Why did WWII Begin?

Historical Context: The 1920s began with a favorable outlook for peace. However, toward the end of the decade and throughout the 1930s, the clouds of war were forming. Dictators arose in countries that were dissatisfied with the results of World War I. The Treaty of Versailles became a flashpoint for conflict. Germany, Italy, and Japan took aggressive actions to regain lost power. Neither the League of Nations nor the democratic countries were able or willing to stop them. British Prime Minister Chamberlain suggested that a policy of appeasement was the best way to deal with Germany's Hitler. Your job is to discover how these events fit together to start WWII. Use the documents included in this packet to support your answer.

Directions: The following question is based on the documents that follow. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and the author's point of view.

➢ Why did the world plunge into World War II in 1939?

The following documents provide information about the steps leading to World War II. Examine each document carefully. *Text in Italics indicates a simplified reading.* Record the answers to your questions on a separate piece of paper. You do not need to write the question.

Document 1: In this excerpt, Adolf Hitler explains some of his ideas.

“One blood demands one Reich. Never will the German nation have the moral right to enter into colonial politics until, at least, it includes its own sons within a single state…. Oppressed territories are led back to the bosom of a common Reich, not by flaming protests, but by a mighty sword.”

Source: Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, 1925-26 (adapted)

One race needs one country. The German nation will not be able to compete in global politics and empire building until it has all German people in one state. We will bring all oppressed (treated badly) German people to a common country, not with protests (talking) but with the sword (war).

1a. What did Hitler suggest was needed for Germany?
1b. How would that lead to war?

Document 2: Italy attacked Ethiopia in 1935. Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia, asked the League of Nations for help in stopping the invasion. He asked for military sanctions. Here is part of his appeal to the League of Nations.

"God and history will remember your judgment. … It is us today. It will be you tomorrow."

2a. According to Haile Selassie, who should stop the aggressors?
2b. What would happen if the aggressors were not stopped?
Document 3: Hitler promised to tear up the Versailles Treaty. One article of the treaty forbade German troops from entering the Rhineland, a buffer zone between Germany and France. Two headlines and articles from The N.Y. Times of March 8, 1936, are excerpted below. They explain this issue from the German (1) and the French points of view (2).

**HITLER SENDS GERMAN TROOPS INTO RHINELAND (1)**
Berlin, March 7-Germany today cast off the last shackles fastened upon her by the Treaty of Versailles when Adolf Hitler, as commander-in-chief of the Reich defense forces, sent his new battalions into the Rhineland's demilitarized zone.... "After three years of ceaseless battle," Hitler concluded, "I look upon this day as marking the close of the struggle for German equality status and with that re-won equality the path is now clear for Germany's return to European collective cooperation."

**PARIS APPEALS TO LEAGUE (2)**
Paris, March 7-France has laid Germany's latest treaty violation before the Council of the League of Nations. At the same time the French Government made it quite clear that there could be no negotiation with Germany ... as long as a single German soldier remained in the Rhineland in violation of Germany's signed agreements....

What is essential, in the French view, is that the German government must be compelled by diplomatic pressure first, and by stronger pressure if need be, to withdraw from the Rhineland.

Source: The New York Times, March 8, 1936 (adapted)

(1) **HITLER SENDS GERMAN TROOPS INTO THE RHINELAND.** Berlin, March 7th. Germany, today, got rid of the last chains put on her by the Treaty of Versailles when Adolf Hitler, as head of the army of the Reich (the German empire), sent his new army into the Rhineland's demilitarized zone (an area between Germany and France that was supposed to be free of soldiers)... “After 3 years of constant fighting,” Hitler concluded, “I look on this day as the end of German’s struggle for equality and with that newly won equality, Germany can now be an equal partner with Europe.”

(2) **PARIS APPEALS TO LEAGUE.** Paris, March 7- France has brought Germany's latest violation of the Treaty of Versailles to the League of Nations (an international group created to solve problems between countries peacefully). At the same time the French government made it quite clear it would not negotiate with Germany… as long as a single German soldiers remained in the Rhineland as a violation of German’s previous agreements.

The main point in the French View, is that Germany should be forced to honor their agreements, first by diplomacy (talking it out), then by stronger means, to leave the Rhineland.

3a. What action did Hitler take in defiance of the Versailles Treaty? How did he explain his action?
3b. What was the reaction in France? How might this have led to war?
Document 4: German aggression continued in 1938. Britain, France, and Italy met with Hitler to discuss his demands for the Sudetenland, a section of Czechoslovakia. This radio broadcast by William Shirer describes what happened at this meeting in Munich, Germany.

It took the Big Four just five hours and twenty-five minutes here in Munich today to dispel the clouds of war and come to an agreement over the partition of Czechoslovakia. There is to be no European war ... the price of that peace is ... the ceding by Czechoslovakia of the Sudeten territory to Herr Hitler's Germany. The German Fuhrer gets what he wanted.... His waiting ten short days has saved Europe from a world war ... most of the peoples of Europe are happy that they won't have to go marching off to war .... Probably only the Czechs ... are not too happy. But there seems very little that they can do about it in face of all the might and power represented here. Source: William Shirer, CBS broadcast, 1938 (adapted)

4a. What happened at this Munich Conference, according to Shirer?
4b. What did he feel was the reaction in Czechoslovakia and in the rest of Europe?

Document 5: This excerpt is from a speech that British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain gave to Parliament in 1938. In it, Chamberlain explains why he favored a policy of appeasement in dealing with Hitler at Munich.

With a little good will and determination, it is possible to remove grievances and clear away suspicion.... We must try to bring these four nations into friendly discussion. If they can settle their differences, we shall save the peace of Europe for a generation. .... I shall not give up the hope of a peaceful solution.... We sympathize with a small nation faced by a big and powerful neighbor. But we cannot involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account. If we have to fight, it must be on larger issues than that..... I am a man of peace.... Yet if I were sure that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should feel that it must be resisted.... But war is a fearful thing.

Source: British P.M. Neville Chamberlain, speech to Parliament

With a little good will and determination, it is possible to get rid of problems and clear up suspicion.... We must try to bring these 4 nations into friendly discussion. If they can settle their differences, we will have peace in Europe for a generation (about 50 years). I will not give up the hope of a peaceful solution....We feel sorry for Czechoslovakia which is a small country with a big, powerful neighbor. But we cannot go to war with the whole British Empire just for one small country. If we have to fight, the issue needs to be bigger..... I am a man of peace....Yet, if I felt another country had made up its mind to take over the world through force (war), I would feel that we needed to resist that country... but war is a terrible thing.
5a. Why did Chamberlain suggest appeasement?
5b. Under what conditions would he fight?


I have always held the view that keeping peace depends on holding back the aggressor. After Hitler’s seizure of Austria in March, I appealed to the government. I asked that Britain, together with France and other powers, guarantee the security of Czechoslovakia. If that course had been followed, events would not have fallen into this disastrous state... In time, Czechoslovakia will be swallowed by the Nazi regime... I think of all the opportunities to stop the growth of Nazi power which have been thrown away. The responsibility must rest with those who have control of our political affairs. They neither prevented Germany from re-arming, nor did they re-arm us in time. They weakened the League of Nations.... Thus they left us in the hour of trial without a strong national defense or system of international security.

Source: Winston Churchill, speech to Parliament

6a. What strategy did Churchill suggest for keeping peace and stopping the growth of Nazi power?
6b. In his opinion, what opportunities had been lost in the quest for peace?
6c. Who was responsible for these lost opportunities?

Document 7: This excerpt offers a critical view of the Munich Agreement.

The Munich Agreement was a ... desperate act of appeasement at the cost of the Czechoslovak state, performed by Chamberlain and French premier, Daladier, in the vain (unlikely) hope that it would satisfy Hitler's stormy ambition, and thus secure for Europe a peaceful future. We know today that it was unnecessary ... because the Czech defenses were very strong ... and because the German generals, conscious of Germany's relative weakness at that moment, were actually prepared to attempt to remove Hitler ... had he continued to move toward war.

Source: George F. Kennan, Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin, Atlantic Little Brown, 1961 (adapted)

7. What are two reasons Kennan felt the Munich Agreement was unnecessary?
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1b. How would that lead to war?

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Big Question: Why did the world plunge into World War II in 1939? Collect Evidence to answer this question in the chart below.

Now, fill in this chart below, using your documents and your answers above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Ideas</th>
<th>Evidence from the Readings</th>
<th>Source for Evidence</th>
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<tr>
<td>Idea 1: Hitler desired to expand German power.</td>
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<td>Idea 2: Europe was afraid to fight so they used appeasement which didn’t work.</td>
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