

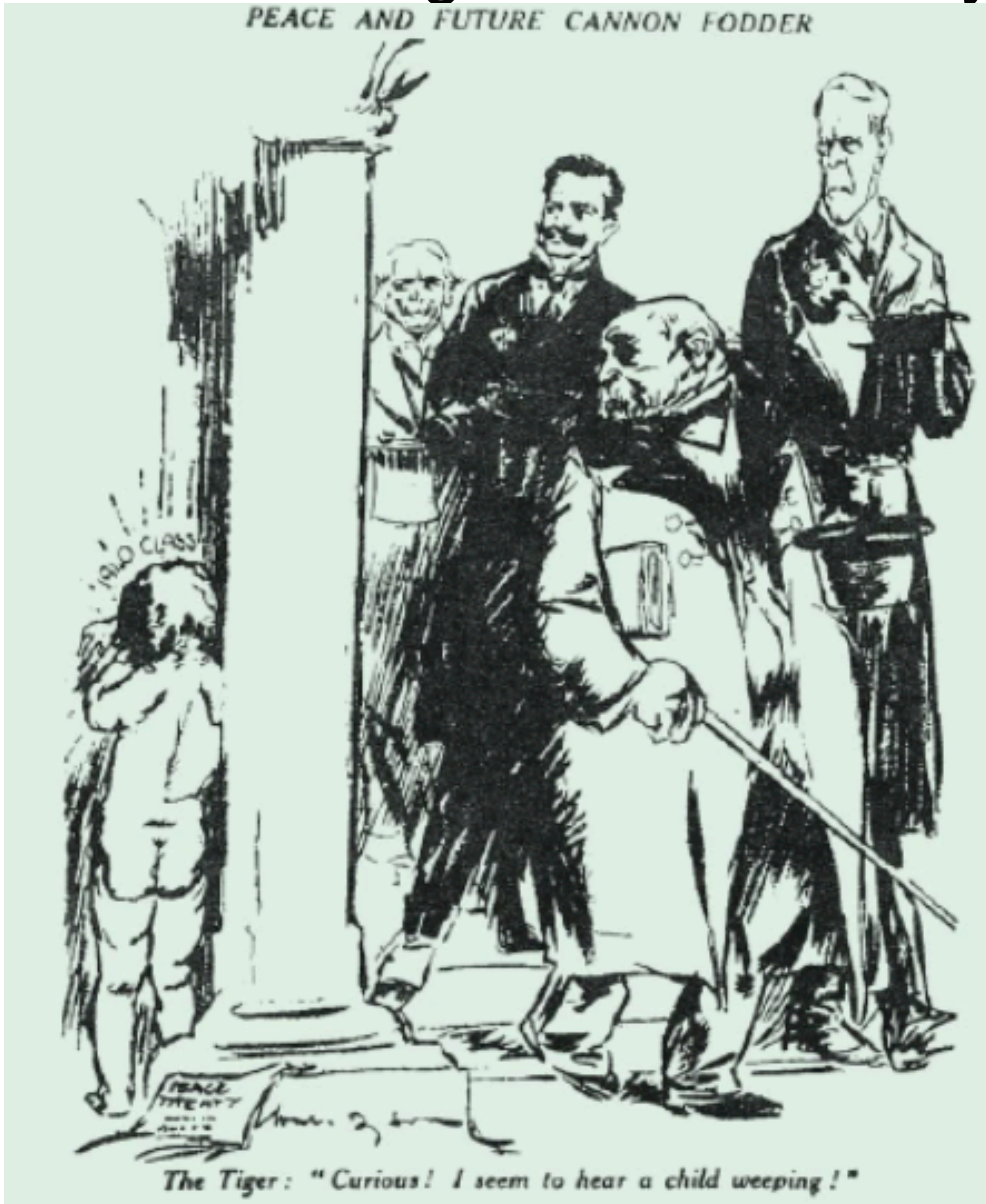
The causes of World War II – Three historiographical traditions



1. Long-term inevitability – 20 year truce
2. Hitler's war - whether intentional or opportunist
3. The 'Guilty Men' thesis – 'the unnecessary war'

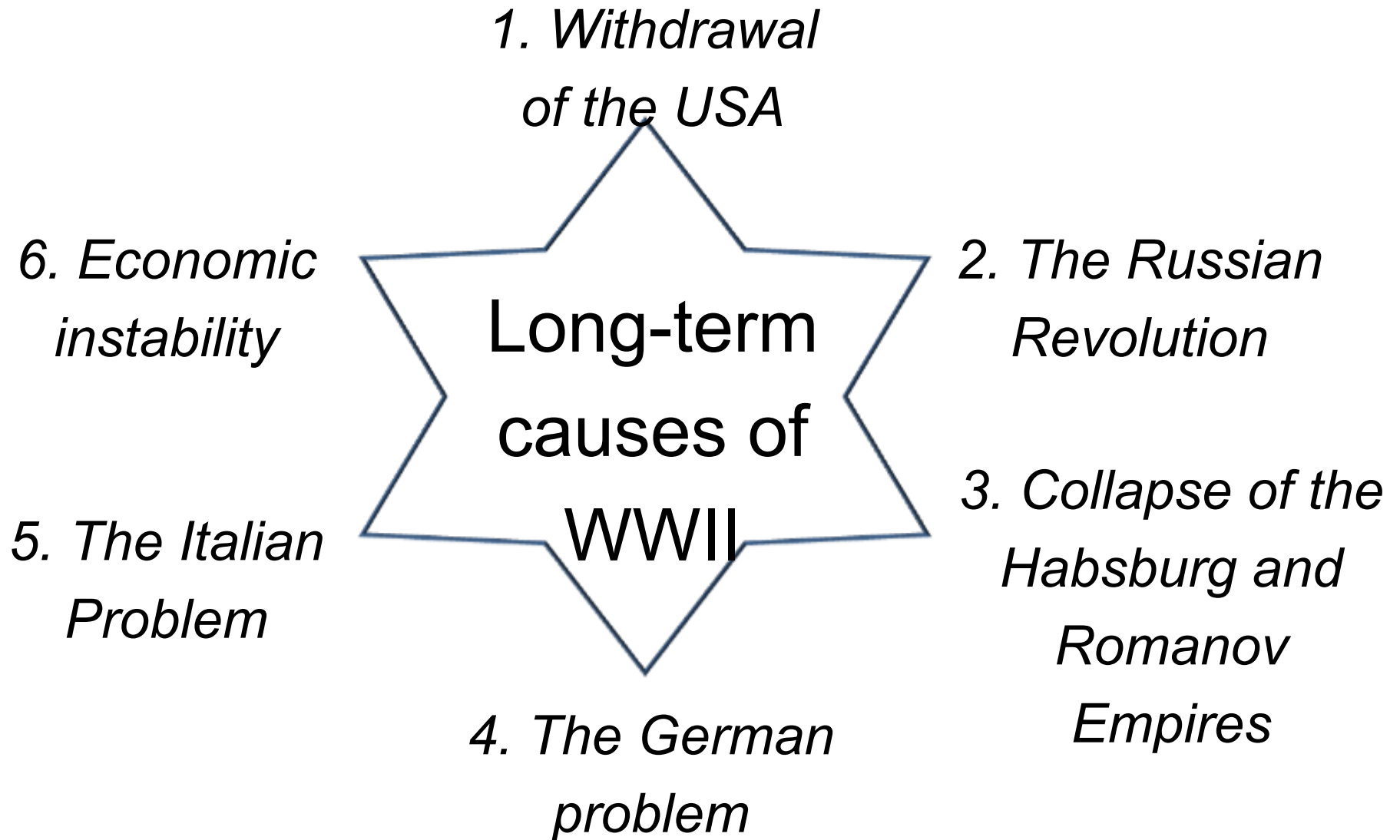
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Long-term inevitability – 20 year truce



A 1920 British cartoon. The '1940 class', presented as a weeping child, represents the children born in the 1920s who might die in a future war.

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Long-term inevitability – 20 year truce



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Hitler's war - whether intentional or opportunist

Hitler's (secret) Hossbach Memorandum (1937)

The aim of German policy was to make secure and to preserve the racial community and to enlarge it. It was therefore a question of space...

Germany's problem could only be solved by means of force and this was never without attendant risk...

Case 1: period 1943-5. *After this date only a change for the worse, from our point of view, could be expected ... Our relative strength would decrease in relation to the rearmament which would by then have been carried out by the rest of the world...*

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Hitler's war - whether intentional or opportunist

In the late 1960s, historians began to divide into two schools of thought, the **intentionalists** on the one hand and **functionalists** or **structuralists** on the other.

Intentionalists identify a clear intention to wage war based on the ideas of racial supremacy and the acquisition of a German world empire outlined in his writings. See **Hitler's (secret) Hossbach Memorandum (1937)**

Functionalists, on the other hand, believe that foreign policy was created by the economic and social conditions of the Third Reich. The German economy could not continue to expand at the same capacity without plundering neighbouring states - Hitler-had to expand the Reich to avoid economic disaster.

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‘Guilty Men’ thesis – ‘the unnecessary war’

After Britain's defeat in France and retreat from Dunkirk in 1940, Michael Foot and two other journalists published a short book called *Guilty Men*, which blamed the defeat on the politicians of the 1930s. It was their failure to stand up to Hitler that had brought matters to where they were in 1940. When in 1945 the full horror of the Nazi regime was revealed, this only served to further discredit those politicians who had tried to negotiate and compromise with the German dictator.

In 1948 Winston Churchill published the first volume of his Second World War memoirs, *The Gathering Storm*, in which he endorsed the judgements made by the authors of *Guilty Men*: 'there was never a war more easy to stop;' it was an 'unnecessary war' brought about by the failure to stop Hitler rearming.

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Guilty Men' thesis – 'the unnecessary war'

30 Year Rule in 1968, which made available the cabinet minutes and government papers of the 1930s allowed historians had a better picture of the context in which the politicians of the 1930s were operating and were able to appreciate both the complexities and constraints.

In 1972 Correlli Barnett in *The Collapse of British Power* and Michael Howard in *The Continental Commitment* both highlighted the problems Britain faced in defending her vast Empire in the 1930s The rehabilitation of Chamberlain began in 1975 with the publication of Maurice Cowling's *The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policy, 1933-1940*, which stressed how Chamberlain was realistic about Britain's interests, commitments and resources.

In 1989, John Charmley published what is perhaps the most complete defence of Chamberlain, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*. He followed this up with an attack on Churchill in *Churchill: The End, of Glory* (1993).