



Second Edition

Germany and Europe 1919–1939

John Hiden



GERMANY AND EUROPE
1919–1939

This page intentionally left blank

Germany and Europe 1919–1939

Second Edition

John Hiden



Routledge

Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1977 by Pearson Education Limited

Second Edition 1993

Second impression 1993

Published in 2014 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business*

© John Hiden 1977, 1993

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notices

Knowledge and best practice in this field are constantly changing. As new research and experience broaden our understanding, changes in research methods, professional practices, or medical treatment may become necessary.

Practitioners and researchers must always rely on their own experience and knowledge in evaluating and using any information, methods, compounds, or experiments described herein. In using such information or methods they should be mindful of their own safety and the safety of others, including parties for whom they have a professional responsibility.

To the fullest extent of the law, neither the Publisher nor the authors, contributors, or editors, assume any liability for any injury and/or damage to persons or property as a matter of products liability, negligence or otherwise, or from any use or operation of any methods, products, instructions, or ideas contained in the material herein.

ISBN 978-0-582-08722-4 (pbk)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Hiden, John

Germany and Europe, 1919-1939/John Hiden. – 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-582-08722-8 (PPR)

1. Europe—Relations—Germany. 2. Germany—Foreign relations—Europe. 3. Germany—Foreign relations—1919–1933. 4. Germany—Foreign relations—1933–1945. I. Title.

D727.H44 1933

327.4304 – dc20

92-21845
CIP

Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
Introduction	1
PART ONE: Germany	5
1. From War to Peace, 1918–21	7
The impact of the Armistice	10
The German Foreign Office under Brockdorff-Rantzau	13
The Baltic campaign and the ‘Russian factor’	16
The terms of peace	20
2. The Domestic Context of Policy-making, 1919–39	32
Coalitions and policy-making	36
Stresemann and the politics of reason	42
From Brüning to Hitler	48
The economics of rearmament	52
Institutional conflicts	57
PART TWO: Germany and the European Powers, 1921–1939	63
3. Germany, Britain and France	65
Reparations	66
Locarno and its effects	72
The radicalisation of foreign policy	80
Hitler and the Western Powers	84
Appeasement	99
4. Germany and Russia	108
Rapallo – its origins and its significance	111

Contents

Weimar-Soviet relations under Stresemann	119
Hitler's quest for Lebensraum	125
The Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939	130
5. Germany and East Europe	137
The economic dimension of Weimar <i>Ostpolitik</i>	139
The prospects for peaceful revision	145
Eastern Europe in Hitler's strategy	153
The economic levers of National Socialist policy	158
Munich and after	162
6. Germany and Italy	168
Balkan issues	171
Mussolini and National Socialism in the 1920s	174
The Austrian factor	177
The emergence of the 'Axis'	181
The 'Pact of Steel'	187
PART THREE: Conclusion	191
7. Hitler's place in German Foreign Policy?	193
<i>Bibliographical Essay</i>	201
<i>Tables</i>	211
<i>Map: Treaty Settlements in Europe, 1919-26</i>	214
<i>Index</i>	216

List of Tables

1	Gross national product and military expenditure in Germany, the United States and England, 1929–45	211
2	The balance of power in Europe, 1939	212
3	The decline of Germany's foreign trade with its future opponents	212
4	Percentage of Czechoslovak foreign trade with Germany	213
5	Percentage of Poland's trade with Germany	213
6	Germany's percentual share in the trade of the states of South-East Europe	213

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

George Philip Printers Ltd for reproduction of a map from *New Cambridge Modern History Atlas* based on copyright map © George Philip & Son Ltd; Phoebus Publishing Company for reproduction of a table from *History Of The Twentieth Century* by Purnell.

This page intentionally left blank

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

The literature on German foreign policy between the two World Wars is, naturally, even more extensive than it was when the first edition of this book appeared in 1977. Yet the reasons then given for publishing an analysis covering the interwar period as a whole remain valid. The variations in the scholarly treatment of the different areas and eras of German foreign policy after 1919 are still noticeable; some of the gaps in coverage, particularly concerning the Baltic states and other parts of Eastern Europe, have been closed since 1977, but others remain; the then patchy treatment of key aspects of German–British and German–French relations has been improved, but more needs to be done.

I have been persuaded to offer a revised edition of the book, integrating new work since 1977, largely because there is still no comparable short account in English which analyses the interwar period as a whole from the German side. Much of the foreign-language literature where debates on German foreign policy have taken place cannot even be used by many English students. The absence of a concise overview of the 1920s, which I remarked upon in 1977, has admittedly been partly remedied for English readers, notably by Marshall Lee and Wolfgang Michalka.¹ Yet by far the most impressive recent study of the Weimar Republic's foreign policy is in German.²

The balance of literature is still, as it was in 1977, heavily tilted towards coverage of German policy during the 1930s, where the

¹ M. Lee, W. Michalka, *German Foreign Policy 1917–1933. Continuity or Break?* (Leamington Spa, 1987).

² P. Krüger, *Die Aussenpolitik der Republik von Weimar* (Darmstadt, 1985).

introductions by William Carr and Klaus Hildebrand continue to be invaluable, and where in addition Ian Kershaw's useful survey of *The Nazi Dictatorship* provides background material for the consideration of foreign policy in the Third Reich.³

I made the point in the first edition of the book that I was anxious to give roughly equal weight to the 1920s and 1930s. In the first place the decision saved me from having to give my own blow-by-blow account of the last years of peace and spared me from competing with the many excellent studies of the immediate origins of war, of which the most impressive now is that by D.C. Watt.⁴ Secondly, and more importantly, it enabled me to treat the study of the Weimar Republic and its foreign policy as valuable in its own right, rather than as a prelude to the Third Reich. Mild issue was taken with the marked tendency at the time, above all of German historians, to emphasise – at the expense of more benign but no less important traits in German foreign policy – the continuity of aggression from Bismarck to Hitler.

My original concern to bring out the positive and not just the all too obvious negative aspects in twentieth-century German foreign policy has been deepened by the momentous event of German reunification. Initial media and public reactions to this were often characterised, in Britain particularly, by sensationalist speculation about likely new German threats to Europe. The dispassionate study of the policies of the former Federal Republic provided no evidence to substantiate such fears, which arose from viewing Germany through the prism of the Third Reich, rather than from any balanced historical assessment.

Because the process of German reunification overlapped with the decline and ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginnings of reconstruction in East Europe, the familiar siren songs also sounded, about the inherent menace of German economic domination in Eastern Europe. In reality, German economic penetration of Eastern Europe is not in itself threatening, a point obscured by memories of the Third Reich's rule there. Nothing could be more unlike that than the current German quest to find, with the European Community (EC), a suitable role in the massive task of rebuilding in the states of East Europe and the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as their reintegration into a wider Euro-

³ W. Carr, *Arms Autarky and Aggression. A Study in German Foreign Policy 1933–1939* (London, 1972); K. Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (London, 1973); I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London, 1985).

⁴ D. C. Watt, *How War Came. The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938–1939* (London, 1989).

pean order. And it is this venture which conjures up, however faintly, echoes of the foreign policy developments slowly emerging during the short lifetime of the Weimar Republic.

My gratitude to former colleagues at Aberdeen University, where I first wrote this book, remains. Since then I have also enjoyed the many benefits of working in the Department of European Studies at Bradford University. Not least of these has been the opportunity to travel and research widely in West and East Europe, as well as contact with students, all of whom speak at least one foreign language. The gains for a teacher of European history are self-evident. Countless discussions of German history with my students have played their part in shaping my own work, including the changes to this new edition.

My biggest debt remains to Juliet, Hugo and Jessica. I am still some way from discharging this.

This page intentionally left blank

PART ONE

Germany

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER ONE

From War to Peace, 1918–21

What happens when a nation's external and internal situation is subject to sudden change, as was the case with Imperial Germany when it suffered military defeat and revolution in the space of a few weeks at the close of the First World War? It is a truism to argue that such a collapse provided the opportunity to think afresh the tenets of foreign policy,¹ but this barely does justice to the speed of events in Germany. In early October 1918, the German Army High Command (OHL) unexpectedly but insistently urged the stunned civilian leaders to ask the Allied Powers for an armistice and a peace treaty based on the American President Wilson's famous 'Fourteen Points' of January 1918. Prince Max of Baden was appointed to head a new, if short-lived government. His task was to prevent a new and crushing military attack by the *Entente*, but it signalled the end of the 'military dictatorship' which Generals Ludendorff and Hindenburg had exercised since 1916 in their capacity of war heroes extraordinaire. In late October, Germany transformed itself into a constitutional monarchy and on the 24th of that month Ludendorff was dismissed. By 9 November, the Kaiser had been compelled to abdicate as the revolution got under way. Wilhelm Solf, the last Foreign Minister of the Empire, woke up, as it were, the first Foreign Minister of the Republic, servant to the all-socialist Provisional Government which was composed on 10 November 1918, the Council of People's Commissars.

¹ O.E. Schüddekopf, 'German foreign policy between Compiègne and Versailles', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 4 (1969): 81. Cf. P. Grupp, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik im Schatten von Versailles 1918–1920. Zur Politik des Auswärtigen Amtes von Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs und der November Revolution bis zum Inkrafttreten des Versailler Vertrags*, (Paderborn, 1988).

It was a time almost for reflexes rather than long-sighted planning in the field of foreign policy as elsewhere. Certainly, a study of German foreign policy in these months offers no neat solution to the political scientist's problem about the relative importance of internal and external factors.² The near-simultaneous transition from war to cease-fire, from Empire to Republic demonstrated, rather, the interaction between domestic and foreign events. President Wilson's insistent calls for proof positive of a genuine change in Germany's power structure played an important part in the general slide towards revolution. The demands were made in the exchange of notes which Prince Max of Baden's government conducted with Wilson prior to the Armistice. Consequently, the Kaiser's failure to confirm the extent of the October reforms by a more ready abdication appeared to the German masses as *the* obstacle to the conclusion of a speedy and reasonable peace; the more intolerable in that the shattering news of imminent defeat made the whole war effort seem tragically wasted. Conversely, when the Kaiser had gone it was apparent that there was a connection between the way in which internal order was restored and the sort of policy pursued towards the outside world.

A mere ten weeks separated the formation of the revolutionary Provisional Government of 10 November 1918 from the appearance in January 1919 of the first Republican parliamentary government which was responsible to the newly elected National Assembly. In that brief period the vision of radical reforms which had helped to fuel the revolution in the first place faded. This process was charted by the growing split between the two main wings of the German socialist movement, the Independent Social Democrats (USPD) and the Majority Social Democrats (SPD) and by the final resignation of the USPD from the Council of People's Commissars on 27 December 1918. Along with the burial of the ideal of socialist unity which had inspired the provisional government in the first place went the demise of the still more revolutionary plans of the radical shop stewards and the Spartacists, later to become the German Communist Party (KPD). Their leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were buried too, literally, in January 1919, after their bloody execution at the hands of the *Freikorps* (volunteer forces).

The failure of revolution was only in part the result of policies pursued by the SPD leaders; only in part the reflection of their own preference for a return to normalcy and the restoration of their links with the moderate bourgeois parties of Germany. These contacts had

² Cf. W. Wallace, *Foreign Policy and the Political Process* (London, 1971), p. 17.

been nurtured in the Empire and had culminated in the reforms of October 1918 only to be rudely interrupted by the revolution.³ Under Friedrich Ebert's guidance, the top SPD leadership sought to resume the dialogue with other parties and groups as soon as possible. Many have regretted that the SPD did not instead concentrate on forcing through sweeping reforms of the social and economic system. The reality was, however, that hardly anybody in Germany wanted a Bolshevik-style revolution. Moreover, the established forces of imperial Germany remained influential. The maintenance of the Imperial bureaucracy, symbolised by Solf's continuing presence in the German Foreign Office, the survival of the German officer corps, founded on Ebert's use of the Army to maintain internal order after 10 November, the successful evasion of socialist reforms by German business – all of these come as no real surprise when the magnitude of the problems thrown up by the transition from war to peace is taken into account.⁴ Germany was not Russia after all. The German Workers' and Soldiers' councils were modelled along Russian lines, but on 16 December they voted themselves out of power by agreeing to the elections for the National Assembly. The extent to which the conceptions of Ebert and the SPD found general support was reflected in the voting at these elections. The SPD, together with the moderate bourgeois parties willing to support the new Republic, the Centre Party and the Democrats, received the overwhelming share of votes.

Such internal realities helped to define the range of choices immediately open to German foreign policy. Most obviously, its commitment to prevent more radical revolution in Germany made it impossible for the provisional government to pursue an active policy of *rapprochement* with Lenin's Russia. A network of contacts had sprung up between the German Workers' and Soldiers' Councils and representatives from the Russian Soviets in the earliest days of the German revolution and this was hardly welcome to the SPD or USPD members of the government.⁵ Joffe, the Soviet Ambassador to Berlin, had been expelled on 5 November for revolutionary

³ R. N. Hunt, 'Friedrich Ebert and the German revolution of 1918' in L. Krieger and F. Stern (eds), *The Responsibility of Power: Historical Essays in Honour of H. Holborn* (London, 1968), p. 320. The strains and stresses of SPD-bourgeois co-operation can be followed in E. Matthias and R. Morsey (eds), *Die Regierung des Prinzen Max von Baden* (Düsseldorf, 1962).

⁴ G.D. Feldman, 'Economic and social problems of the German demobilisation', *Journal of Modern History*, 47 (March, 1975): 1–2, 20–1. His critics comment, *ibid.*, pp. 24–44. Cf. R. Rürup, 'Problems of the German Revolution 1918–1919', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3 (1968): 109–35.

⁵ H.G. Linke, *Deutsch-sowjetische Beziehungen bis Rapallo* (Cologne, 1970), pp. 21ff.

propagandising. To the domestic pressures preventing the premature development of closer relations between the new Germany and the new Russia was added the weight of external factors.⁶

THE IMPACT OF THE ARMISTICE

The Armistice which Germany signed with the Allied Powers on 11 November 1918 created additional obstacles to any normalisation of German–Russian relations. It demanded that Germany abrogate not only the Treaty of Bucharest with Romania but the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which had governed German–Russian relations since March 1918. Technically, this put Germany in a state of war with Russia. In fact Lenin had also declared Brest-Litovsk null and void in November and Germany's Embassy in Moscow had not been filled after the murder of their Ambassador Count Mirbach, in July 1918. The Armistice reflected the determination of the Western Allies to stop Bolshevism from spreading to Central Europe. In effect the Germans were associated with the Allied intervention against the Bolshevik regime. Whereas the territories occupied by German troops in Western Europe at the end of the war were to be evacuated more or less immediately, Germany was only to evacuate those occupied areas in the east formerly belonging to Russia when the Allies deemed the moment suitable (Article XII).

Other provisions in the Armistice included the predictable arrangements for the immediate repatriation of prisoners of war and the forbidding of Germany damaging property as it evacuated occupied territories. The financial clauses called for the return of gold seized from Belgium, Romania and Russia and, ominously, for 'reparations for damage done'. The overwhelming preoccupation of the Allies with their own security was reflected in the demand for the surrender of heavy arms and vehicles and for the immobilisation of the German fleet. Moreover the left bank of the Rhine was to be occupied by Allied troops, together with the bridgeheads of Mainz, Cologne and Coblenz and a surrounding stretch of thirty kilometres. The crippling blockade of Germany was to be continued for the time being and in effect this was made harsher by the ban on Germany's merchant naval

⁶ Wolfgang Elben, *Das Problem der Kontinuität in der deutschen Revolution. Die Politik der Staatssekretäre und der militärischen Führung vom November 1918 bis Februar 1919* (Düsseldorf, 1965), pp. 105–7.

activity. As a means of securing German's continued good behaviour until the conclusion of a peace treaty, the Armistice was made renewable after an initial period of thirty-six days.

The Armistice brutally underlined the extent of Germany's military defeat. The scale of adjustment required of German foreign policy may be seen from a brief look back at the conditions existing when Germany signed its victorious peace with the Bolshevik forces in March 1918 at Brest-Litovsk. In this present study it is impossible to discuss at any length the controversies about German war aims, 1914–18. No attempt can be made to answer the question to what extent the annexationist policies pursued by the Germans in Europe after 1914 were conceived before war broke out. All that can safely be assumed here is that the Imperial war aims at least fulfilled many of the requirements of Germany's rulers, of its military, landowning and industrial élites, and that these aims received at least the approval of large sectors of German society during the war. Fritz Fischer's summary of Germany's war aims as they stood in 1918 can therefore serve as a useful yardstick against which to measure the dramatic limitations imposed by the Armistice.

A survey of Germany's war aims at the beginning and in the middle of 1918, when German self-confidence was at its peak in the expectation of early victory, discloses a picture of an *imperium* of grandiose dimensions. In the West: Belgium, Luxemburg, Longwy–Briey, linked with Germany on such terms as to make possible the adherence of France and Holland and to isolate Britain and force her to recognise Germany's position; in the East: Courland, Livonia, Estonia and Lithuania, from Reval to Riga and Vilno, the Polish Frontier Strip and Rump Poland all closely fettered to Germany; in the South-east: Austria–Hungary clamped into Germany as a cornerstone, then Rumania and Bulgaria, and beyond them the Ottoman Empire as an object of Germany's Asiatic policy. Command of the Eastern Mediterranean was to compel the adherence of Greece and secure the route through Suez, while the domination of the Black Sea guaranteed the economic mastery of the Ukraine, the Crimea and Georgia, and the command of the Baltic compelled Sweden and Finland, with their riches, to take the German side. On top of all this was the position of at least economic hegemony in Rump Russia.⁷

Such an extended European power base was to be the precondition of Germany's bid for world power. The Armistice obviously removed for the foreseeable future any prospect of reviving the imperial war aims in Western Europe. What remained was an aversion to the Western Powers and a determination to recover Germany's status at their expense which was nurtured by the survivors of Imperial

⁷ F. Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (London, 1967), p. 607.

Germany's establishment, by its military leaders and by its unrepentant nationalists. They could capitalise on the resentment of the wider German public but they could do little directly in 1918/19, beyond trying to frustrate the slow and painful emergence in the German Foreign Office and in some of the political parties of a more realistic policy towards the Western Powers (p. 65). But what of East Europe where the situation was more confused owing to the continuing fighting of the Bolshevik forces and the highly uncertain outcome of the revolution in Russia? Could the unrepentant elements in Germany salvage something of Imperial war aims before it was too late?

On 18 November 1918, the Council of People's Commissars discussed the issue of German–Russian relations in order to clarify the policy to be pursued towards Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who were pressing precisely for this while still counting on revolution in Germany. There was unanimous agreement in the Cabinet that any suggestion of more friendly relations with Russia would prejudice Germany's prospect for a better peace. The USPD spokesmen, who shared the general feeling that the Bolsheviks might well fall from power, endorsed the view that:

The Entente is willing to meet the present bourgeois-socialist republic halfway in the matter of peace terms and food supplies, but only as long as the government adheres to its present composition under Ebert's leadership. The Entente would, however, intervene with all its might to forestall the rise of Bolshevism. If Joffe, for one, were to return, that alone would suffice to alter the prospect of peace.⁸

What was to be done? Ironically, Haase, leader of the USPD, provided the suggestion which kept even the Army leaders happy for the time being; namely to give a dilatory answer to the Russian overtures. A positive commitment to intervention against the Soviets was of course impossible for the USPD to support.⁹ At the same time, delaying tactics towards the Bolshevik overtures offered the only chance of preserving even a limited freedom to manoeuvre for the Berlin government. A dilatory answer to Lenin's overtures left open the future possibility of some *rapprochement* with the new Russia, if it survived, but did not exclude close co-operation with the Allied Powers against the Bolsheviks if this seemed likely to lead to a better peace for Germany. Exactly how the Army hoped to exploit this situation will be examined shortly.

⁸ C.B. Burdick and R.H. Lutz (eds), *The Political Institutions of the German Revolution 1918–19* (New York, 1966), p. 70.

⁹ Elben, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

THE GERMAN FOREIGN OFFICE UNDER BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU

When the government of Philip Scheidemann (SPD) took office in January 1919 the danger of revolution had receded to the point where both the Foreign Office and the Army leaders could exercise a more overt influence on the immediate peace strategy than had been possible when they worked in harness with the provisional government, which had been technically responsible to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. Nonetheless, the Foreign Office had not been unaffected by the revolution. The origins of the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt* – AA) go back to the eighteenth century but its name, and importance, was not acquired until 1871, when the Prussian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was elevated to the central authority for the new German Empire. Under Bismarck the AA played a crucial role in the Imperial administration. It might be going too far to describe the AA as in 'eclipse' during the First World War and the military 'dictatorship' of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, although it was overshadowed.¹⁰ Like the rest of the Imperial bureaucracy it continued to function after the Republic was proclaimed and its officials were influential, although flanked by the political watchdogs of the socialist parties.¹¹ In short, it was far more involved in the domestic political crossfire than it had ever been in Bismarck's day, a point to which this book will return later. It was the intention of the Foreign Minister appointed in December 1918, Count Ulrich Brockdorff-Rantzau, to gather together more firmly the various strands of German foreign policy as the Peace Conference loomed nearer. As a member of the aristocracy who nonetheless accepted the need to adjust to changed circumstances he was the classic 'wanderer between two worlds', a description which could be applied to many during the November revolution.¹²

¹⁰ Cf. W. Baumgart, *Deutsche Ostpolitik 1918: Vom Brest-Litovsk bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Vienna–Munich, 1966), pp. 85–6, 90–2. More generally see A.R. Carlson, *German Foreign Policy 1890–1914 and Colonial Policy to 1914: A Handbook and Annotated Bibliography* (Metuchen, New Jersey, 1970), pp. 32–9; M. Kitchen, *A Military History of Germany: from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day* (London, 1975).

¹¹ Matthias and Morsey, *op cit.*, pp. 545–6; Eberhard von Vietzsch, *Wilhelm Solf. Botschafter zwischen den Zeiten* (Tübingen, 1961), pp. 212–22.

¹² Short surveys of Rantzau's policies and attitudes can be found in Elben, *op. cit.*, pp. 107–14, 120ff; Schüddekopf, *op. cit.*, p. 189; Leo Haupts, 'Zur deutschen und britischen Friedenspolitik in der Krise der Pariser Friedenskonferenz. Britisch-Deutsche Separatverhandlungen im April/Mai 1919?' *Historische Zeitschrift*, 217 (1973): 54–98; Udo Wengst, *Graf Brockdorff-Rantzau und die aussenpolitischen Anfänge der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973).