



World War II and India

For Prelims: [World War I](#), [World War II](#), [Treaty of Versailles](#), Operation Barbarossa, Policy of Appeasement, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Marshall Plan

For Mains: India's role in World War II, Causes and consequences of World War II, Global impacts of World War II

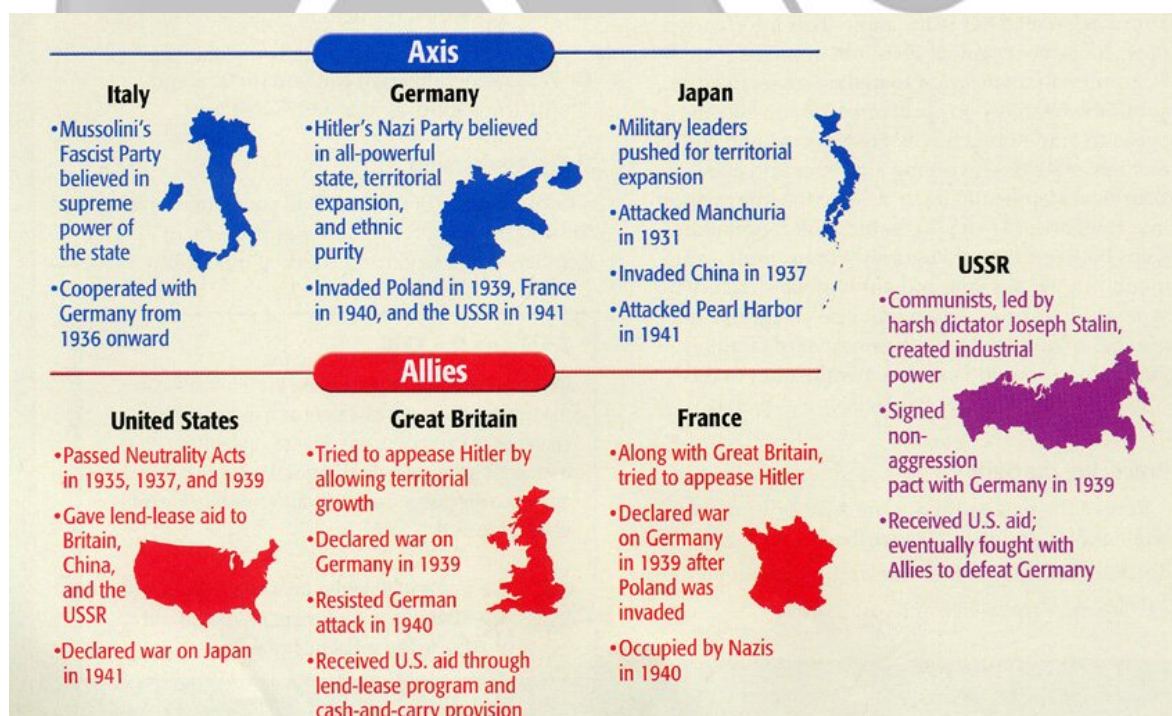
[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

The recent discovery of 23 Japanese soldiers' remains in Bangladesh after more than 80 years has reignited discussions on [World War II](#) and the role of various countries, including India, in the conflict.

What are the Key Facts About World War II?

- **Duration and Scope:** World War II lasted from **1939 to 1945** and was the most widespread and devastating conflict in human history.
- **Primary Combatants:** The two main opposing alliances were the **Axis powers** (Germany, Italy, Japan) and the **Allied powers** (including the US, France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, China).



- **Trigger Event:** The immediate cause of the war was Germany's invasion of Poland on 1st September 1939, leading Britain and France to declare war on Germany.
- **Causes of the War:**
 - **Treaty of Versailles (1919):** The [Treaty of Versailles](#), signed in 1919 by Germany and the Allied Nations, formally ended World War I.
 - The treaty required Germany to pay reparations, disarm, lose territory, and relinquish its overseas colonies. These harsh terms created resentment and **economic instability, contributing to the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany.**
 - **Failure of the League of Nations:** The **League of Nations, established in 1919 to maintain world peace**, aimed for universal membership and the resolution of disputes through negotiation rather than force.
 - Despite being a good idea, the League of Nations ultimately failed because **not all countries joined**. Its inability to stop **Japan's invasion of Manchuria in China** and Italy's invasion of Ethiopia encouraged the Axis powers to pursue further aggressive actions.
 - **Economic Depression 1929:** The global economic downturn of the late 1920s and early 1930s led to the rise of **totalitarian regimes** (one political party that has absolute power) in countries like Italy, Japan, and Germany.
 - Germany, Italy, and Japan aggressively expanded their territories in the 1930s, leading to military confrontations.
 - **Rise of Fascism:** After World War I, the victors aimed to **"make the world safe for democracy,"** leading to democratic constitutions in Germany and other states.
 - However, in the 1920s, **nationalism and militaristic totalitarianism (fascism)** emerged. It promised to meet people's needs more effectively than democracy and positioned itself as a defense against communism.
 - Benito Mussolini established the first fascist dictatorship in Europe in Italy in 1922.
 - **Rise of Nazism:** Adolf Hitler, leader of the German National Socialist (Nazi) party, preached a racist form of fascism, promising **to overturn the Versailles Treaty** and secure more **Lebensraum ("living space")** for the "superior" German race.
 - He became German Chancellor in 1933 and **established himself as a dictator**. In 1941, the Nazi regime launched a **war of extermination against Slavs, Jews, and others deemed inferior.**
 - **Policy of Appeasement:** The policy of appeasement, followed by **Britain and France**, aimed to avoid war with aggressive powers like Japan, Italy, and Germany by **conceding to their demands to maintain peace.**
 - This approach allowed **Nazi Germany to annex territories without military intervention**, escalating the conflict.
- **Major Phases of the War:**
 - **Outbreak and Early Axis Victories:** The **Phoney War (1939–1940)**, Hitler conquered Poland, leading to a period of minimal land activity as countries waited for the other to act.
 - Early Axis successes through Germany's **Blitzkrieg** (combination of speed, surprise, and concentrated firepower) tactics led to the rapid occupation of much of Western Europe, including France.
 - **Operation Barbarossa (1941):** Germany invades the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa) marked a significant turning point.
 - Despite initial successes, the Soviet Union managed to halt the German advance, particularly during the **Battle of Stalingrad (1942-1943).**
 - **Entry of the United States:** Following **Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor** in 1941, the US entered the war, significantly altering the balance of power.
 - **Turning Points:** Key battles such as the **Battle of Midway (1942)** (US defeated Japan), **El Alamein (1942)**, **Stalingrad**, and the Allied invasion of Normandy (D-Day) in 1944 reversed the Axis advances and began the push towards their eventual defeat.
- **End of the War:**
 - **Defeat of Germany:** The war in Europe ended with the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945, following the fall of Berlin and Hitler's suicide.
 - **Defeat of Japan:** Japan surrendered in August 1945, after the US dropped atomic bombs on the cities of **Hiroshima (August 6)** and **Nagasaki (August 9)**. With Japan's surrender, World War II finally came to an end.

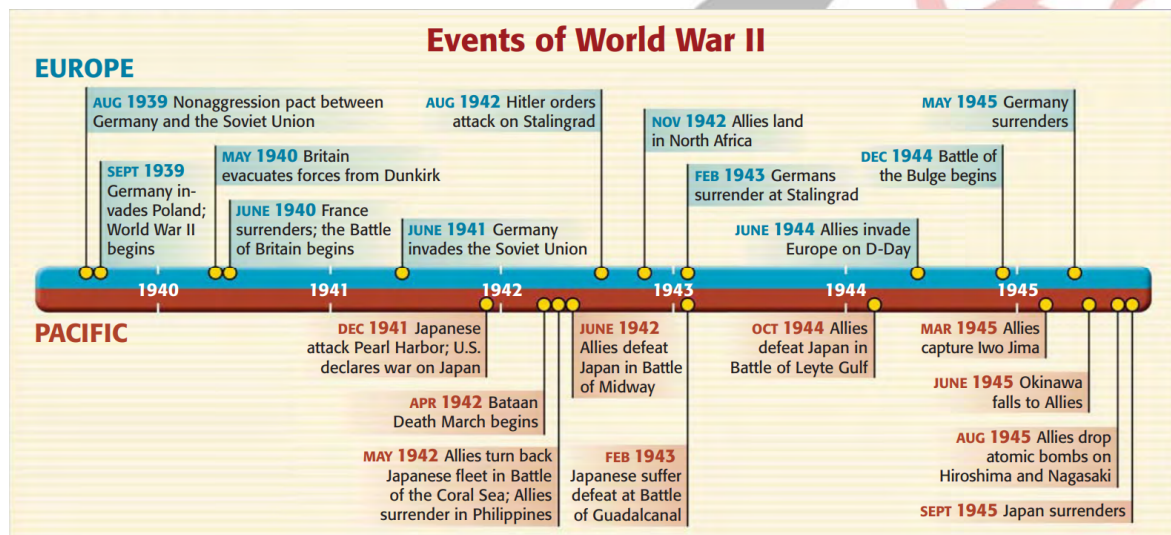
What are the Consequences of World War II?

▪ Consequences:

- **Human Cost:** The war led to an estimated **70-85 million** deaths, both military and civilian, including the [Holocaust](#), where **six million Jews were killed** by Nazi Germany.
- **Emergence of the Cold War:** The Axis powers were defeated, leading to the **fall of Nazi Germany** and **Imperial Japan** and the division of **Germany** into occupation zones.
 - The **Soviet Union** expanded its influence in Eastern Europe, while the **US** emerged as a superpower, marking the beginning of the [Cold War](#).
- **United Nations:** The [UN was established in 1945](#) to promote international cooperation and prevent future conflicts.
- **Economic Recovery:** The US implemented the **Marshall Plan** (1948) to aid in the reconstruction of war-torn western Europe.
- **Nuclear Arms Race:** The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked the beginning of the [nuclear age](#), leading to the **nuclear arms race** during the Cold War.
- **Decolonization:** Many European colonial empires weakened after the war, leading to a wave of **anti-colonial movements across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East**.

▪ Legacy of World War II:

- **Rise of the Cold War:** The ideological and political rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union led to the Cold War, which lasted for several decades.
- **Global Realignments:** The war significantly reshaped international relations, leading to the formation of **new alliances and influencing the political, economic, and social landscapes** of the world in the decades that followed.



What was India's Role in World War II?

- **Part of the British Empire:** At the time of World War II, India, along with Pakistan and Bangladesh, was a colony under British rule.
- **Unilateral Declaration of War:** The British government, led by [Viceroy Lord Linlithgow](#), declared India's involvement in the war without consulting Indian political leaders, sparking discontent.
- **Massive Contribution of Soldiers:** India sent over 2.5 million soldiers to fight in various theatres of war under British command, making it the largest volunteer army in the world.
- **Support for the Allied Nations:** Indian troops fought on all major fronts, including Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. They played a crucial role in liberating Italy and providing critical supplies to the war effort.
 - Their participation in the **Battle of Monte Cassino in Italy** was pivotal.
- **India with Axis Powers:** During World War II, Subhas Chandra Bose led the [Indian National Army \(INA\)](#) with support from Japan.
 - The INA fought alongside Japanese **forces against the British in Southeast Asia**, including regions like Myanmar and Thailand, **aiming to secure India's independence from British rule**.

How did Indians View World War II?

- **Opposition to British Rule:** The [Indian National Congress \(INC\)](#) provincial governments resigned in 1939 in protest against the **unilateral decision of the Governor General of India Lord Linlithgow** to involve India in the Second World War.
 - They demanded that India's political future should be **decided by its own people after the war.**
- **Support for Independence:** Many Indians, particularly under leaders like [Mahatma Gandhi](#), saw the war as an opportunity to demand independence from Britain.
 - They believed Britain's weakened position during the war could be leveraged to achieve freedom.
- **Conditional Support:** Some factions, including the [Muslim League](#) and the [Hindu Mahasabha](#), supported the British war effort, hoping that India's contribution would result in leniency and eventual independence.

What was the Impact of World War II on India?

- **Increased Nationalism:** The war and the British response fueled a new wave of nationalism, particularly after the creation of the [Indian National Army \(INA\)](#) by Subhas Chandra Bose, which fought alongside the Japanese in Southeast Asia.
- **Economic Strain:** The war had a devastating impact on **India's economy, causing inflation, high taxes, corruption, and famines.**
 - The [Bengal famine of 1943](#), one of the most catastrophic, led to millions of deaths.
- **Post-War Independence Movement:** The impact of the war made it increasingly difficult for Britain to maintain its empire. By the end of the war, **the demand for Indian independence was undeniable.**
 - Additionally, many Indians who returned from the war realized they had **fewer civil liberties compared to Europeans**, further fueling the demand for independence and paving the way for **India's independence in 1947.**

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Analyze the causes that led to the outbreak of World War II and its global impact. How did these events shape India's political landscape?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Mains

Q. "There arose a serious challenge to the Democratic State System between the two World Wars." Evaluate the statement. **(2021)**

Q. To what extent can Germany be held responsible for causing the two World Wars? Discuss critically. **(2015)**