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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. “The second World War was the result of nationalistic tensions, unresolved issues, and economic depression”. Discuss (250 words)

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Approach

- In the introduction briefly discuss the formation of military alliances and the Second World War.
- Discuss the background of the 1st World War and Treaty of Versailles.
- In body mention various factors that led to the outbreak of the Second World War.
- The rise of militarism in Germany and Japan, and the failure of the League of Nations.
- Conclude the answer suitably.

Introduction

The Second World War (WW-II) was a global military conflict which lasted from 1939 to 1945. The vast majority of nations formed two opposing military alliances, the Allies and the Axis.

- The **Allies** consisted of France, Poland and the United Kingdom, as well as their dependent states, such as British India. Later joined by the US and China.
- The **Axis**, also known as "Rome–Berlin–Tokyo Axis", consisted of Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Body

Factors led to the Second World War

- **Unresolved issues:** The **Treaty of Versailles** was signed in 1919 in a hostile environment after the first World War to bring peace in Europe.
 - The treaty was harsh on Germany and served as a humiliation for the Germans. It brought many hardships for the German population and further deteriorated the entire geopolitical landscape of Europe.
 - The treaty could not contain the rise of extreme nationalism in fascist regimes of Italy, Germany and Japan which in turn led to the increased scramble for new colonies.
- **Nationalistic tensions:** Disintegration of German population into newly created nations was used by Hitler to justify German aggression and expansion before the second World War.
 - The humiliating conditions of the treaty of Versailles annoyed the Germans for years and in many ways led to the rise of Nazism in Germany.
 - The terms of the Treaty of Versailles were violated by Hitler which led to the formation of alliances like the Anti-Comintern Pact (1937) between Germany, Japan and Italy and the Non-Aggression Pact (1939) between Germany and USSR.

- **The economic depression:** The period before World War II was a time of great economic suffering throughout the world called the Great Depression. It posed severe risks to the entire economies of the world and specifically in Europe..
 - **Aggressive foreign policy:** Unemployment, poverty lead the cause for development of dictatorial regimes across Europe, who rationalized the idea to take anything by force, led to more aggressive/nationalist foreign policy.
 - **Empire building forces:** In the atmosphere of cut-throat economic trade/Depression, the answer of countries like Japan & Italy was to build an empire.
 - This secures their supplies of raw materials and natural resources. Countries like Japan (Manchuria), Italy (Abyssinia) and Germany (eastern Europe), therefore, set international conflict and tension, mistrust.
 - This created unstable governments and turmoil around the world that led to the Second World War.
 - The 1930s economic depression gave opportunity to Mussolini and his Fascist Party came to power, making Italy rich and powerful.
 - Rising to power in an economically and politically unstable Germany, Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist (Nazi Party) rearmed the nation to further his ambitions of world domination.

Other Factors Includes

- **Japan's Militarism:** In 1931, Japan was hit badly by the economic depression. Japanese people lost faith in the government. They turned to the army in order to find a solution to their economic problems.

In order to produce more goods, Japan needed natural resources for its factories. The Japanese army invaded China, an area rich in minerals and resources.
- **Failure of League of Nations:** The treaty led to the formation of the **League of Nations** which failed to prevent actions of fascist regimes like invasion of Manchuria by Japan.

The idea of the League of Nations was to prevent wars through disarmament, collective security and negotiation. Unfortunately the League failed miserably in its intended goal.
- **Appeasement policy:** The failures of the League in the 1930s were not only because of aggressor nations undermining its authority, but also down to its own members.

Britain and France, the two most influential members, ignored the League in their efforts to appease Hitler, it allowed Hitler to expand German territory unchecked, this led to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Conclusion

The seeds of the Second World War were sown in the treaty of Versailles. The harsh restriction led to the growth of dictatorial regimes and ingrained the feeling of revenge in Germany and Italy. Both these nations re-emerged as a strong military power with fascist tendencies driven by extreme nationalism in their respective countries.

Whereas, Japan's economic condition after the great depression and its militaristic policy in search of natural resources led to the formation of alliances with axis powers.