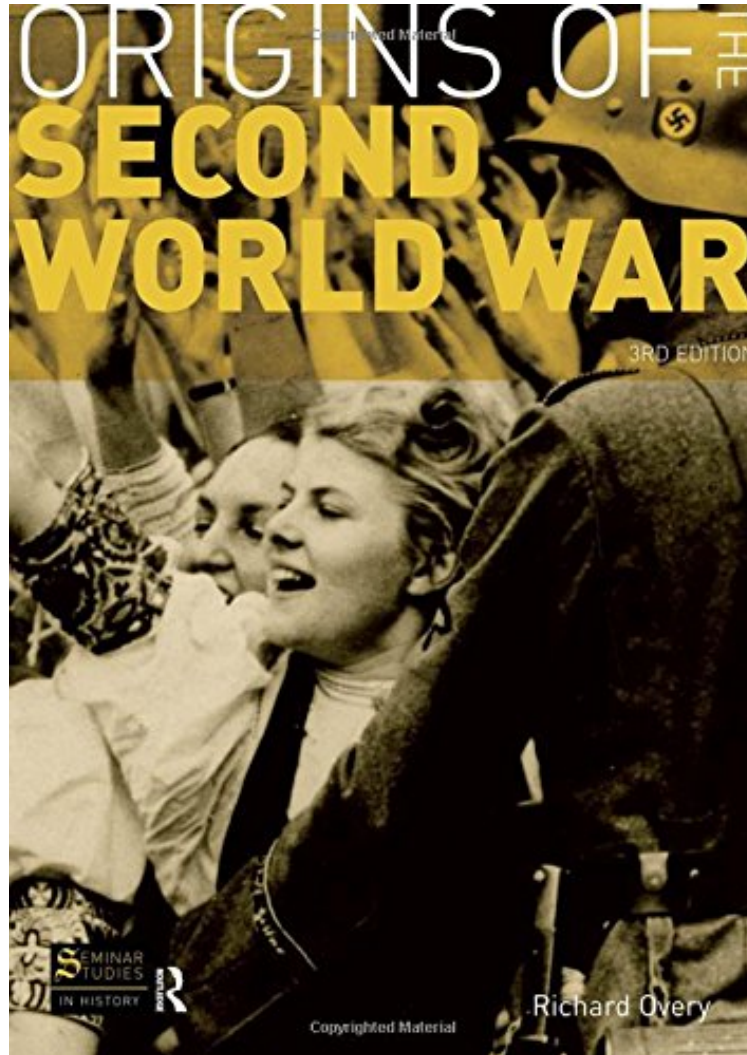


The Origins of the Second World War

R. J. Overy

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R. J. Overy : The Origins of the Second World War before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Origins of the Second World War:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. An Excellent Survey of the Causes of World War II By Yoda Despite this book's relatively short length it provides a very good survey of the causes of the Second World War. This survey is not only useful to undergraduates who are interested in touching upon the subject but it is also of interest to even those with good background in the subject. This is because Overy, the author, not only covers many of the commonly covered causes in the war in the general literature (i.e., the pre-war arm's race, etc.) but there is an excellent discussion of other factors that are not that commonly covered. These include the fact that the axis powers, for example, had no access to material resources, a fact greatly exasperated by the Great Depression. In addition, Overy does an excellent

job at pointing out that France and Britain's military potential peaked in the 1939-1904 period while Germany's and the Soviet Union's were going to peak in the 1943 -1944 period. Hence, if France and England were going to declare war, it would have to be in that period. The third edition of this book, unlike the first and second, incorporates material that has become available to the public on the Soviet Union (i.e., military strength) that was not available previously. Hence, even though the third edition is considerably more expensive than the first two editions, the money is well spent. There are a few problems with the book, however. These do not permit this reviewer to grant this book a five star rating. The most important involves the fact that the book underplays the role of Hitler motivation and ideology as a cause of the war. Considering Hitler's stated goals, made quite explicit in *Mein Kampf*, Overy does not give them the coverage they should have had. It was this one man, more than any other factor, that caused the war and gave it the extremely violent form that it took on (especially in the East). Overy should have covered this topic in greater depth or have made a more in-depth case as to why the war may have occurred even in Hitler's absence (since ignoring Hitler's role implies this in a tacit fashion). The book also is quite weak in discussing the causes for war in the Far East. Nevertheless, an excellent and very sophisticated overview of the subject in such a short book.

43 of 45 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful Overview Of The Factors Leading To WWII! By Barron Laycock

In this interesting, provocative, and comprehensive overview of the antecedents leading up to and causing the onset of the Second World War, noted British historian Richard Overy ("Why The Allies Won", "Russia's War") presents a masterful summary of the complex welter of factors influencing the drift into conflict between the Axis powers and the more established powers of Britain and France. Overy carefully articulates the ways in which a multiplicity of factors created a power vacuum as well as an associated change in the balance of power such that the existing world order created at the close of the First World War became increasingly fragile and dysfunctional. It was into this moment of recognized weakness in both the British and French empires that the German, Japanese, and Italian governments sought to create their own empires at the expense of the existing order. This, of course, varies from the conventional belief that World War Two was singularly Hitler's war, one that he alone created and prosecuted against the good will and conventional moral purposes of the powers that be. Yet Overy argues quite convincingly that this is hardly a fair or objective reading of the historical record, since the policies of appeasement pursued by both Britain and France were hardly moral, being rather more organized around preserving their own political, economic, and military advantage than around any kind of democratic values or concern for the common good. While it is true that Hitler aggressively sought to change the existing framework to the benefit of the German state, it is hardly true that the political or economic policies of the other world powers were in any fashion necessarily more selfless or altruistic. Indeed, the acts of appeasement were callously designed to give whatever they could over to Germany without endangering their own admittedly precarious strategic economic and political interests, with little regard for the consequences for the indigenous populations of the areas surrendered in the process. Seen in this way, Hitler was feeding into the existing time-honored mode of empire creation, and one must remember that when general war was declared in the fall of 1939, it was Britain and France that declared war on Germany over the issue of the invasion of Poland. In this fashion, one must examine the reasoning behind the Allies decision to commence hostilities at that point rather than later. Given the fact that Hitler did not seek a wider war at that point, one must question the specific reasons that the Allies chose to prosecute a general war at that juncture. Overy argues that it was due as much to political self-interest more than altruism that they decided for a general mobilization. This becomes even clearer when one recognizes that Hitler wanted to avoid a two-front war, and the main objective of his reach eastward was to gain "lebensraum", or living room, for the rapidly expanding German population. In this sense, he made a fatal miscalculation of British and French resolve, and their decision to escalate the conflict in the Fall of 1939 rather than later resulted in the transformation of what Hitler expected to be a quick and easy regional war into a messy and prolonged general European war. Overy argues that it was only when it became apparent to the Allies that Germany posed a real danger to "their common political and economic interests, a danger they would be unable to accommodate without endangering their own strategic interests did they decide to escalate" to general war. He also argues that only the Soviet Union or the United States might have helped to prevent the general European war that subsequently broke out, but that neither of these countries were in a position to do so, largely for domestic political and economic reasons. Yet in so avoiding participation, they ironically guaranteed it would later escalate into a world war when the Axis powers tragically underestimated the power and resolve of each to engage in and successfully prosecute a war neither originally sought. This is wonderfully comprehensive book of barely 100 pages, part of a series of such "seminar studies in history" produced by a consortium of British academics who are central figures in a variety of contemporary history topics. The book is quite concise and yet eminently quotable, and Overy manages to pack in a lot of provocative and well substantiated points regarding the epoch leading up to the onset of hostilities that powerfully demonstrates the truth in the claim that in order to understand the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 that eventually became World War Two, one must understand the "international structure as a whole, its weaknesses and strengths, and the character and motives of the major powers that comprised it". This is a terrific book, and one I highly recommend to any serious student of 20th century history. Enjoy!

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Essential for students of the Second World War By greene_man This is a thorough look at both the historical,

diplomatic and economic forces that were in play in the origins of the Second World War and was written for college level reading. Overy concludes that there was no "one" cause of the war that broke out in September 1939, but rather a combination of Hitler's belief that Britain and France would not fight for Poland; British and French fears for their status as Great Powers; and Polish firmness. I would recommend this to anyone interested in the Second World War, and the book includes a brief, but excellent, bibliography.

The book explores the reasons why the Second World War broke out in September 1939 and not sooner, and why a European war expanded into world war by 1941. The war has usually been seen simply as Hitler's war and yet the wider conflict that broke out when Germany invaded Poland was not the war that Hitler wanted. He had hoped for a short war against Poland; instead, Britain and France declared war on Germany. Richard Overy argues that any explanation of the outbreak of hostilities must therefore be multi-national and he shows how the war's origins are to be found in the basic instability of the international system that was brought about by the decline of the old empires of Britain and France and the rise of ambitious new powers, Italy, Germany and Japan, keen to build new empires of their own.

From the Back Cover The Origins of the Second World War explores the reasons why the Second World War broke out in September 1939 and not sooner, and why a European war expanded into world war by 1941. Richard Overy argues that this was not just 'Hitler's War' but one that had its roots and origins in the decline of the old empires of Britain and France and the rise of ambitious new powers in Germany, Italy and Japan. Any explanation of the outbreak of hostilities must be multinational in scope taking into account the basic instability of the international system that had still not recovered from the shocks of the Great War. In this third edition: · The role of Italy in the approach to war has been re-evaluated · Overy addresses recent revelations about Soviet policy in the 1930s, particularly exploring Soviet military planning and preparations · Arguments about Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement are rethought and reassessed. This new edition has now been completely overhauled, updated, expanded and reset. With a comprehensive documents section, colour plates, guide to who's who, a chronology and lists of further reading, The Origins of the Second World War will provide an invaluable introduction to any student of this fascinating period. Richard Overy is Professor of History at the University of Exeter. He has authored 17 books on the Third Reich, the Second World War and air warfare which include: The Air War 1939-1945 (2nd ed, 2006), Why the Allies Won (2nd ed, 2006) and The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia (2004) which won both the Wolfson and the Hessell Tiltman Prizes for History in 2005. About the Author Richard Overy is Professor of History at the University of Exeter. He has authored 17 books on the Third Reich, the Second World War and air warfare which include: The Air War 1939-1945 (2nd ed, 2006), Why the Allies Won (2nd ed, 2006) and The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia (2004) which won both the Wolfson and the Hessell Tiltman Prizes for History in 2005.