

APPEASEMENT

Purpose

This activity will help you avoid presentism by putting yourself in the shoes of a world leader faced with the decision of whether or not to stop Hitler and the German military from moving into the Rhineland in the mid-1930s. By learning about the context for the decisions that world leaders made during this period, you'll be able to more fully understand how leaders weigh different options before making difficult decisions.

Process

1. Read the International Circumstances Briefing on the next page. You will take on the role of a prominent political leader for a large European country and decide how to respond to Germany's military movements in the Rhineland in the spring of 1936.
2. Once you're done reading, determine the best- and worst-case scenarios for two different actions. Finally, choose which action you're going to take for your country, and explain why you chose that one over all others.

APPEASEMENT

International Circumstances Briefing

Leader of Country X:

You are a prominent political leader for a country of roughly 47 million people.

Read the following international circumstances and decide on the wisest course of action.

Context for the Crisis

The First World War left your country \$35 billion dollars in debt and cost over 1 million lives. The trauma of the war was made worse by the economic depression that followed. In the past several years, world trade has fallen by half, the output of heavy industry has fallen by a third, and employment profits have plunged in nearly all sectors. Your country is suffering from unemployment rates as high as 70% in some areas, and many families depend entirely on welfare payments from the local government. It's unclear when this slump will end, or how your government will be able to handle the ever-growing debt.

Unfortunately for you, this economic slump did not affect the communist Soviet Union as much as it did you and your neighboring capitalist allies. Since the Soviet government owns all means of production and doesn't rely on capitalist markets to sell or distribute their goods, they have largely escaped the worst effects of the Depression. This means that they're ready to take advantage of the economic downturn and expand their communist empire, which frightens you and your allies.

News of the Crisis

It is March 1936. News has just reached you that Germany's new fascist government has begun militarizing the Rhineland, an area in the western region of Germany that was taken from their control after World War I. Germany's actions clearly violate the terms of the Treaty of Versailles (which prohibits Germany from building its military power) and violates the terms of the Treaty of Locarno (which specifically prohibits Germany from moving troops into the Rhineland). You fear the possibility that Germany might have more aggressive moves in mind, but you can't be certain.

Considerations

Public opinion has shifted since the end of World War I, and many citizens of your country have second thoughts about the harsh treatment of Germany in the treaties that followed. In fact, many see the remilitarization of the Rhineland as the Germans merely walking into "their own backyard." Some even view fascism in Germany as a positive force for Europe, helping to promote anticommunism and prevent the Soviet empire from expanding. If you allow Germany to rebuild their military, they could act as a buffer between capitalist Europe and communist Russia. Other members of the League of Nations are in similar economic distress after the trauma of World War I and are ill-prepared to act. Your greatest ally in World War I—the United States—is not a member of the League of Nations. They are an ocean away and following a strict isolationist policy, so you can't depend on their help with this one. What will you decide?



APPEASEMENT

Action	Potential consequences
Send troops into the Rhineland region to push German troops out by force.	Best-case scenario:
	Worst-case scenario:
Allow the Germans to reoccupy the Rhineland region.	Best-case scenario:
	Worst-case scenario:

APPEASEMENT

3. Which of these actions would you choose? Explain your reasoning for choosing that one rather than the other one.