



## German History in Documents and Images

Volume 7. Nazi Germany, 1933-1945

Hitler's Secret Speech to Military Commanders (February 10, 1939)

In this secret speech to military commanders on February 10, 1939, Hitler explained that all of the diplomatic and military maneuvering of the previous years was part of his long-established plan for expansion and rearmament. When speaking to the outside world, assertions about the peaceful intentions of his regime were a successful component of his dual-track foreign policy. Here, however, his listeners were left with no doubt that his goal was preparing Germany for war.

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All our actions during 1938 represent only the logical extension of the decisions which began to be realized in 1933. It is not the case that during this year of 1938—let us say—a particular action occurred which was not previously envisaged. On the contrary, all the individual decisions which have been realized since 1933 are not the result of momentary considerations but represent the implementation of a previously existing plan, though perhaps not exactly according to the schedule which was envisaged. For example, in 1933 I was not exactly certain when the withdrawal from the League of Nations would occur. However, it was clear that this withdrawal had to be the first step towards Germany's revival. And it was further clear that we would have to choose the first appropriate moment. We could see from the start that the next step would have to be rearmament without the permission of foreign countries, but naturally we could not gauge the exact speed and extent of this rearmament right from the start. It was also further obvious that, after a certain period of rearmament, Germany would have to take the daring step of proclaiming to the world its freedom from restrictions on rearmament. At the beginning, naturally one could not foresee the right moment for this step. Finally, it was further clear that every further step must first involve the remilitarization of the Rhineland. The date for this was in fact envisaged as being one year later: I did not think I would carry it out until 1937. The circumstances at the time made it seem appropriate to carry it out as early as 1936. It was also quite obvious that the Austrian and the Czech problems would have to be solved in order further to strengthen Germany's political and, in particular, her strategic position. To start with, I was not quite sure whether both problems ought to be or could be solved simultaneously or whether one should deal first with the question of Czechoslovakia or with the Austrian questions. There was no doubt that these questions would have to be solved and so all these decisions were not ideas which were realized at the moment of their conception, but were long-made plans which I was determined to realize the moment I thought the circumstances at the time would be favorable.

Source of English translation: Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Nazism, 1919-1945. Vol. 3: Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001, p. 117.

Source of original German text: Bundesarchiv NS 11/28, Bl. 87ff; also reprinted in Jochen Thies, *Architekt der Weltherrschaft [Architect of World Domination]*. 2nd edition, Düsseldorf: Droste, pp. 113-14.