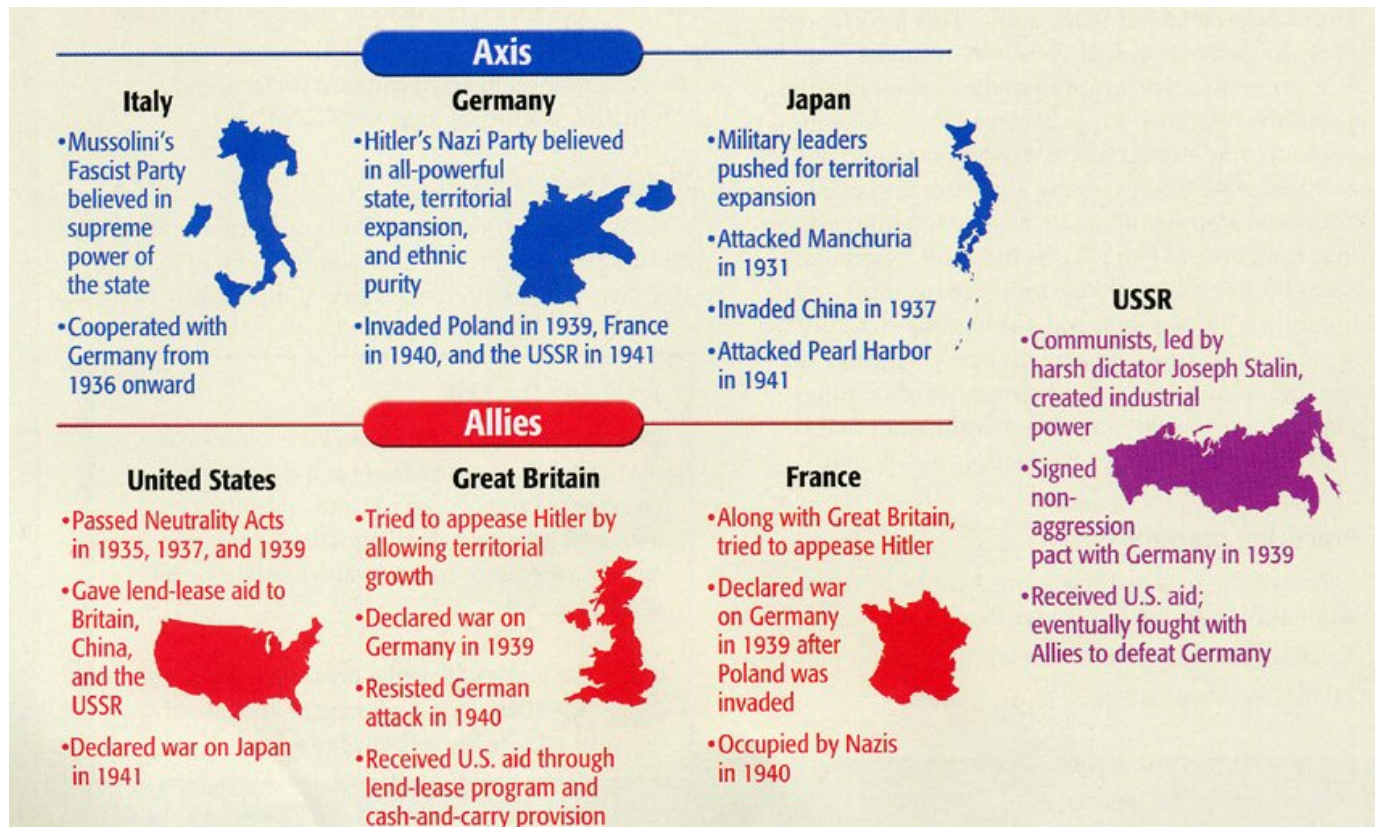


## World War II

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### Introduction

- World War II, also called Second World War, was a conflict that involved virtually every part of the world during the years 1939–45.
- The principal belligerents were the Axis powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan—and the Allies—France, Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, China.
- It was the biggest conflict in history that had lasted almost six years.
- Nearly some 100 million people had been militarised, and 50 million had been killed (around 3% of the world's population).



### Causes of War

The major causes of World War II were numerous. They include the **impact of the Treaty of Versailles following WWI, the worldwide economic depression, failure of appeasement, the rise of militarism in Germany and Japan, and the failure of the League of Nations.**

### **Treaty of Versailles**

- Following World War I, the victorious Allied Powers met to decide Germany's future. Germany was forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles.
- Under this treaty, Germany had to accept guilt for the war and to pay reparations. Germany lost territory and was prohibited from having a large military.
- The humiliation faced by Germany under this treaty, paved the way for the spread of Ultra-Nationalism in Germany.

### **Failure of the League of Nations**

- The League of Nations was an international organization set up in 1919 to keep world peace.
- It was intended that all countries would be members and that if there were disputes between countries, they could be settled by negotiation rather than by force.
- The League of Nations was a good idea, but ultimately a failure, as not all countries joined the league.
- Also, the League had no army to prevent military aggression such as Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in Africa or Japan's invasion of Manchuria in China.

### **Great Depression of 1929**

- The worldwide economic depression of the 1930s took its toll in different ways in Europe and Asia.
- In Europe, political power shifted to totalitarian and imperialist governments in several countries, including Germany, Italy, and Spain.
- In Asia, a resource-starved Japan began to expand aggressively, invading China and maneuvering to control a sphere of influence in the Pacific.

### **Rise of Fascism**

- Victors' stated aims in World War I had been "to make the world safe for democracy," and postwar Germany was made to adopt a democratic constitution, as did most of the other states restored or created after the war.
- In the 1920s, however, the wave of nationalistic, militaristic totalitarianism known by its Italian name, fascism.
- It promised to minister to peoples' wants more effectively than democracy and presented itself as the one sure defense against communism.
- Benito Mussolini established the first Fascist, European dictatorship during the interwar period in Italy in 1922.

### **Rise of Nazism**

- Adolf Hitler, the Leader of the German National Socialist (Nazi) party, preached a racist brand of fascism.

- Hitler promised to overturn the Versailles Treaty, restore German wealth & glory and secure additional Lebensraum (“living space”) for the German people, who he contended deserve more as members of a superior race.
- In 1933 Hitler became the German Chancellor, and in a series of subsequent moves established himself as dictator.
- Moreover, in 1941 the Nazi regime unleashed a war of extermination against Slavs, Jews, and other elements deemed inferior by Hitler’s ideology.

## **Policy of Appeasement**

- Hitler openly denounced the Treaty of Versailles and began secretly building up Germany’s army and weapons.
- Although Britain and France knew of Hitler’s actions, they thought a stronger Germany would stop the spread of Communism from Russia.
- An example of appeasement was the Munich Agreement of September 1938. In the Agreement, Britain and France allowed Germany to annex areas in Czechoslovakia where German-speakers lived.
  - Germany agreed not to invade the rest of Czechoslovakia or any other country. However, in March 1939, Germany broke its promise and invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia.
  - Even then, neither Britain nor France was prepared to take military action.

## **Key Turning Points of the World War II**

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### **The Start**

- Three years of mounting international tension - encompassing the Spanish Civil War, the union of Germany and Austria, Hitler's occupation of the Sudetenland and the invasion of Czechoslovakia led to deterioration of ties between Axis Power and Allied Powers.
- However, the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 and subsequently two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany.
- This marked the beginning of World War II.

### **Phoney War**

- The western Europe was very quiet during the first few months of the war.
- This period of war is known as 'phoney war'.
- Preparations for war continued in earnest, but there were few signs of conflict, and civilians of the western european countries (allied powers) evacuated to safe places.

### **Ribbentrop Pact**

- By the early part of 1939 the German dictator Adolf Hitler had become determined to invade and occupy Poland.
- Poland, for its part, had guarantees of French and British military support should it be attacked by Germany. Hitler intended to invade Poland anyway, but first he had to neutralize the possibility that the Soviet Union would resist the invasion of its western neighbour.
- Secret negotiations in August 1939, led to the signing of the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in Moscow.

- Further, Russia followed Germany into Poland in September and Poland was carved up between the two invaders before the end of the year.

### **Winter War 1940**

- The 'winter war' between Russia and Finland concluded in March, and in the following month Germany invaded Denmark and Norway.
- Denmark surrendered immediately, but the Norwegians fought on - with British and French assistance - surrendering in June 1940.

### **Fall of France 1940**

- After war with Scandinavian countries got over, Germany invaded France, Belgium and Holland.
- During this phase, the western Europe encountered the Blitzkrieg - or 'lightning war'.
- **Blitzkrieg:** Germany's combination of fast armoured tanks on land, and superiority in the air, made a unified attacking force that was both innovative and effective.  
Despite greater numbers of air and army personnel in Allied powers, they proved no match for German Forces.
- In France an armistice was signed with Germany, with the puppet French Vichy government.
- Having conquered France, Hitler turned his attention to Britain, and began preparations for an invasion.

### **Battle of Britain 1940**

- Lasting from July to September 1940, it was the first war to be fought solely in the air.
- German took decisions to attack from airfields and factories to the major cities, but somehow the Royal Air Force managed to squeak a narrow victory.
- This ensured the - ultimately indefinite - postponement of the German invasion plans.

### **War Getting Global**

- With continental Europe under Nazi control, and Britain safe - for the time being - the war took on a more global dimension in 1941.
- Following the defeat of Mussolini's armies in Greece and Tobruk, German forces arrived in North Africa and invaded Greece and Yugoslavia in April 1941.

### **Operation Barbarossa**

- After facing defeat in Britain, Hitler broke the **Ribbentrop Pact** and invaded Russia in 1941.
- The initial advance was swift, with the fall of Sebastopol at the end of October, and Moscow coming under attack at the end of the year.
- The bitter Russian winter, however, like the one that Napoleon had experienced a century and a half earlier, crippled the Germans.
- The Soviets counterattacked in December and the Eastern Front stagnated until the spring.

### **Pearl Harbour**

- The Japanese, tired of American trade embargoes, mounted a surprise attack on the US Navy base of Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii, on 7 December 1941.

- This ensured that global conflict commenced, with Germany declaring war on the US, a few days later.
- Also, within a week of Pearl Harbor, Japan had invaded the Philippines, Burma and Hong Kong.

### American Entry Into the War

- Through the Battle of Midway 1942, the US entered World War II. In this battle, US sea-based aircraft destroyed four Japanese carriers and a cruiser, marking the turning point in World War II.
- Also, the news of mass murders of Jewish people by the Nazis reached the Allies, and the US pledged to avenge these crimes.

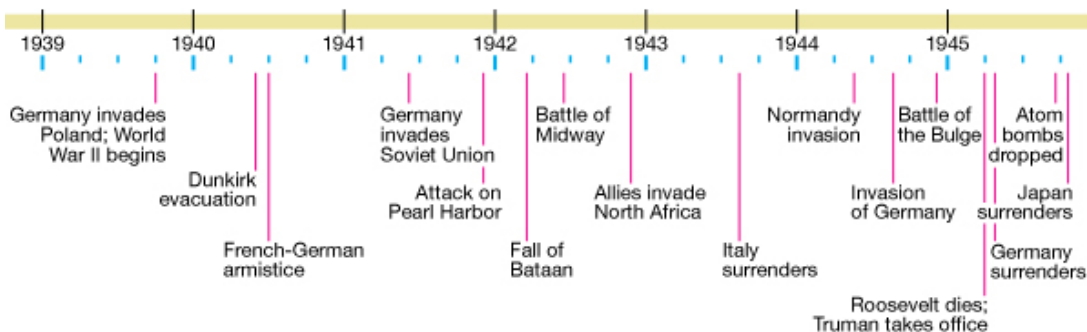
### Reversal of German Fortunes

- By the second half of 1942, British forces gained the initiative in North Africa and Russian forces counterattacked at Stalingrad.
- In February 1943, Germany surrendered at Stalingrad to Soviet Union. This was the first major defeat of Hitler's armies.
- Further, German and Italian forces in North Africa surrendered to the Allies.
- As the Russian advance on the Eastern Front gathered pace, recapturing Kharkiv and Kiev from Germany. Moreover, Allied bombers began to attack German cities in enormous daylight air raids.
- The Russians reached Berlin (capital of Germany) on 21 April 1945.  
Hitler killed himself on the 30<sup>th</sup>, two days after Mussolini had been captured and hanged by Italian partisans.
- Germany surrendered unconditionally on 7 May, and the following day was celebrated as VE (Victory in Europe) day. The war in Europe was over.

### Nuclear Bombing And The End

- Plans were being prepared for an Allied invasion of Japan, but fears of fierce resistance and massive casualties prompted Harry Truman - the new American president to sanction the use of an atomic bomb against Japan.
- Such bombs had been in development since 1942, and on 6 August 1945 one of them was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima.
- Three days later another was dropped on Nagasaki.
- No country could have withstand such attacks, and the Japanese surrendered on 14 August.
- With the surrender of Japan, World War II was finally over.

#### Chief Events of World War II, 1939–45



## Aftermath of World War II

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### **New Superpowers**

World War II brought about changes in the status of countries and continents. Britain and France lost their positions of preeminence as superpowers and yielded place to the USA and the USSR.

### **Start of Decolonisation**

After the war, Britain and France were confronted with various domestic and external problems. Both of them could no longer hold onto their respective colonies. Thus, the post-war world witnessed the end of colonialism in Africa and Asia.

### **Birth of UN**

- One of the momentous results of the war was the birth of the United Nations Organisation.
- Although the League failed to deliver, mankind did not altogether lose its hopes of making the world a safer and happier place to live in.
- The UN Charter enshrines the hopes and ideals of mankind on the basis of which countries can work together to maintain lasting peace.
- However, the establishment of the UN was agreed, much before the end of World War II under the Atlantic Charter.

### **Start of Cold War**

- After the end of the war, a conference was held in Potsdam, Germany, to set up peace treaties. The countries that fought with Hitler lost territory and had to pay reparations to the Allies. Germany and its capital Berlin were divided into four parts.
- The zones were to be controlled by Great Britain, the United States, France and the Soviet Union.
- The three western Allies and the Soviet Union disagreed on many things and as time went on Germany was divided into two separate countries: East Germany, which had a Communist government and West Germany, which was a democratic state.
- This laid the foundation of the Cold War.

### **New Economic World Order**

- Bretton Woods Conference, formally United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, meeting at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire (July 1–22, 1944), during World War II to make financial arrangements for the postwar world after the expected defeat of Germany and Japan.
- It drew up a project for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD-now known as World Bank) to make long-term capital available to states urgently needing such foreign aid, and a project for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to finance short-term imbalances in international payments in order to stabilize exchange rates.
- Also, the US dollar was established as a reserve currency for the world trade.

## India and World II

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- World War II had taken an immense toll on the British Empire. Britain had lost a lot of capital and they were looking to their colonies to help them get the status of world power back. However, Mahatma Gandhi at this time organized Indians against the British.
- Also, World War II broke out to contain Hitler's intention of having German colonies beyond its borders, the same colonial occupation that Britain had already been practicing for centuries.
- Thus, after the war, people all over the world started supporting voices against British occupation over its colonies.
- When the Labour Party came to power in 1945 in Britain it inclined towards internationalism and racial equality, among other liberal principles.
- Soon after coming into power, Prime Minister Clement Attlee (Labour Party) began the process of granting India its independence in 1947.