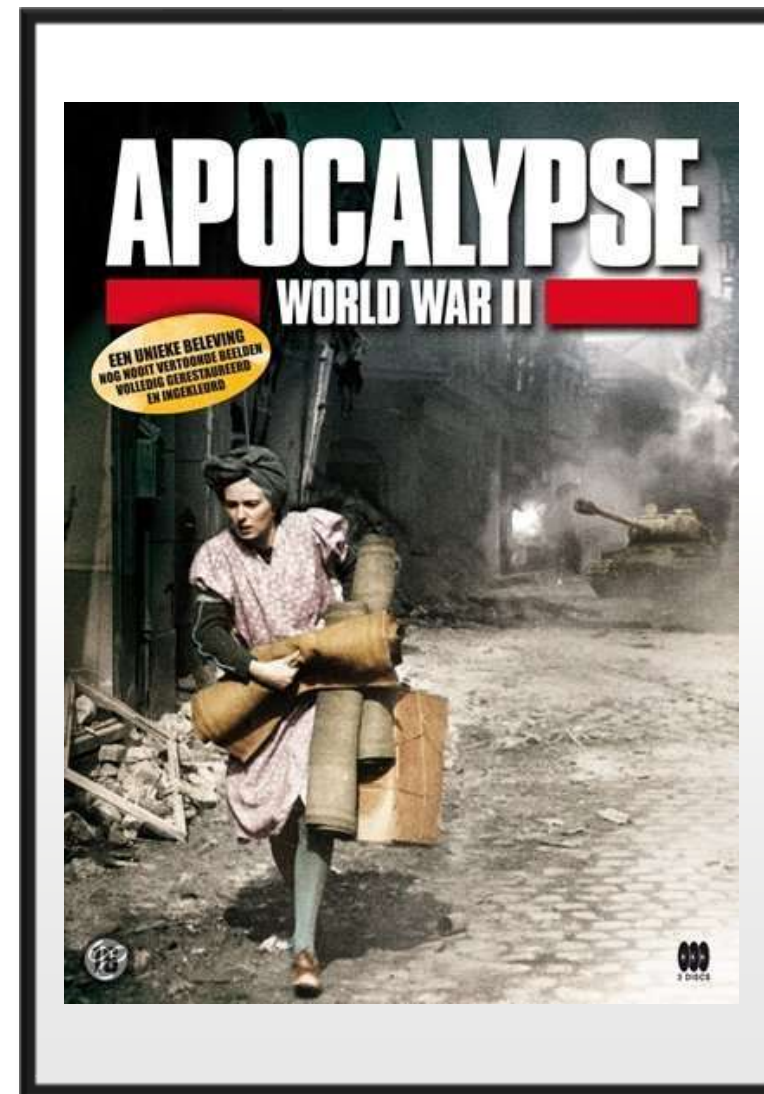
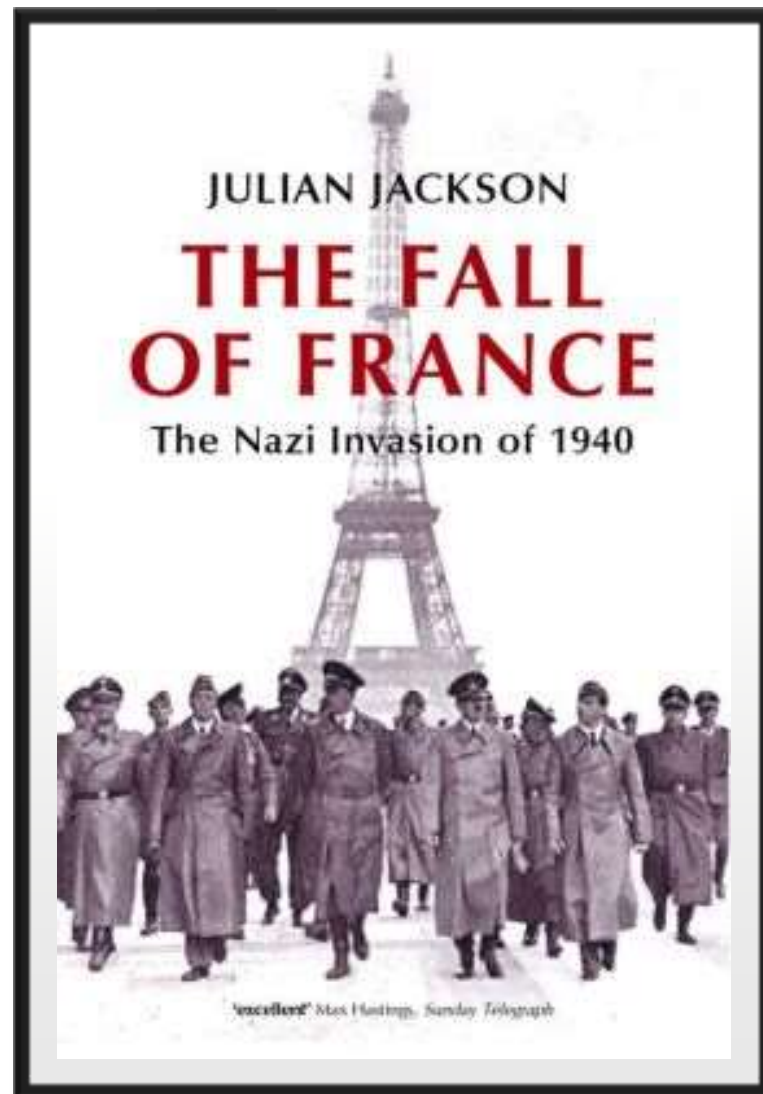
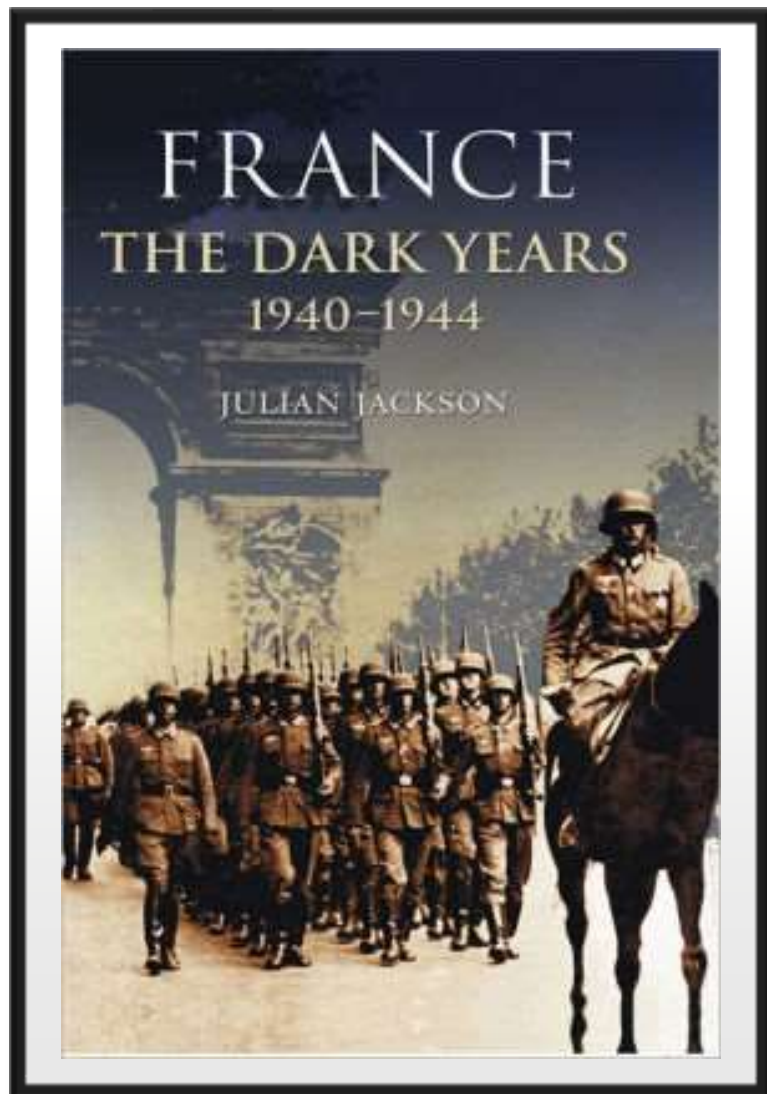


May-June 1940
Was France's defeat
inevitable?







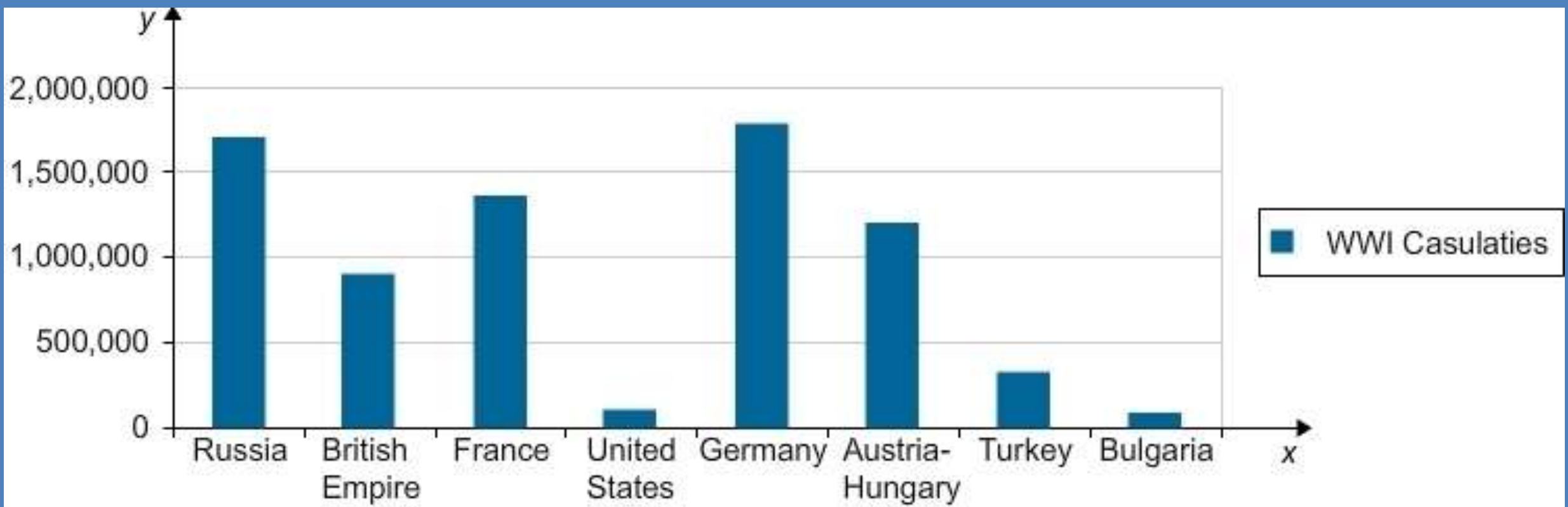
Pétain & de Gaulle: opposite conclusions



The French defeat of 1940:
bad luck or necessity?

1939: a reluctant France declared war on Germany

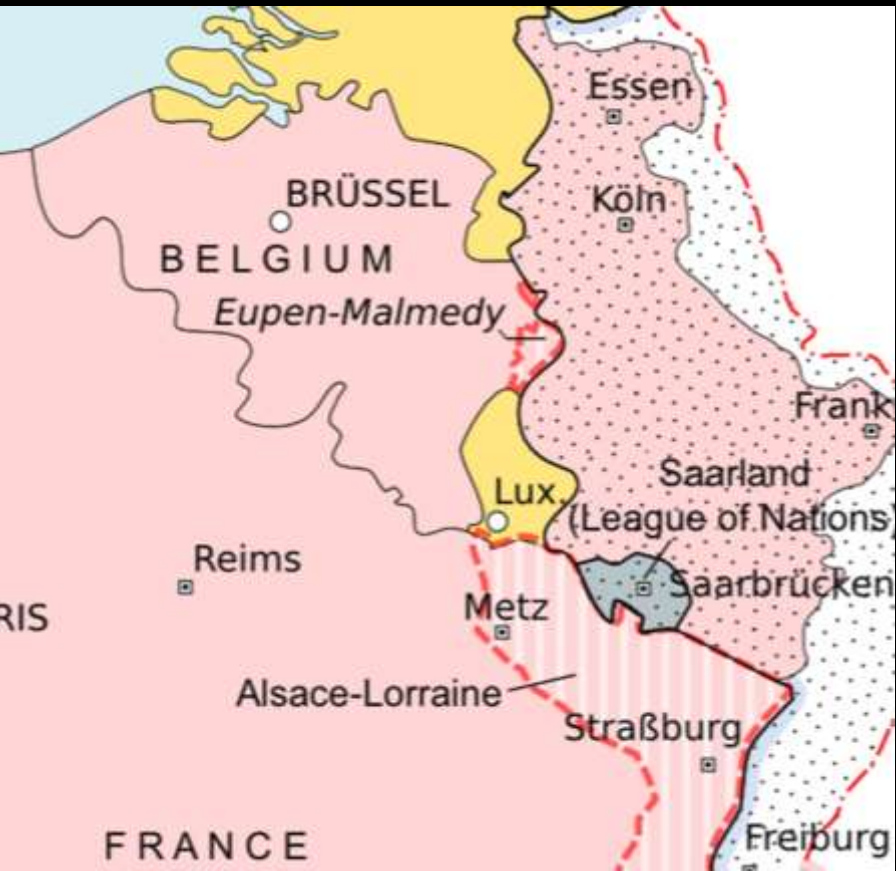




France: 1.4 million dead (highest per capita)



Georges Clemenceau in 1919



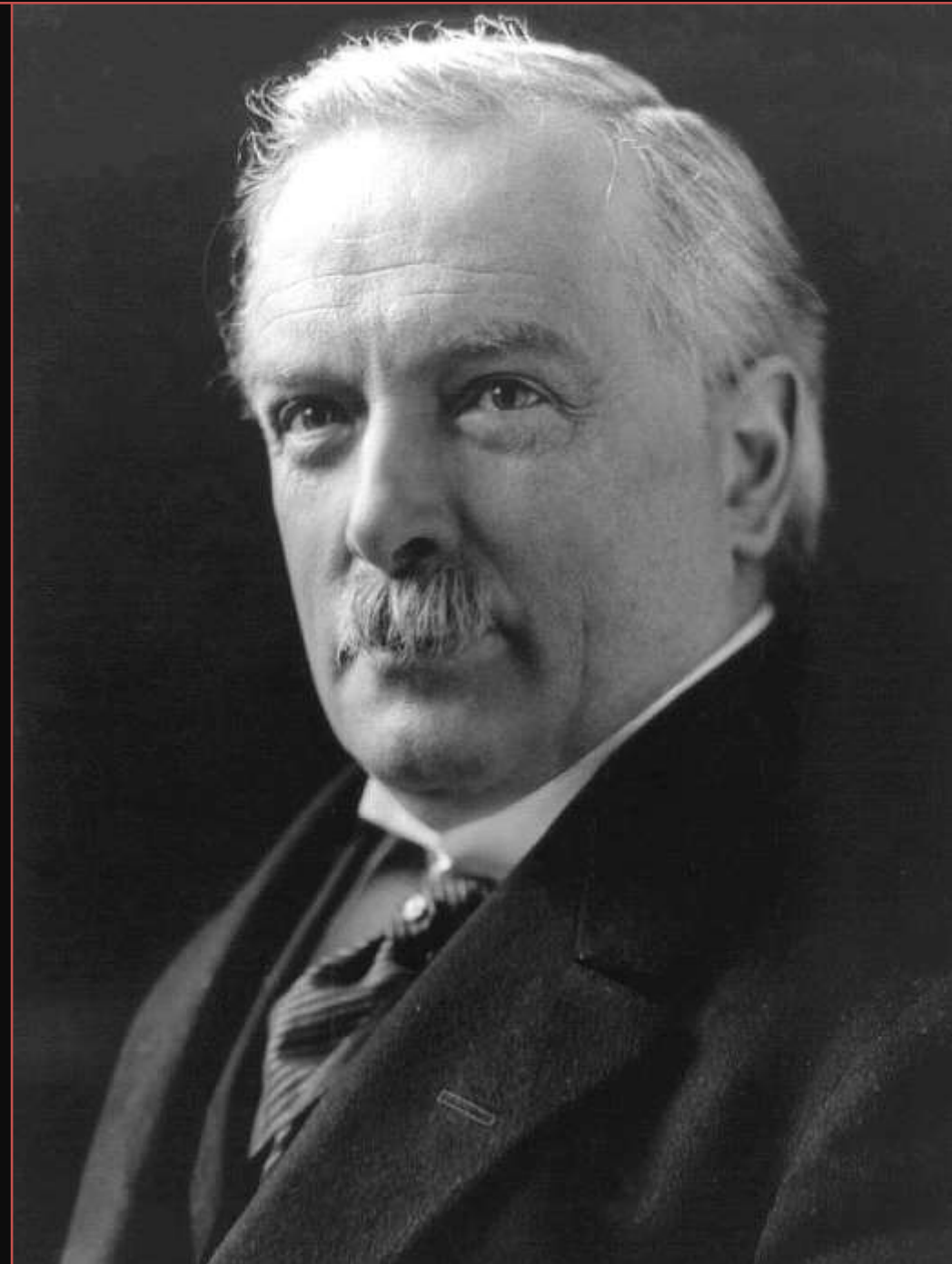
Fear of a German revenge
Fundamental preoccupation: security
To weaken Germany as much as possible
The Rhineland detached from Germany
(independent state occupied militarily by France)

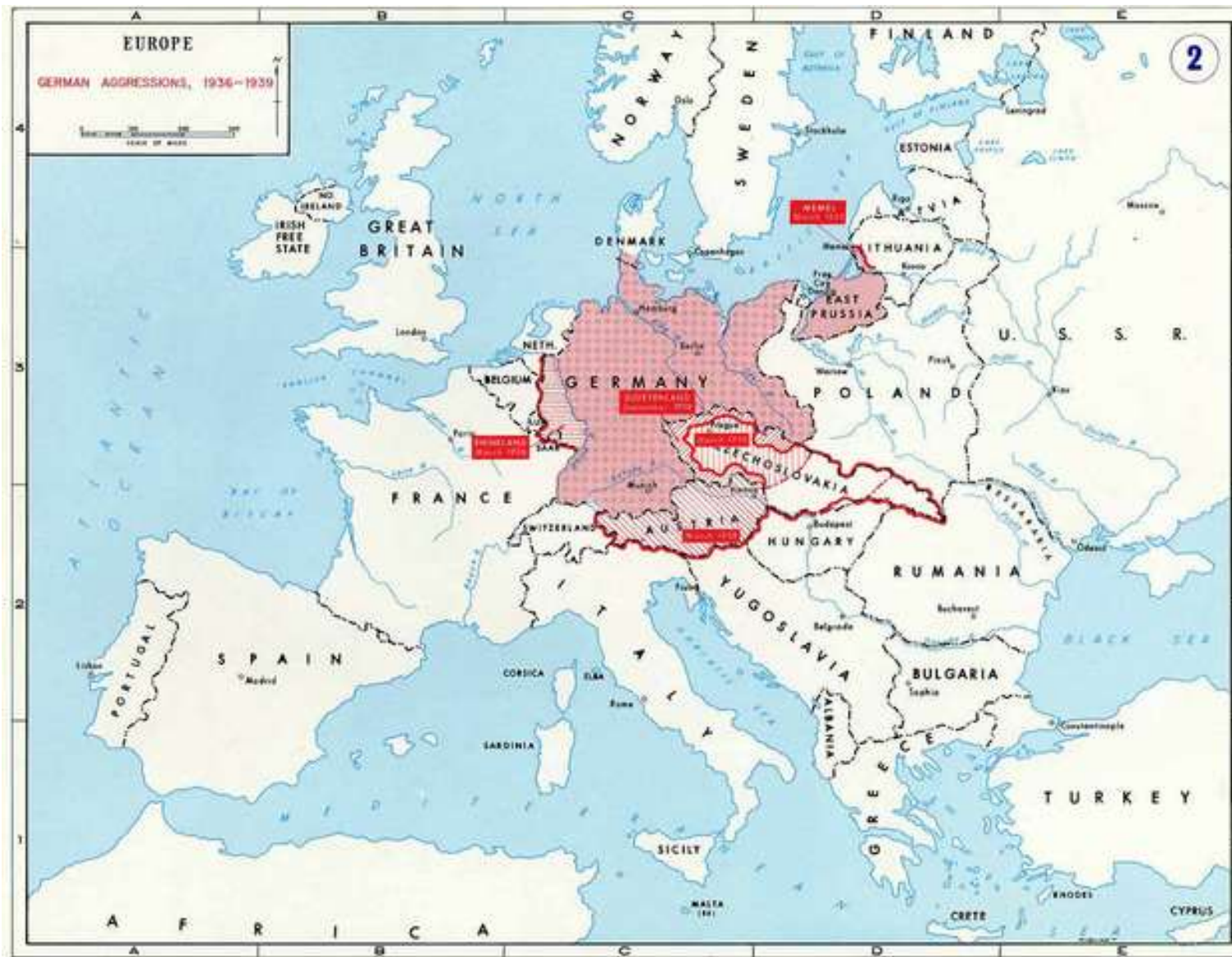
The Rhineland: a buffer to protect France from
another German invasion

Lloyd George

But Germany not to be ruined: a potential
economic partner in the future

Balance of power in Europe – Little
support to France until 1939
1930s appeasement

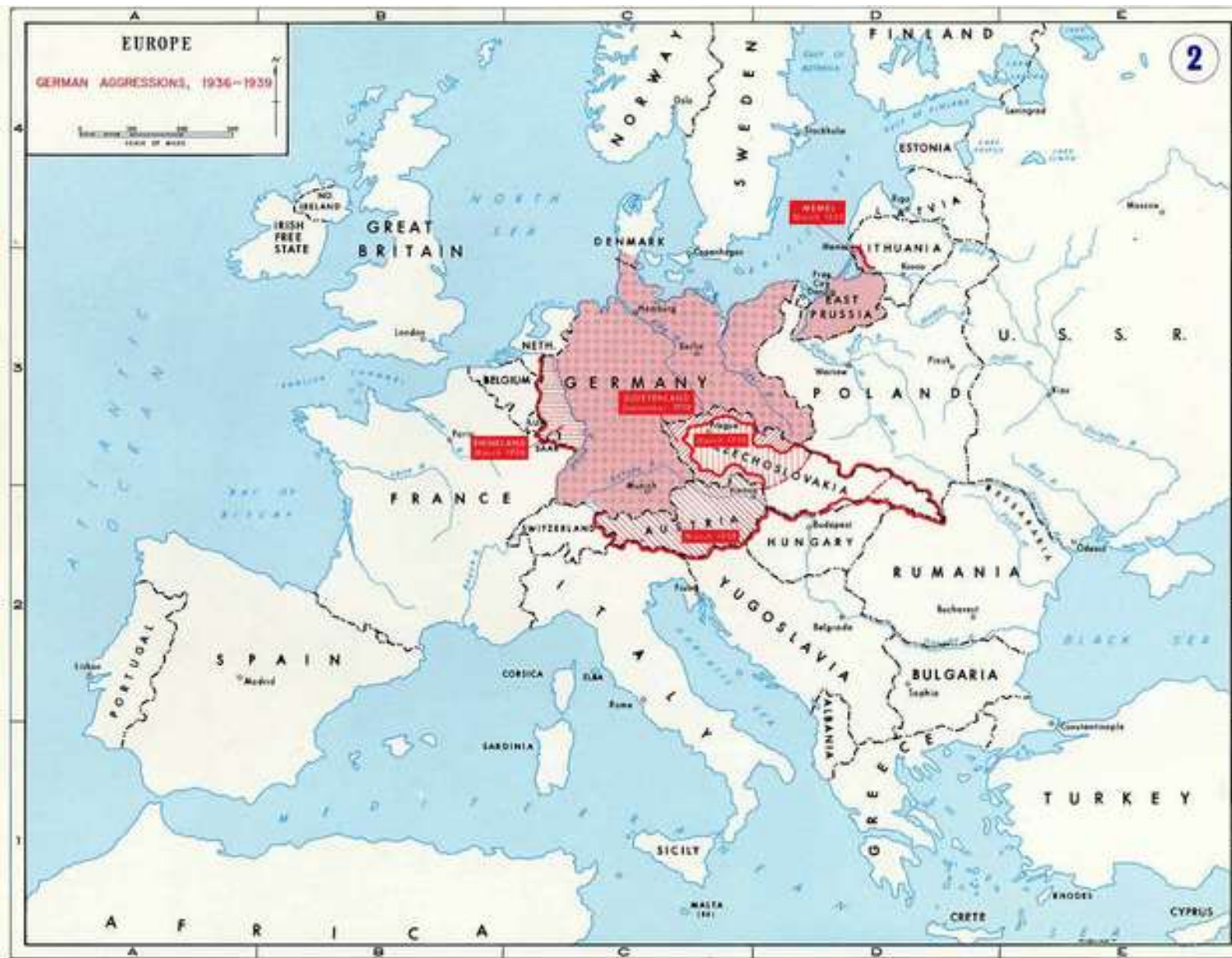




No alliance with Russia
like in 1914

Poland: unreliable until
1939 (**non-aggression
declaration** with
Germany in 1934)

Belgium's **neutrality**
(1936): no common
military strategy



Italy allied to Germany
since 1936

1939: France could
only rely on British
support

France's attitude towards Germany
after 1933

Germany: repeated violations of the
Treaty of Versailles

1935: mandatory conscription reinstated

1936: the Rhineland re-militarized

France: 1936-1938: support to British
appeasement

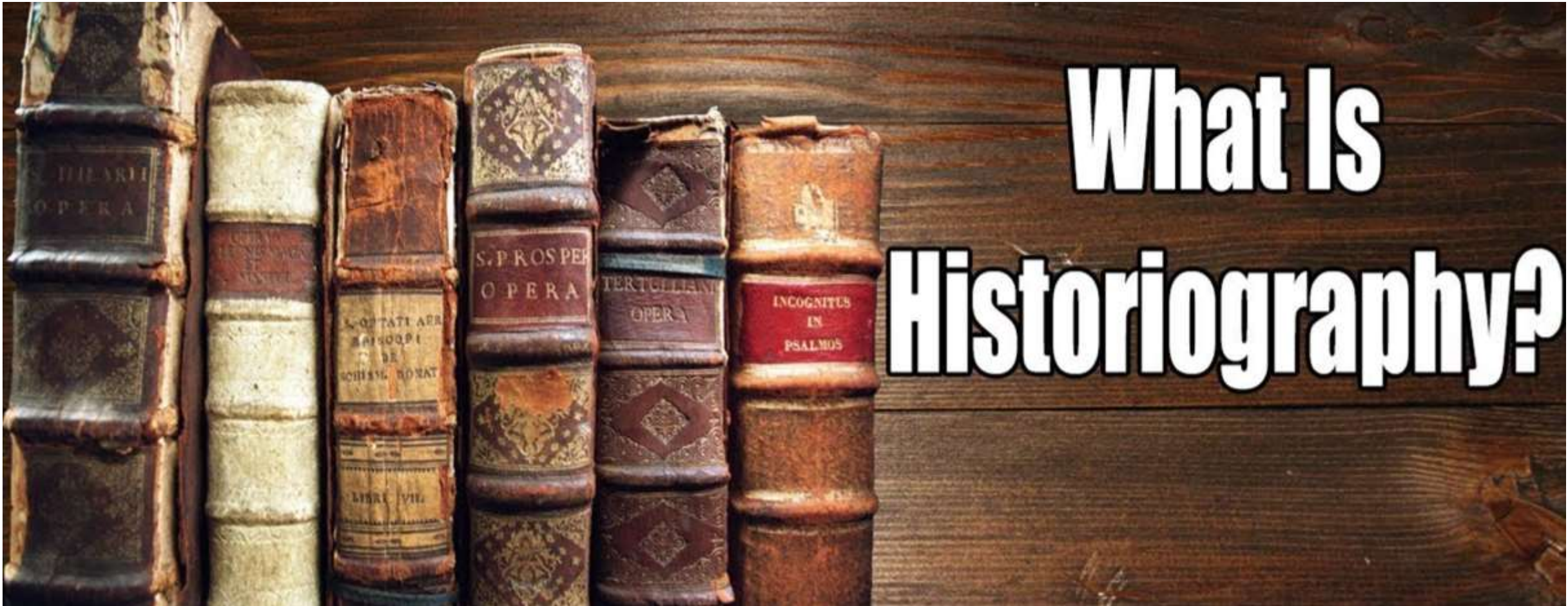


France: the **Popular Front** (left wing coalition in power (1936-1938) **rehabilitated**

France's defeat in 1940 was not inevitable

Impressive French rearmament prior to 1939





The methods of historians to analyze historical facts



Appeasement

1936-1939

Nothing is as simple as it
looks...

Few controversies
surrounding the causes of
WW2

Established consensus: the
march to war was inevitable

The trauma of WW1

The Treaty of Versailles

The failure of **collective**
security

The Great Depression

The **cowardice** of France &
Great Britain



The aggressors: Japan,
Italy & Germany



The **cowards**: France &
Great Britain





The innocent victims:
Czechoslovakia, Poland and
Austria

Nothing is as simple as it
looks...





Debate over the **role of the Soviet Union** in 1939 (Non-aggression Pact)

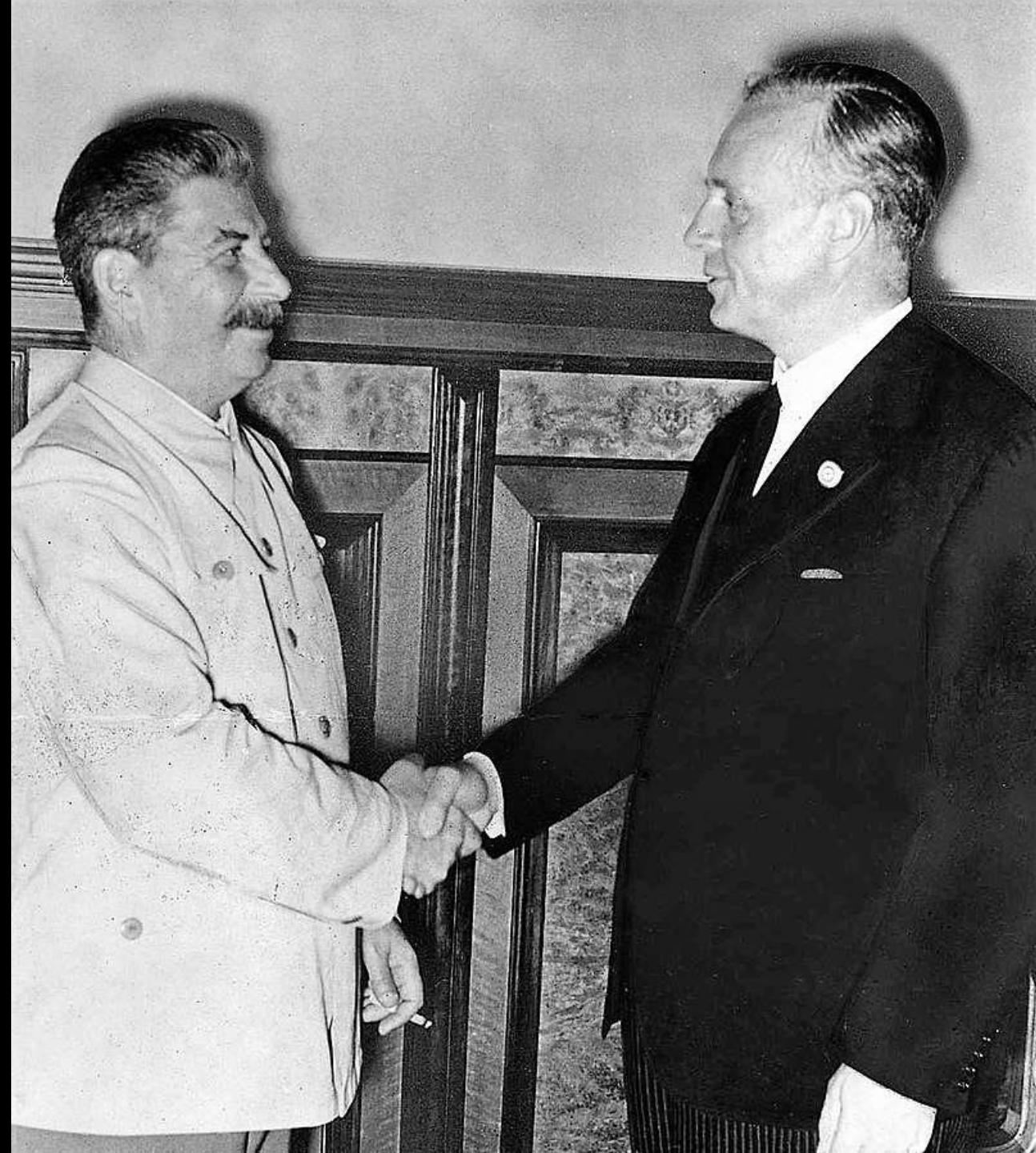


2 schools of thoughts

1. Soviet Union accused of **colluding** **with Nazi Germany**

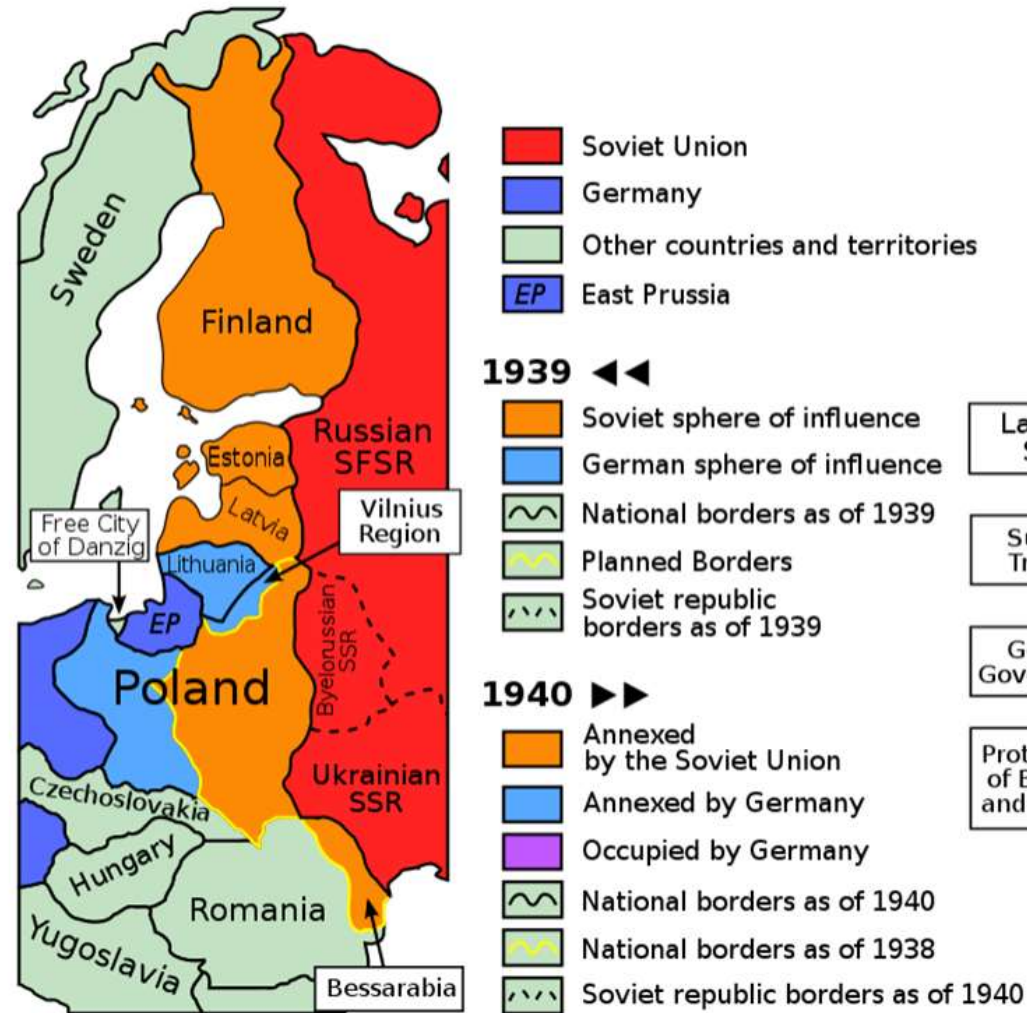
Why?

To avoid a conflict with Germany
To help the spread of communism
To regain territories lost in 1918

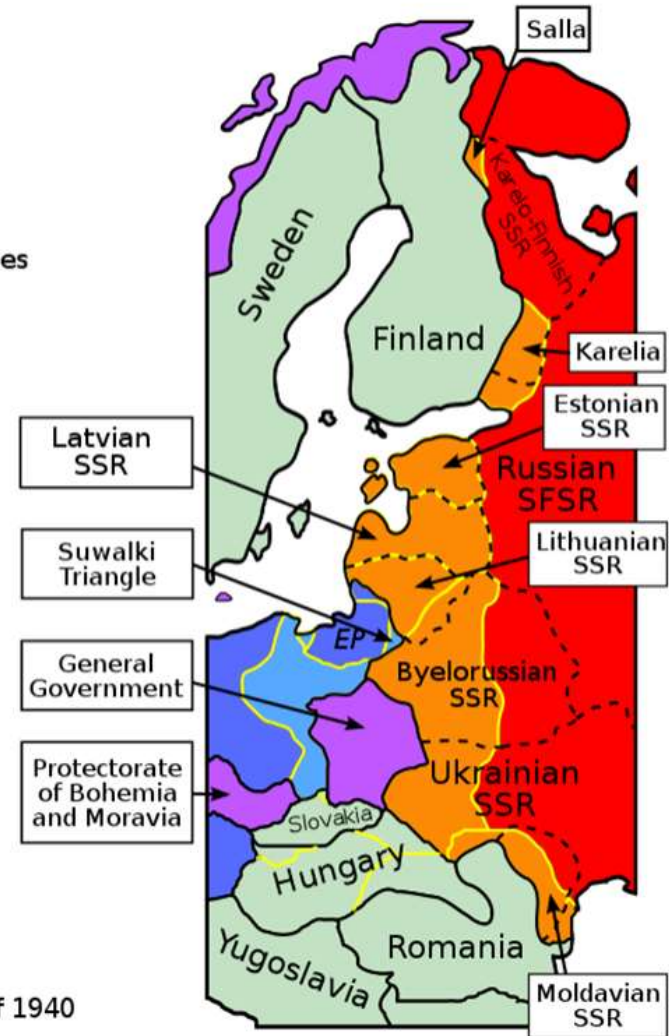





Planned division of Central Europe according to Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact



Actual territorial changes 1939-1940








2. Stalin acted to gain time

Stalin initially favored an alliance with France & Great Britain

Fear of communism in the West

Poland's hostility towards the Soviet Union



***Appeasement* (negotiation
& compromise): was is so
wrong?**

A rational policy for a declining Great
Britain?

Everything had to be attempted to avoid
another conflict

Churchill: the man of the hour who saved
Britain



March 1938: the *Anschluss*



The next target:
Czechoslovakia

The Sudetenland crisis



The “Munich Syndrome”

The **ongoing consensus**: democracies did nothing to stop Berlin, Rome & Tokyo’s aggressive foreign policies

Left wing **historiography**: British and French elites fearful of communism and fascinated by the Nazis





Right-wing
historiography: **left-wing
pacifism** & political
divisions led to war

The “lessons” of the
1930s: the democracies
“capitulated” at Munich
(1938)

The need to negotiate in
a position of strength

The concept of **preventive
war**

The 2003 invasion of Iraq



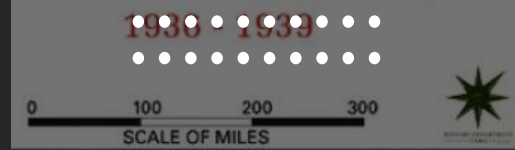


What the archives tell us...

British & French elites eager to compromise

But

Did the democracies act cowardly towards Hitler?



Could a war in 1938 have prevented the horrors of WW2?

Hindsight: History with "ifs"



Fact: a great many number
of German generals feared
the consequences of a war
in 1938

The German army
(*Wehrmacht*) not ready

Defensive strategy



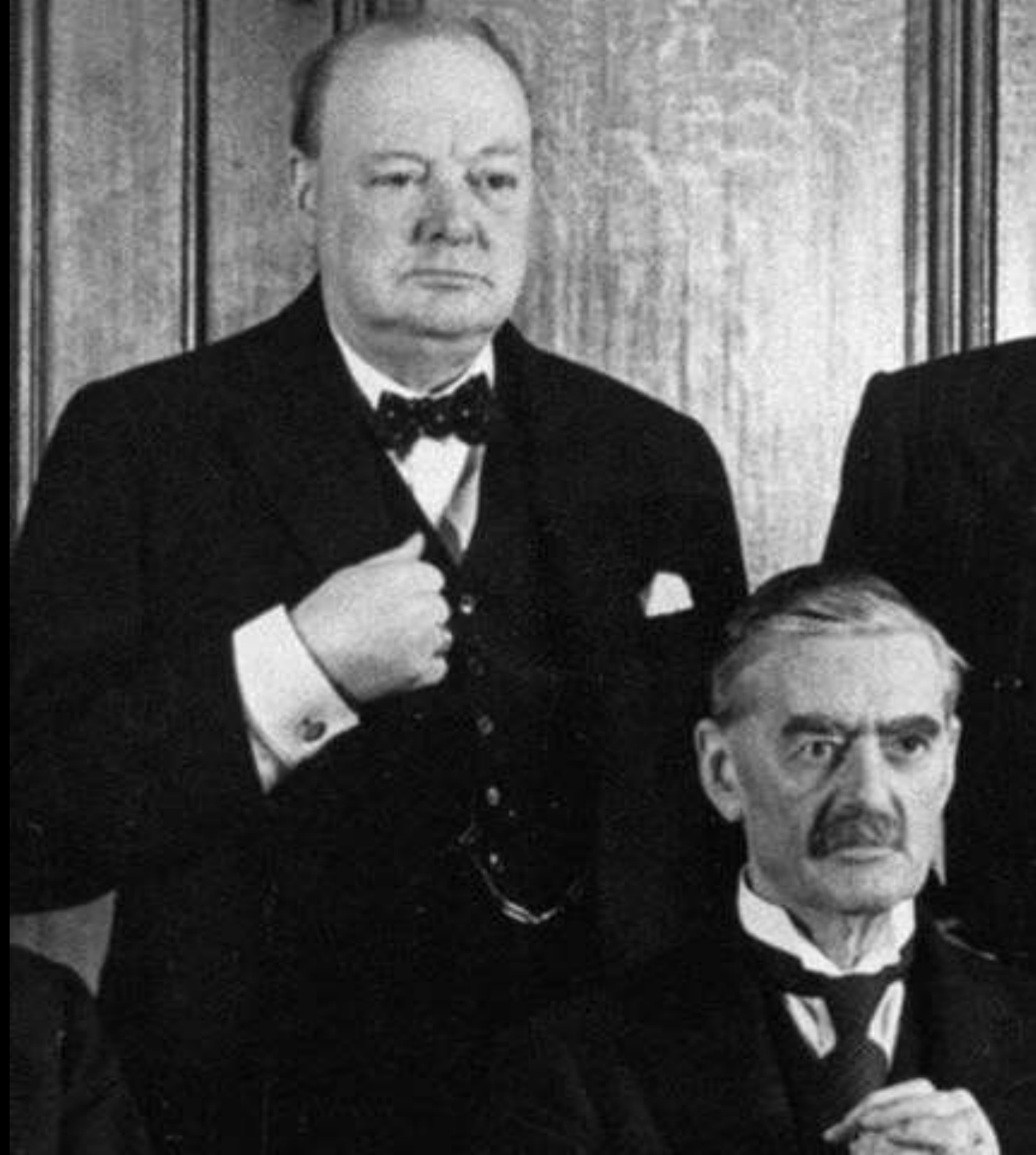
Why were France & Great Britain unwilling to consider war in 1938?

German air force (*Luftwaffe*) capabilities & industrial potential overestimated

Anti-appeasers were few in number and poorly organized



Winston Churchill only called for war
to stop Germany in 1938



Rearmament (France & Great Britain)

A real effort at rearming

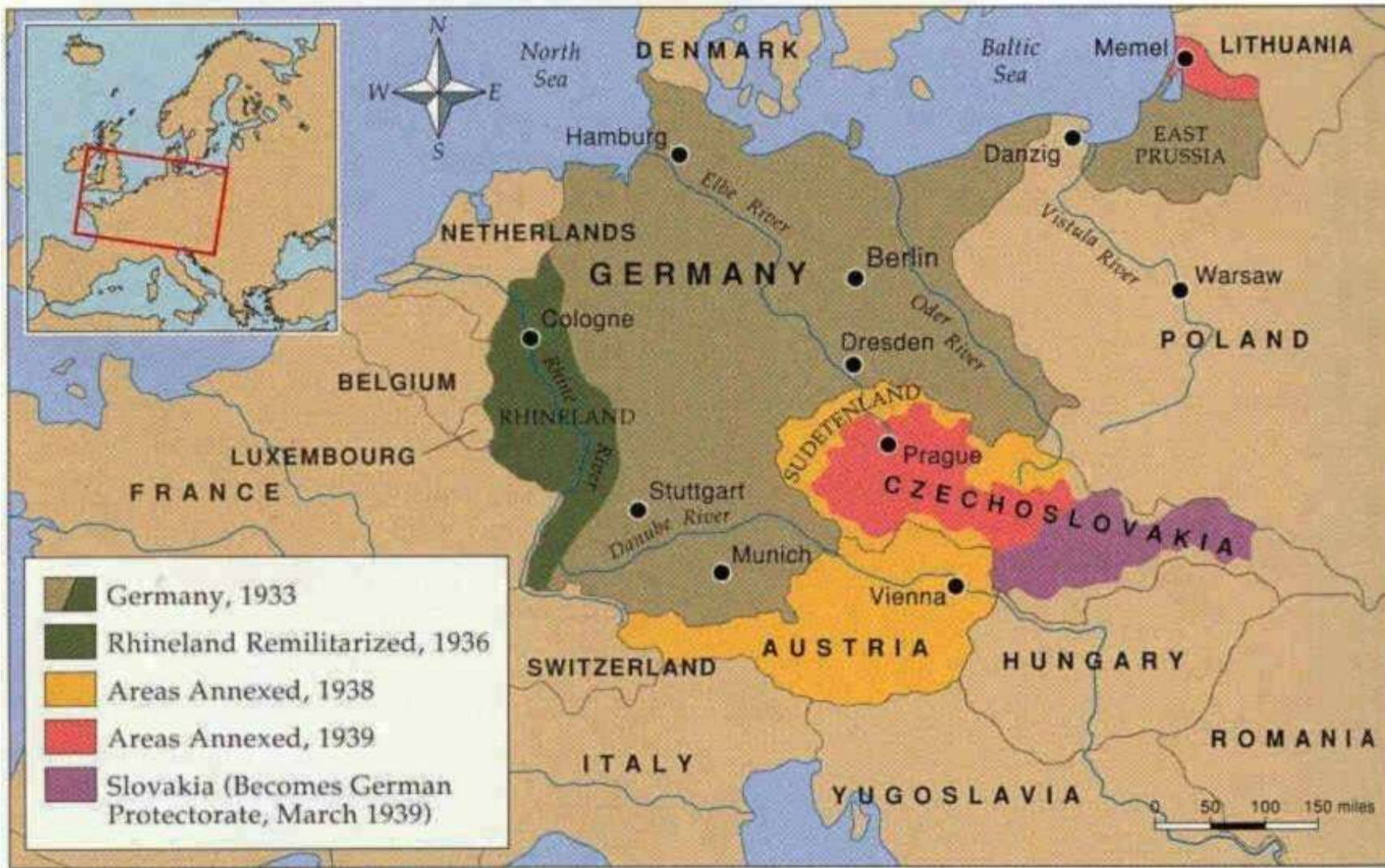
British military budget tripled between
1937 & 1939

1940 British production of aircraft far
superior to Germany's

France & Great Britain produced 3
times more tanks than Germany



Nazi Germany on the March, 1936-1939



With hindsight,
France & Great
Britain should
have waged
war on
Germany in
1938

BUT

War is more
than statistics
on paper

Widespread belief in 1938
that Hitler could be talked
into compromising

Hitler's ability to dissimulate
his real intentions

German elites & people did
not want war



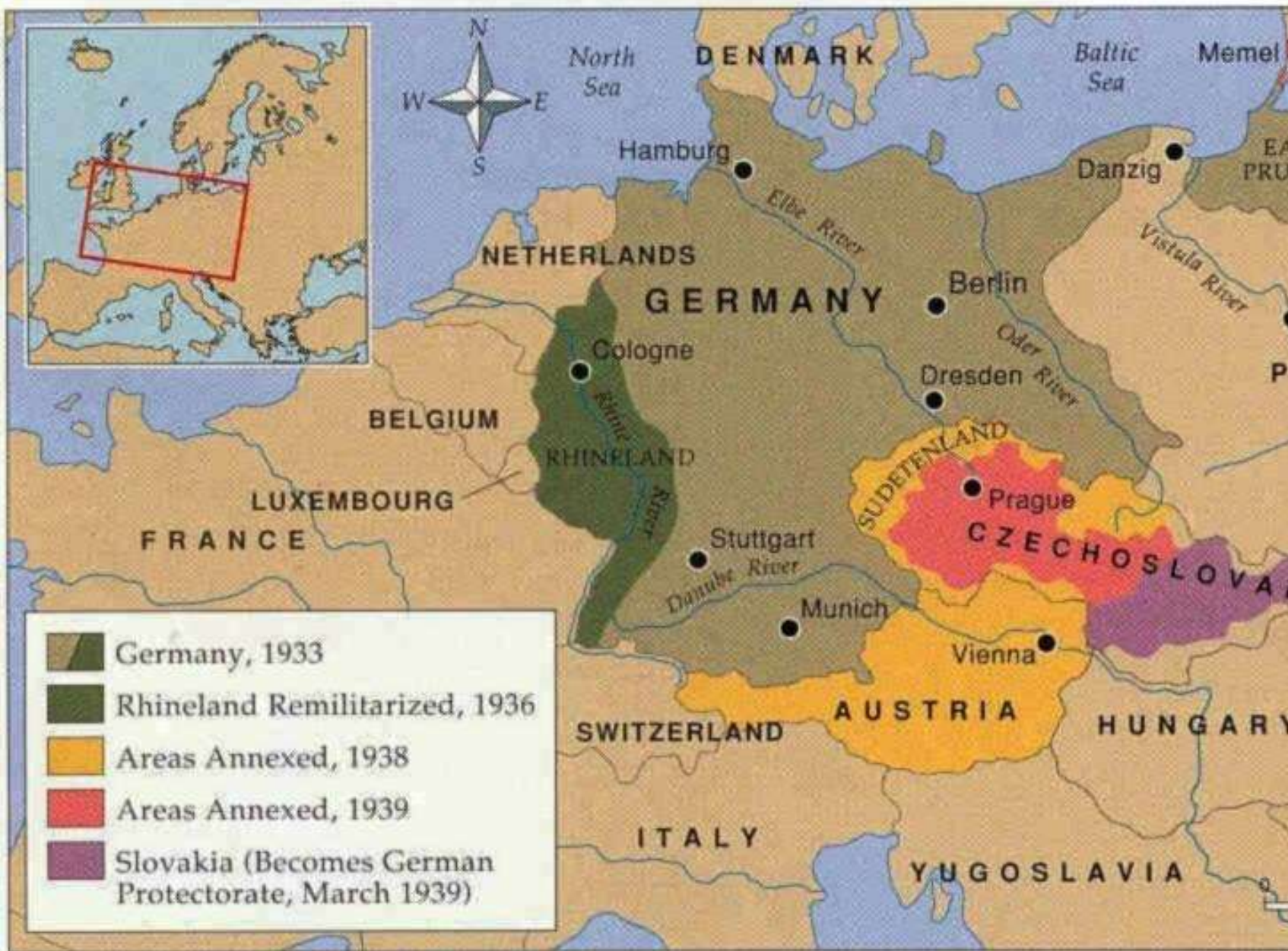
Hitler more aggressive after Munich

Munich Agreement not
considered a victory by Hitler

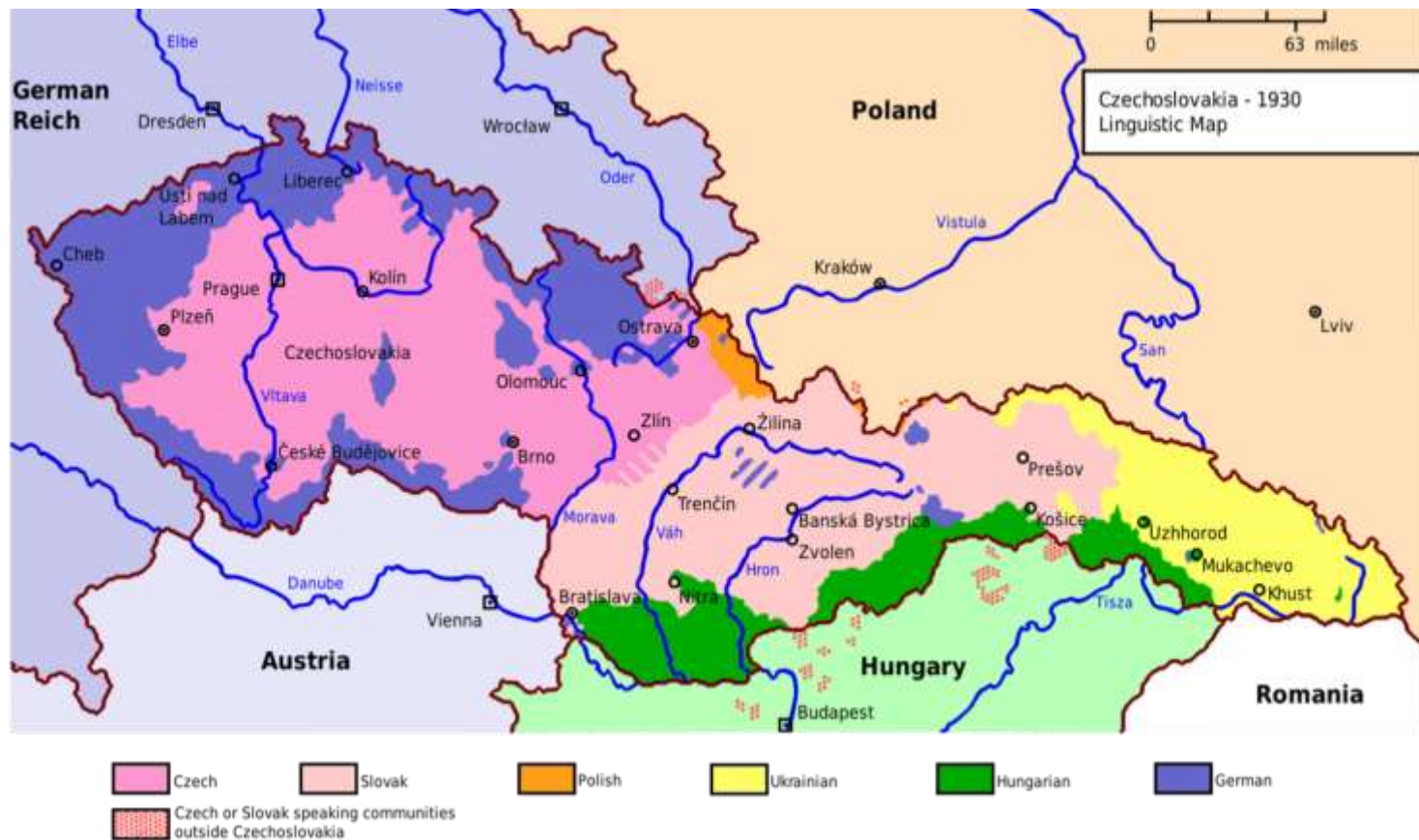
Hitler wanted war (fear Germany
could not win an arms race)



Nazi Germany on the March, 1936–1939



Hitler's decision to invade what was left of Czechoslovakia (March 1939): a **wake-up call** for France & Great Britain



Could France & Great Britain have justified a war with sole objective to prevent German populations of Czechoslovakia to be reunited with Germany?

How to think war in
1938?

No one could have
anticipated the horrors of
WW2

Racial war did not start
until the invasion of Poland
(September 1939)



Nazi concentration camps
paled in comparison to Soviet
camps

Millions had died of hunger in the
Soviet Union (Ukraine)

1 million executed in Soviet Union
prior to 1938



Kristallnacht (9-10 November 1938)

Violence against the Jews:
Kristallnacht took place after
Munich

Violence against the Jews in France
(Alsace-Lorraine & Paris): “greedy”
Jews accused of promoting a
“Jewish war”



- Neutral Powers
- Central Powers
- Allied Powers

A rigid system of alliances led to war in 1914

Why renew with similar alliances in the 1930s

Hitler denounced Germany's "encirclement"



BRITAIN DECLARES WAR

GERMANY FAILS TO REPLY TO OUR ULTIMATUM



PREMIER TELLS THE NATION

"I Am Certain That The
Right Will Prevail"

HITLER'S MIND MADE UP

BRITAIN IS AT WAR WITH GERMANY, NO REPLY TO OUR ULTIMATUM
HAVING BEEN RECEIVED BY 11 A.M.

Premier in a broadcast to the nation at 11.15 said: "We are at war with Germany.
"No undertaking has been received from Germany."

Prime Minister said: "Now may God bless you all. May we defend the
right. It is not things that we shall be fighting against: brute force, bad faith,
injustice, oppression, and persecution, and against them I am certain that the
right will prevail."

"You can imagine what a bitter blow it is to me that all my long struggle to win
peace has failed."

"Yet I cannot believe that there is anything more or anything different that I could
have done and that would have been more successful."

"Up to the very last it would have been quite possible to have arranged a peaceful



The fights have gone on in France more again and
Britain is at war with the Navy on perpetual guard.

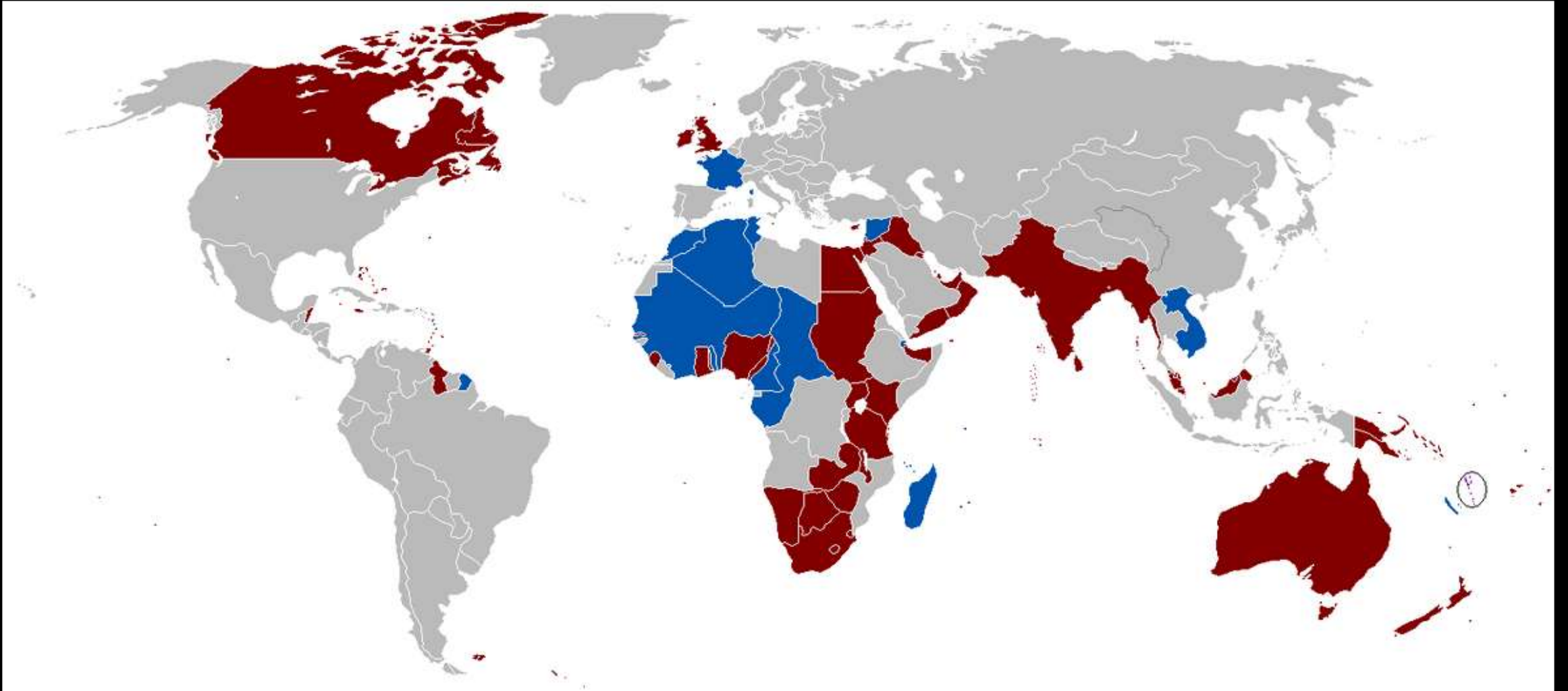
Battle Continues Along The Frontier

THE PREMIER'S DISCLOSURE

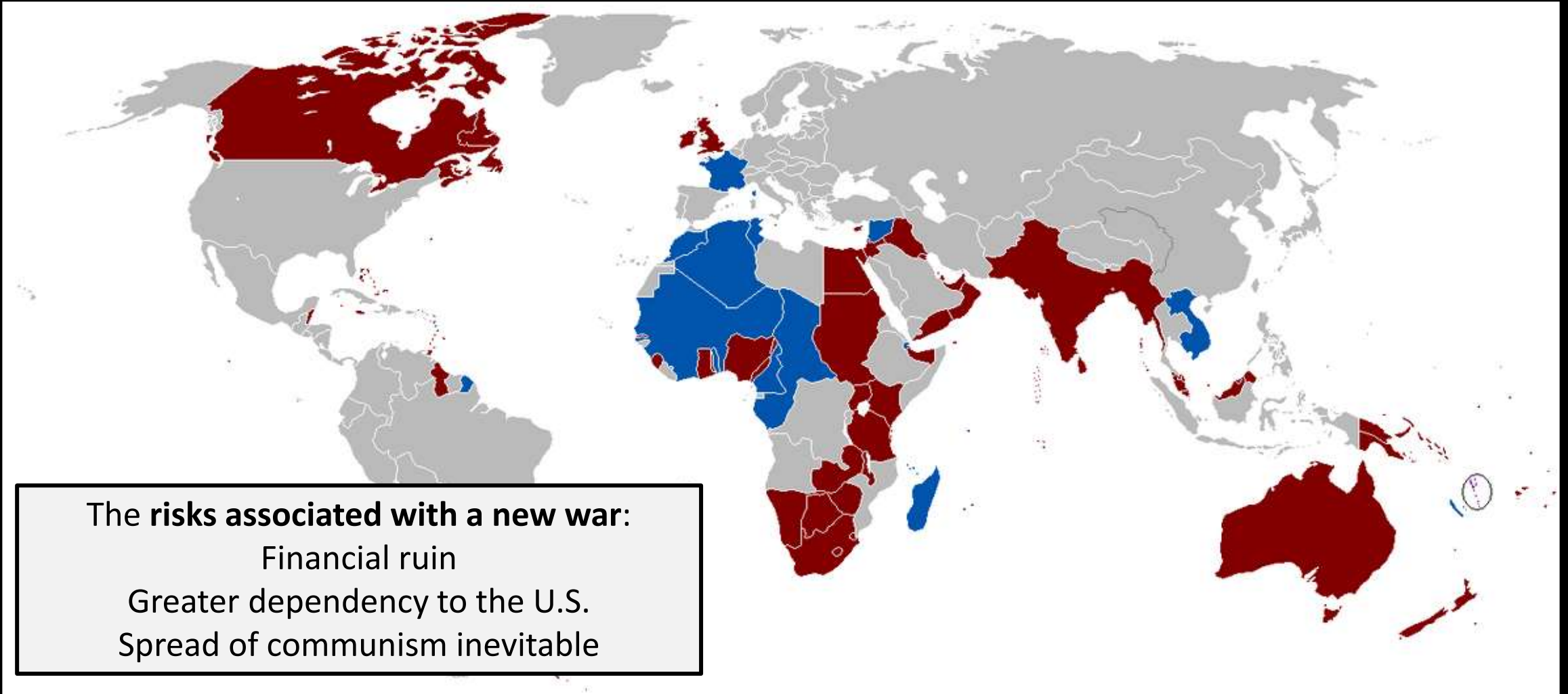
Delayed German Reply Due
to Peace Plan?

British leaders in 1939:
certainty that ALL had
been attempted to
avoid another war

*"A war postponed is
often a war avoided"*



Democracies and their **colonial empires**
Germany, Italy & Japan: why not us?



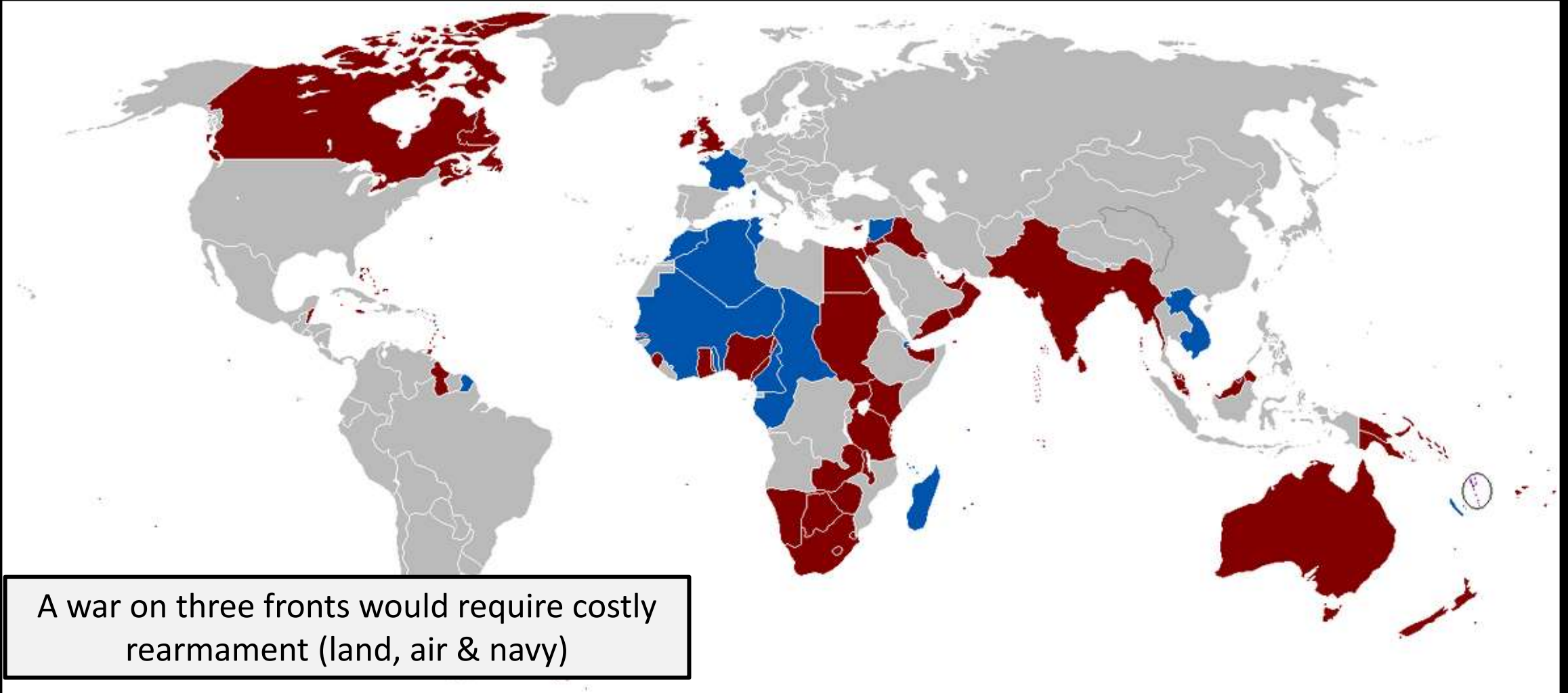
French & British **colonial empires**: both a strength & a weakness

Soviet Union: anti-colonial stance
A mortal threat to the British Empire



Japanese expansionism:
could Japan still be used as a
counter-balance to Soviet
Union?





The British nightmare: a war against Germany in Europe, Italy in the Mediterranean Sea & Japan in Asia



The Pact of Steel (22 May 1939)

A Germano-Italian
bilateral alliance





Italian fleet: a threat
to vital British
communication lines
in the Mediterranean

Mediterranean key to
British defense
system in the Far-East

40% of British oil
imports via
Mediterranean

Active Italian anti-British & anti-French propaganda in the
Middle-East & Tunisia

The Arab revolt in
Palestine: tens of
thousands of British
troops needed

Rebellion dealt with in 6
months **after** Munich

Fear of Nazi & Fascist
propaganda in the
Middle-East



Could Hitler have been
compelled not to go to
war?

Hitler more aggressive
after Munich



Hitler directly responsible
for war in 1939, not the
perceived weakness of
the democracies



Mobilizing an entire
country: a difficult
decision

French & British
courageous to declare
war in September 1939



Conclusion: simple
judgements are insufficient

It was all about **context**

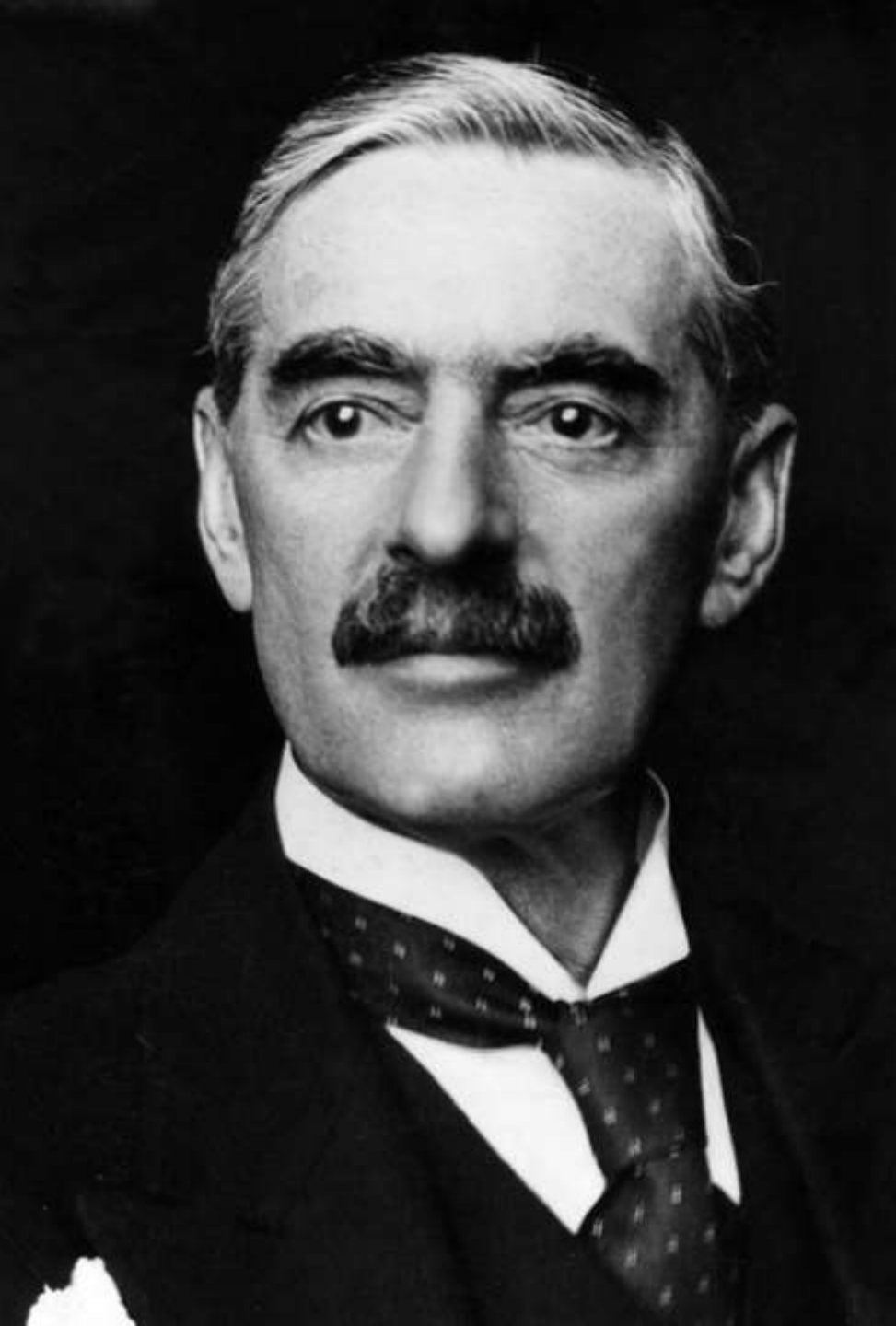


1 September 1939:
Germany invaded Poland

2 September: Franco-British
ultimatum to Germany

3 September: France &
Great Britain declared war
on Germany





A lack of vision & leadership?

Was Chamberlain naïve & weak?

Authoritarian, pretentious & narcissistic

Contradictory judgements on Hitler

A poor negotiator

A complex situation

Was an alliance including the
Soviet Union, Poland,
Czechoslovakia & Italy possible?

Soviet Union military
underestimated (the 1937
Moscow purges)

Fear of communism



The French Army
believed to be the best
army in the world

A French defeat
unthinkable



Overall **balance of military power**

France: 90 divisions

Belgium: 22 divisions

The Netherlands: 10 divisions

Great Britain: 10 divisions

Total: **132 divisions**

Germany: **135 divisions**

3 000 French tanks (of better quality) vs. 2 500
German tanks

Impressive rearming (1936-1939)



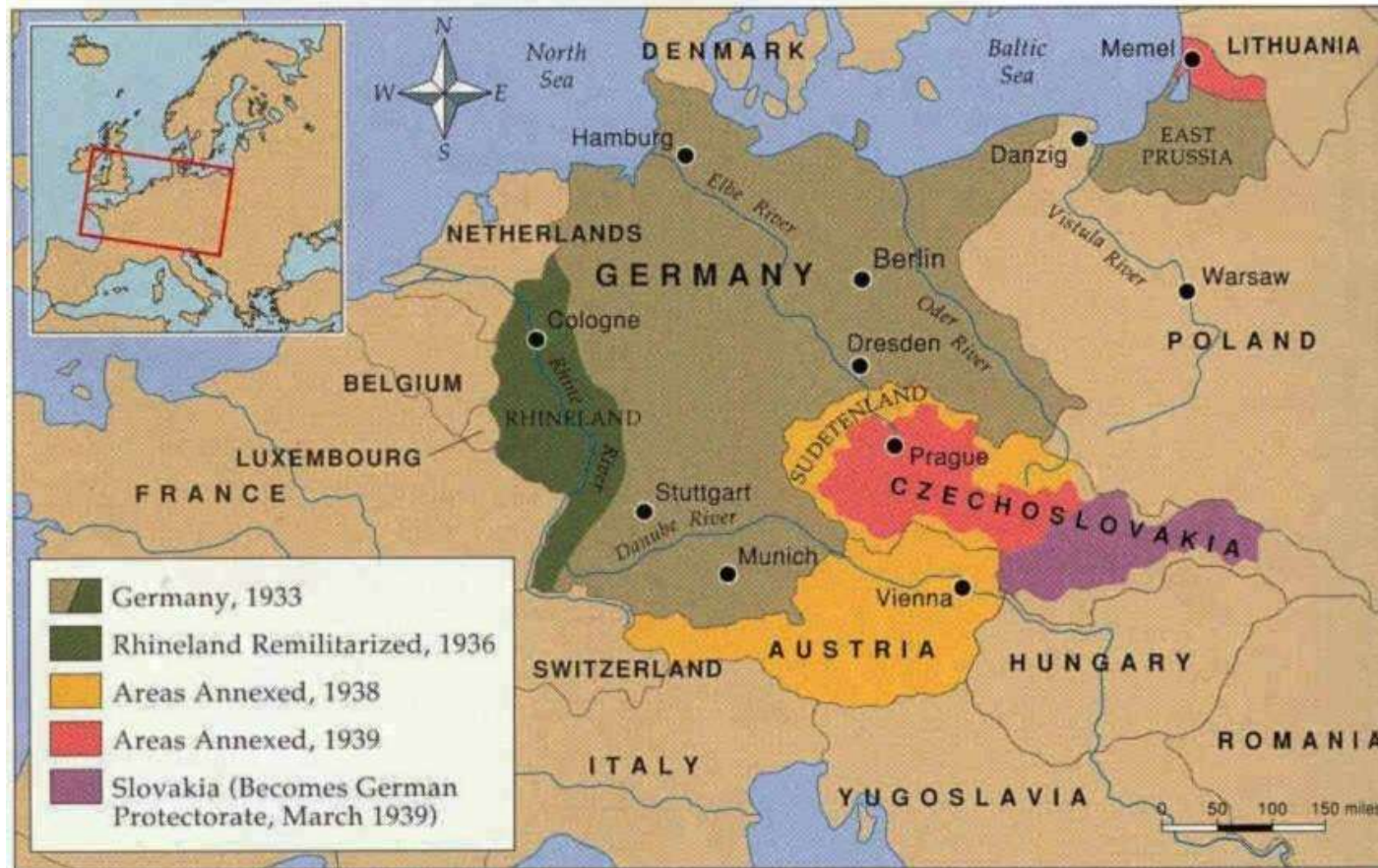
1936-1939: a vulnerable German economy

Lack of foreign currencies
Lack of natural resources
Insufficient coordination

Programs of rearmament
reduced by half



Nazi Germany on the March, 1936-1939



Germany isolated

No support to be expected
from Italy and Japan

November 1939: the U.S. **Cash
and Carry** clause

Lack of foreign currencies:
Germany unable to benefit

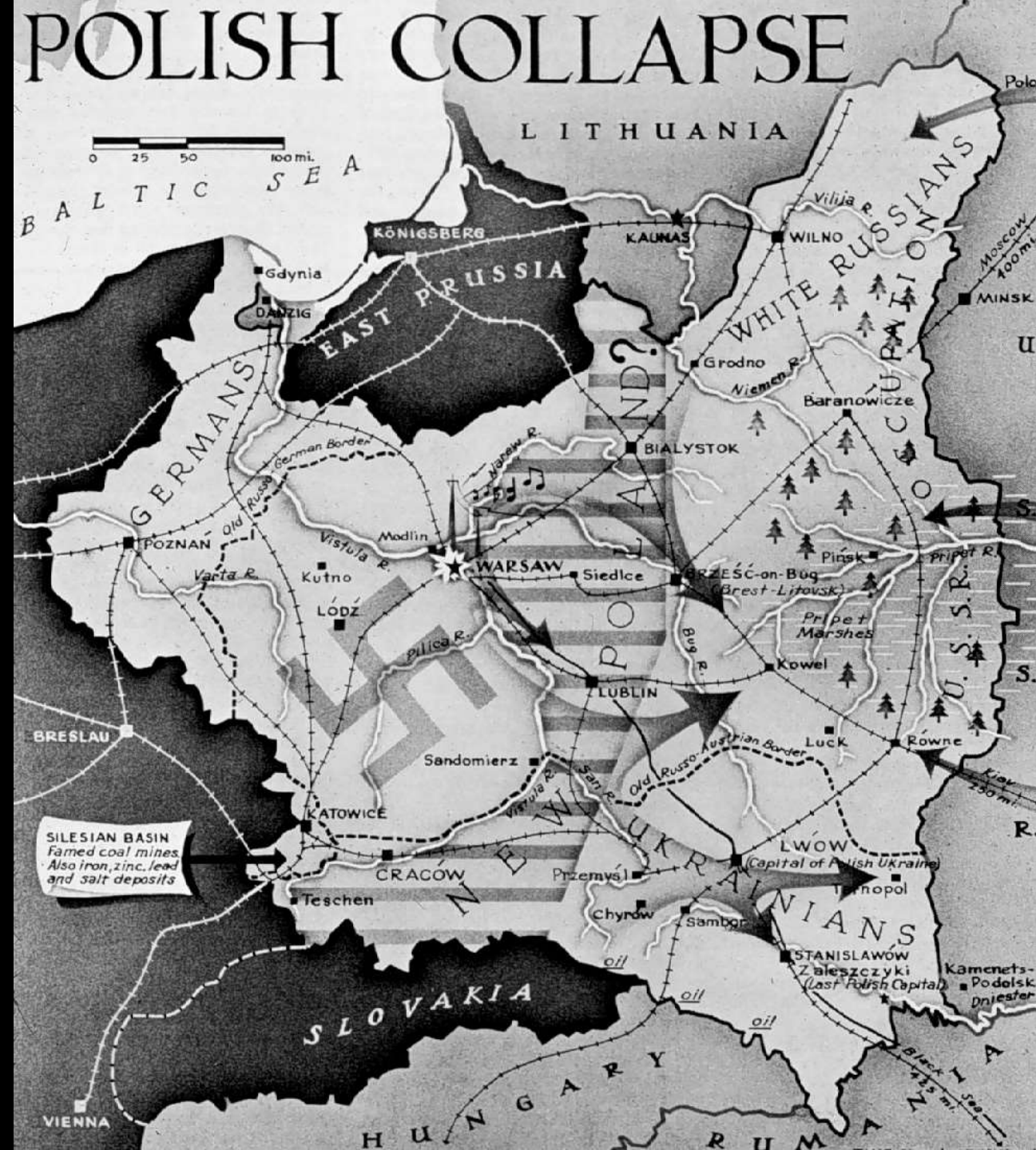
The invasion & partition of
Poland: a welcome respite

Soviet exports of natural resources
(oil) to Germany

BUT

The effects of France & Great
Britain's naval blockade

Time not on Germany's side



Hitler to his generals: a military campaign against France & Great Britain

A swift campaign? Maybe not!

445 000 tons of steel allocated to the army (second quarter of 1940): only 25 000 to tanks vs. 26 000 to barbed wires and obstacles

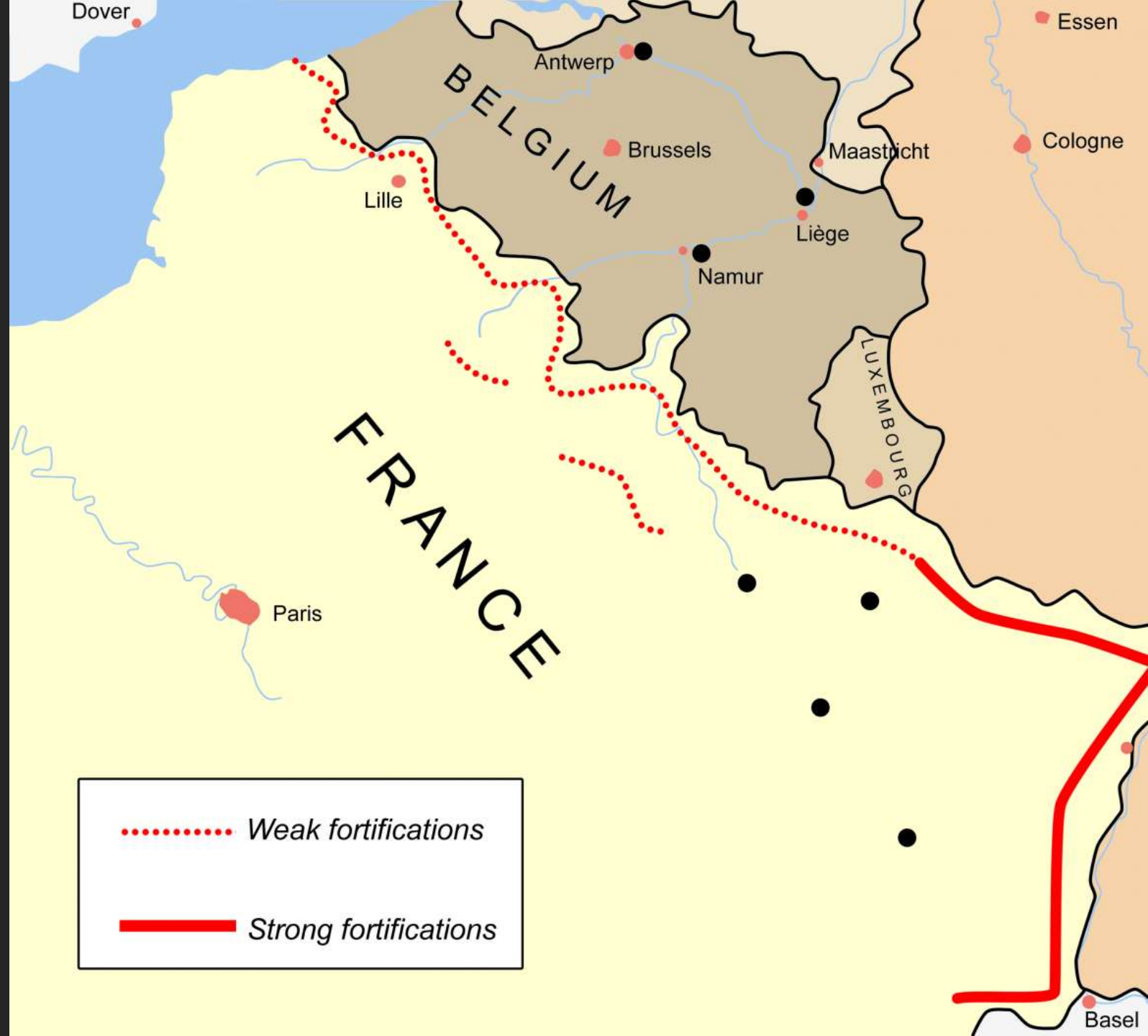


A question of **military strategies**

France: a “**methodical battle**”: to engage armies progressively

A **centralized direction of operations**: no space for initiative or imagination – Total lack of flexibility

A **defensive outlook**



No war of conquest

The memories of the Great War
and its staggering casualties

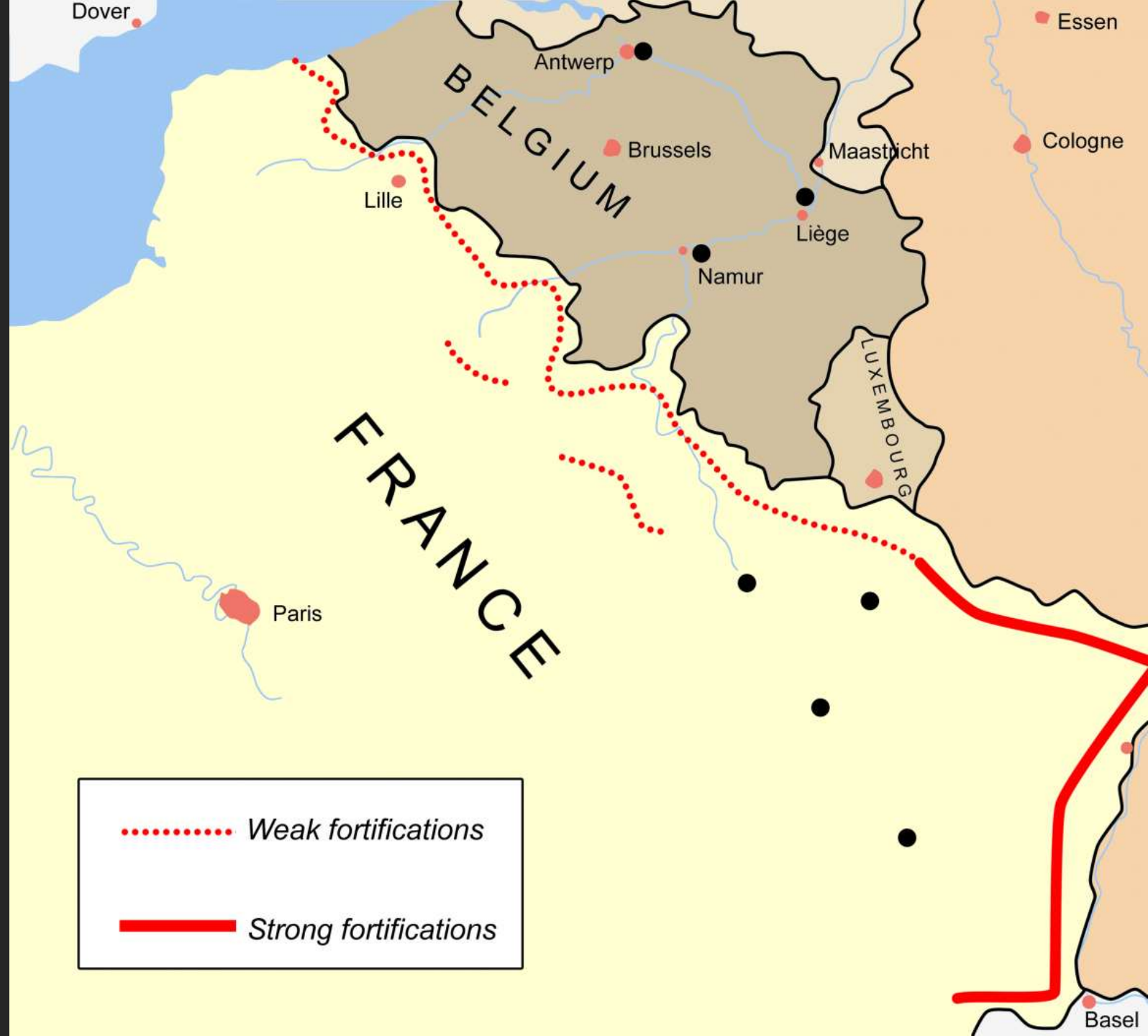
The demographic factor:

Germany: 13.1 million men

France: 6.7 million men

The construction of the **Maginot**
line: a logical move

To minimize the human cost &
contain the enemy





The **many weaknesses** of the French military strategy

The tanks reduced to a role of support (infantry)

No concentration of tanks in mechanized units


CHARLES DE GAULLE

***VERS
L'ARMÉE
DE MÉTIER***

An outnumbered
aviation

Priority to missions of
observations



The background of the slide is a composite of two black and white aerial photographs. The top half shows a large number of German Panzer tanks moving across a field, kicking up dust. The bottom half shows a city, likely London, during a bombing raid, with a large bomber plane (likely a Heinkel He 111) visible in the lower right corner, dropping bombs that create large fireballs on the ground.

The German *Blitzkrieg*: strategy or improvisation?

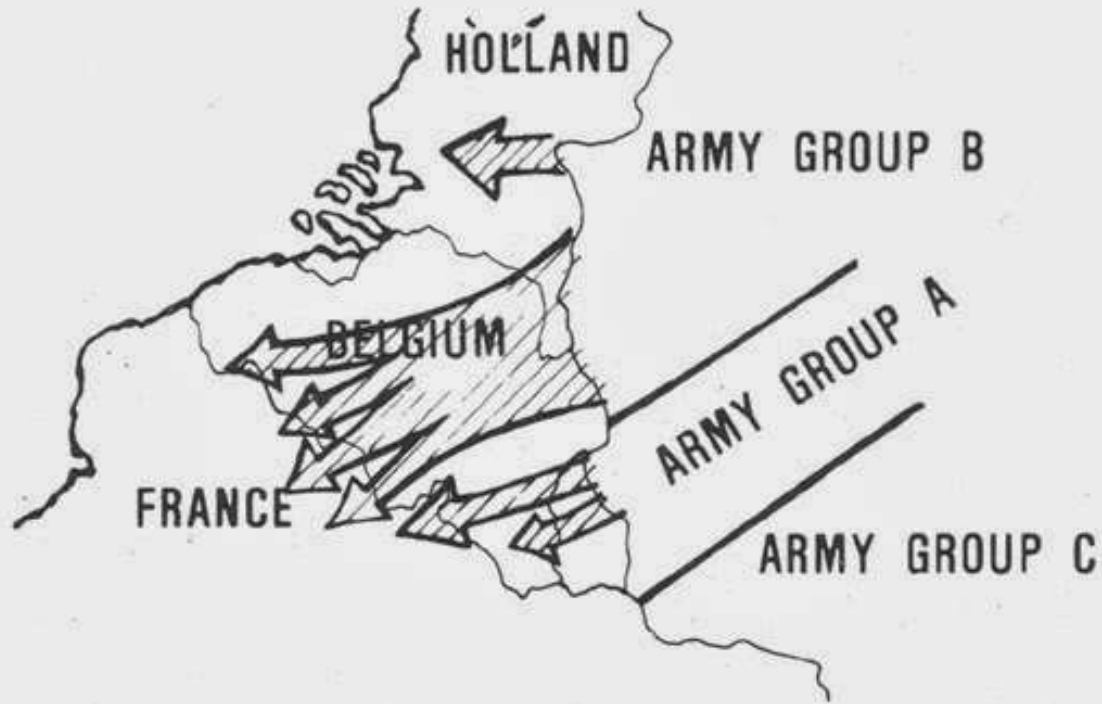
Germany: limited economic
potential

An offensive strategy

Blitzkrieg: a strategy not duly
theorized

THE INVASION OF FRANCE 1940: The Plans

OKH PLAN, OCT 1939



FINAL PLAN MARCH 1940



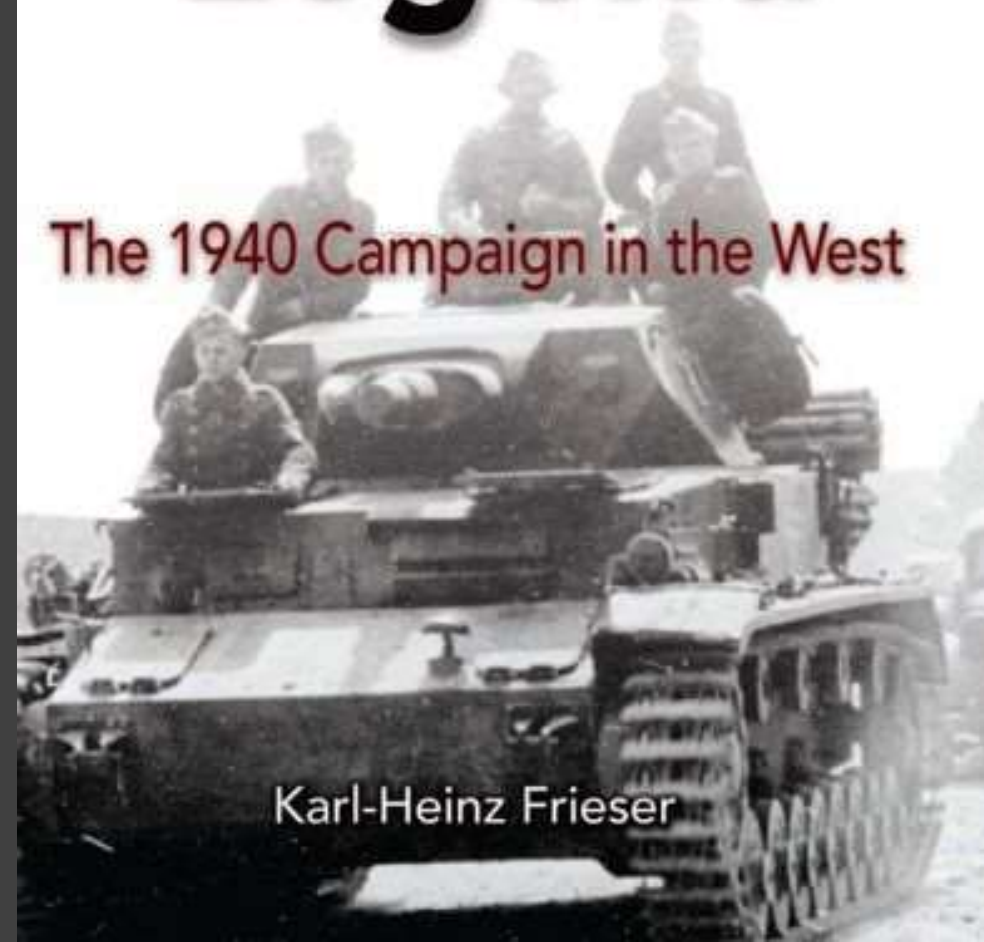




*Blitzkrieg “is rather an operational act of
despair to exit a desperate strategic
situation”*

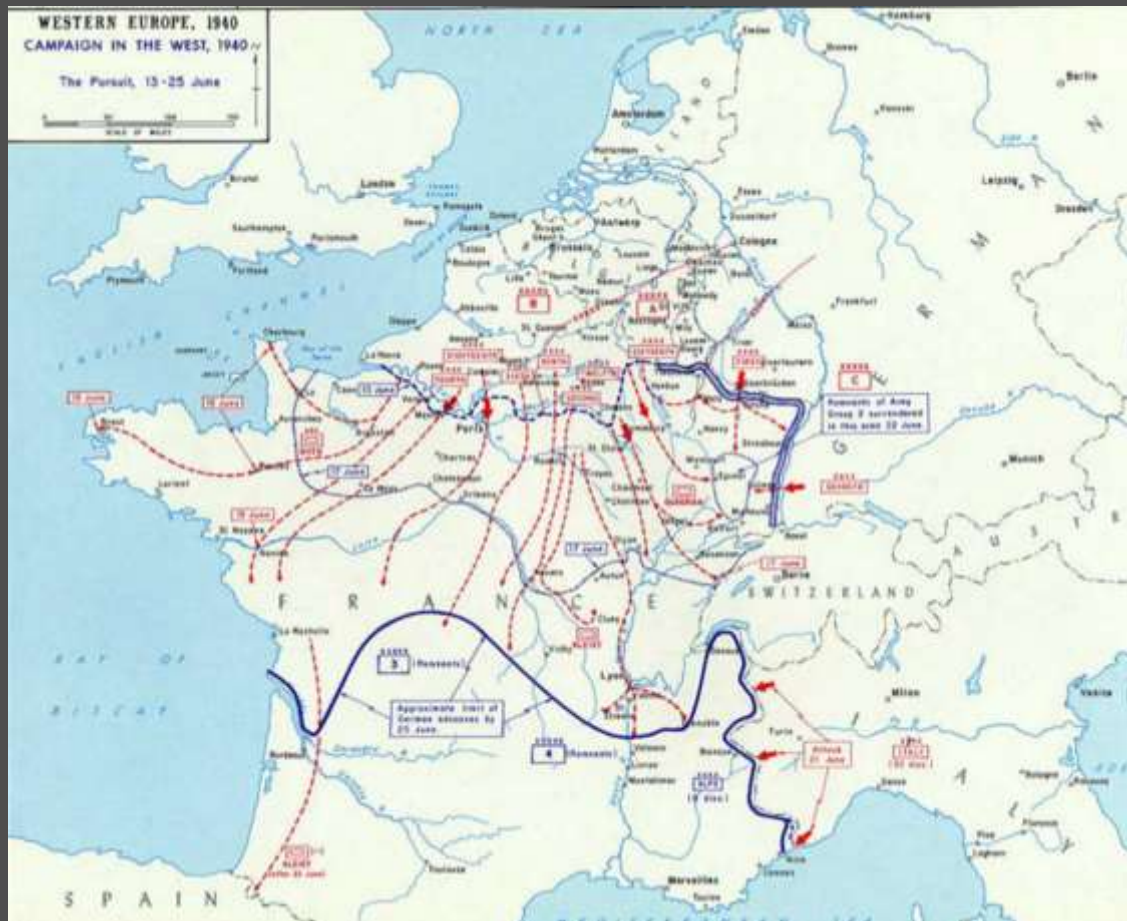
The **Blitzkrieg** Legend

The 1940 Campaign in the West



Karl-Heinz Frieser



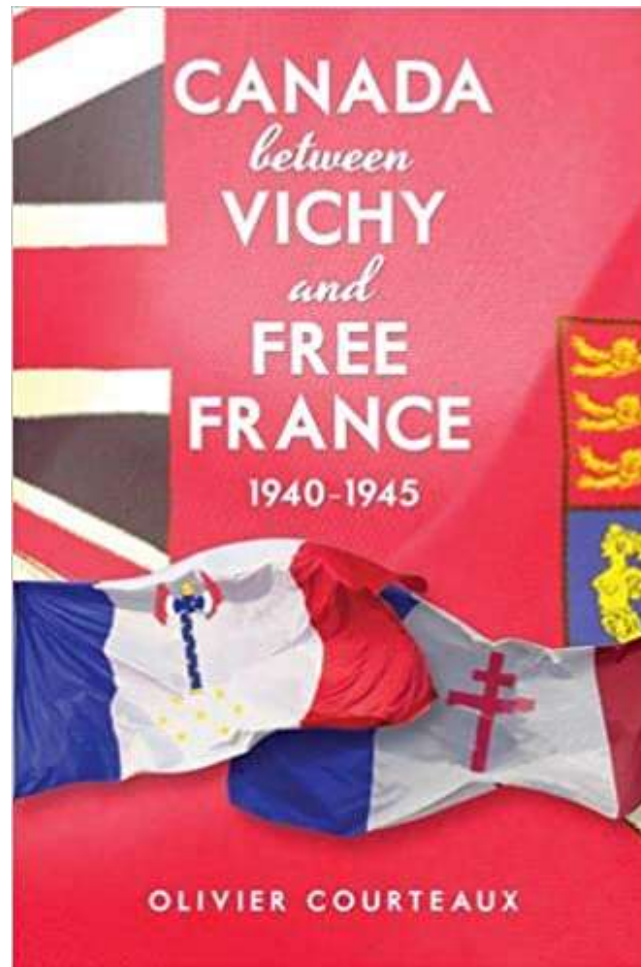


France's collapse

Marshal **Philippe Pétain** to lead the
French government

Calls for an **armistice**





The Germans were **lucky**

The invasion of France: a **risky bet**

Flexibility and initiatives

French errors



FRANCE OCCUPIED BY AXIS POWERS 1940-1944



Occupied zone to include the
entire Atlantic coast

Italian occupation zone
(control of the
Mediterranean)

A “Free Zone”
A new capital: Vichy

