



World War II & Shift in Global Power Dynamics

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

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

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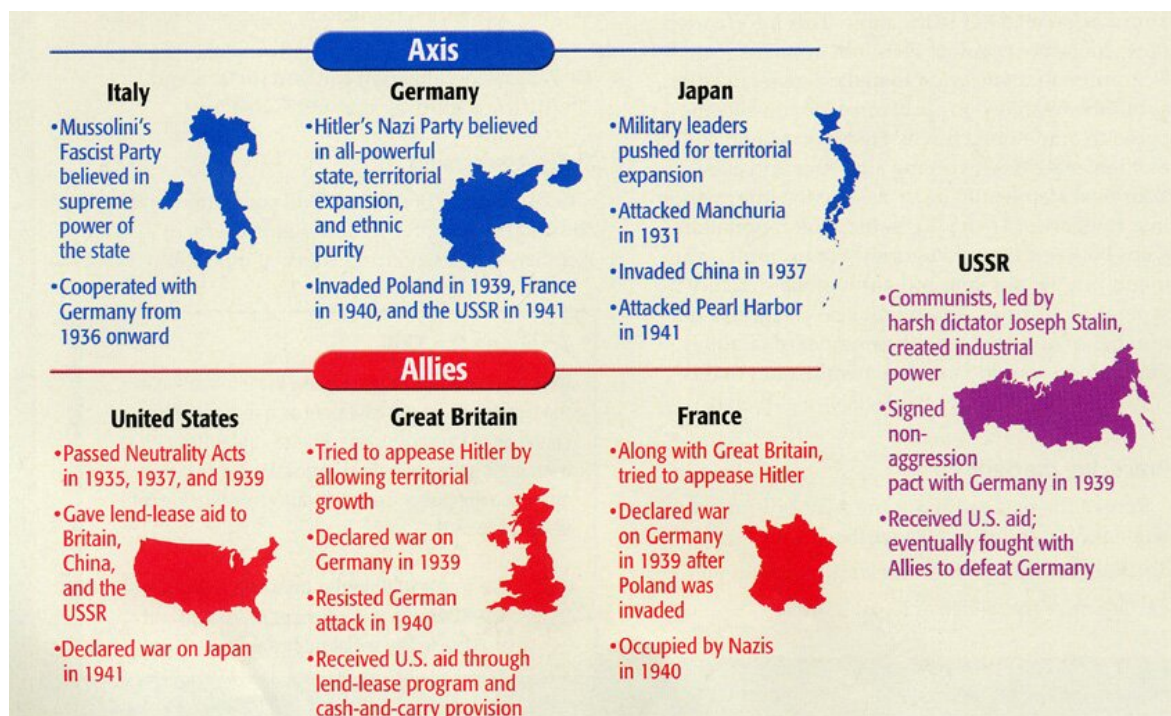
Why in News?

On **6th August 2025**, the world marked **80 years** since the **US atomic bombing** of **Hiroshima**, observed annually as **Hiroshima Day**.

- On **6th and 9th August 1945**, the US dropped **“Little Boy”** on **Hiroshima** and **“Fat Man”** on **Nagasaki**, **killing thousands instantly**, causing **massive destruction** and **long-term radiation effects**, and leading to **Japan’s surrender** in **World War II**.

What was World War -II?

- **About: World War II (1939-1945)** was the deadliest **global conflict**, fought between the **Axis Powers** (**Germany, Italy, Japan**) and **Allied Powers** (**France, Great Britain, the US, Soviet Union, China**).
 - Nearly **100 million** people were mobilized, with around **50 million deaths**, accounting for **3% of the world population**.



▪ Key Causes:

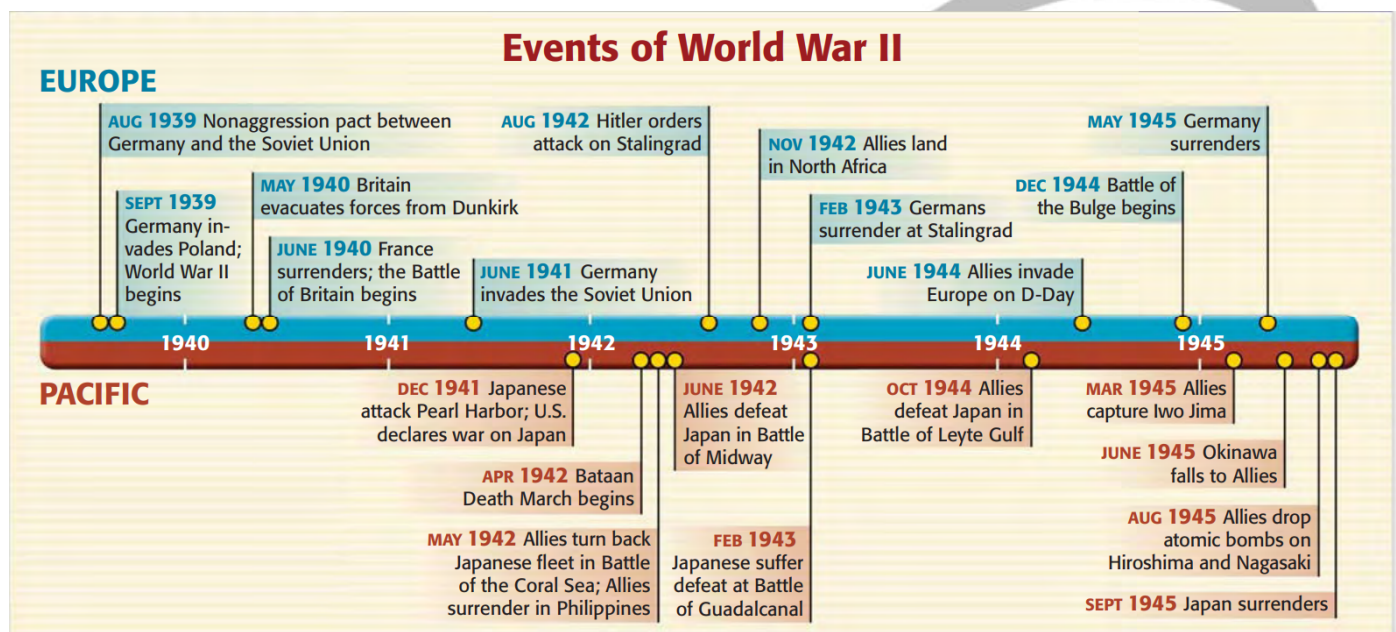
- **Treaty of Versailles (1919):** The treaty imposed **harsh terms on Germany** after **WWI**, including **war guilt**, **heavy reparations**, territorial losses and **strict military restrictions**. These terms **humiliated Germany**, **fostered resentment**, and **fueled ultra-nationalism** and **revanchism**.
- **Failure of the League of Nations:** Established to maintain peace, the League lacked **universal membership (US never joined)** and had no **standing army**; its failure to prevent **Japanese aggression in Manchuria (1931)** and **Italian invasion of Abyssinia (1935)** **emboldened fascist powers**.
- **Economic Crisis:** The **Great Depression (1929)** caused **worldwide unemployment, poverty, and political instability**. In Germany, **hyperinflation** and **US loan withdrawal** worsened conditions, enabling **totalitarianism and militarization in Europe and Japan**.
- **Rise of Fascism and Nazism:** **Fascism**, led by **Mussolini** in Italy, promoted **order, nationalism, and anti-communism**.
 - **Nazism** under **Hitler** combined fascism with **racial ideology**, aiming to overturn the **Treaty of Versailles**, restore **German power**, and gain **Lebensraum** ("living space").
 - From 1933, Hitler's **dictatorship** pursued aggressive **expansion** and **racial extermination** policies.
- **Policy of Appeasement:** Britain and France allowed Hitler to violate the **Treaty of Versailles** by permitting the **Rhineland reoccupation (1936)** and **Sudetenland annexation (1938)**, underestimating his ambitions and delaying military readiness; they avoided action even after Germany invaded **Czechoslovakia (1939)**.
- **Invasion of Poland (September 1939):** Germany's invasion prompted Britain and France to declare war, marking the official start of **WWII** and exposing the failure of **appeasement**.
- **Japanese Expansion and Pearl Harbour (1941):** Japan's imperial ambitions led to the attack on **Pearl Harbour**, drawing the **US** into the war and expanding WWII into a **global conflict**.

What were the Key Events of World War II?

- **Start of WWII & Nazi-Soviet Pact (1939):** Germany invaded Poland on **1st September 1939** after making a secret agreement with the **Soviet Union** to divide the **country**, which

led **Britain and France to declare war**, officially **starting World War II**.

- **Phoney War & Early Conflicts (1939-1940):** Western Europe saw **little fighting during the Phoney War**. Meanwhile, the **USSR fought Finland (Winter War)**, ending in March 1940, and Germany invaded Denmark (surrendered) and Norway (resisted until June).
- **Fall of France & Blitzkrieg (1940):** Germany's rapid Blitzkrieg tactics overwhelmed France, Belgium, and the Netherlands despite Allied numerical superiority, leading to France's defeat and establishment of the Vichy puppet regime.
- **Battle of Britain (July-September 1940):** The **Royal Airforce** successfully defended Britain against the German Luftwaffe's air assault, marking the **first major defeat of Nazi Germany** and halting plans for a German invasion.
- **Operation Barbarossa & US Entry (1941):** In June 1941, **Germany broke the Nazi-Soviet Pact** by invading the USSR, but progress stalled due to **harsh winter and Soviet counterattacks**. **Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor** led the US to join the war, followed by Germany declaring war on the US, globalizing the conflict.
- **Turning Tide: Midway, Stalingrad, and North Africa (1942-1943):** The **US decisively defeated Japan at the Battle of Midway (June 1942)**.
 - The **Soviet victory at Stalingrad (February 1943)** marked Germany's first major defeat. **Allied forces won in North Africa** and began **pushing Axis forces back in Europe**.



What were the Key Consequences of World War II?

- **Global Impact:**
 - **Human Cost:** The war caused an estimated **70-85 million deaths**, including **military and civilian casualties**. The **Holocaust** resulted in the systematic murder of **six million Jews** by **Nazi Germany**.
 - **Emergence of the Cold War:** Defeat of **Axis powers** led to the collapse of **Nazi Germany** and **Imperial Japan**. **Germany** was divided into **occupation zones**, while the **Soviet Union** expanded its influence over **Eastern Europe**. The **United States** emerged as a **superpower**, marking the beginning of the **Cold War**.
 - **United Nations:** Established in **1945**, the **United Nations** was created to promote **international cooperation** and prevent **future conflicts**.
 - **Economic Recovery:** The **Marshall Plan (1948)** by the **United States** provided economic aid for the **reconstruction** of **war-torn Western Europe**.
 - **Nuclear Arms Race:** The **atomic bombings** of **Hiroshima** and **Nagasaki** introduced the **nuclear age**, leading to a prolonged **nuclear arms race** during the **Cold War**.
 - **Decolonization:** The war weakened **European colonial empires**, sparking widespread **anti-colonial movements** in **Africa, Asia, and the Middle East**, leading

to decolonization.

▪ **Impact on India:**

- **Economic Hardships:** WWII caused **economic hardship**, including **inflation**, **high taxes**, **corruption**, and catastrophic events like the **Bengal famine of 1943**, which caused millions of deaths.
- **Increased Nationalism:** The war intensified **nationalist sentiments**, especially after the **Indian National Army (INA)** formation by **Subhas Chandra Bose**, inspiring further resistance against British rule.
- **Post-War Independence Movement:** The war **weakened British control**, making **continued rule untenable**.
 - Returning soldiers' experiences of **limited civil liberties** compared to Europeans further fueled the **demand for independence**, culminating in **India's independence in 1947**.

What was India's Response to World War II?

- **Colonial Status & Unilateral War Declaration:** During WWII, India was a **British colony** and the British government, under **Viceroy Lord Linlithgow**, declared **India's involvement in the war without consulting Indian leaders**, leading to **widespread political discontent**.
- **Massive Military Contribution:** India contributed over **2.5 million soldiers**, forming the **largest volunteer army globally**. Indian troops fought across **major theatres**, including **Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia**, playing crucial roles in battles such as the **Battle of Monte Cassino** in Italy, supporting the Allied war effort.
- **INA & Axis Collaboration:** **Indian National Army (INA)** was formed with Japanese support & it **fought alongside Axis powers** in Southeast Asia, aiming to **overthrow British rule and secure India's independence**.
- **Opposition by INC:** The **Indian National Congress (INC)** strongly opposed British **unilateralism** by **resigning from provincial governments in 1939**.
 - They demanded that India's political future be **decided by Indians after the war and saw WWII as an opportunity to press for independence**.
- **Full & Conditional Support:** While some groups, including the **Muslim League** and **Hindu Mahasabha**, offered **conditional support to the British war effort**, hoping India's contribution would lead to **leniency and eventual self-rule**.
 - While leaders like **Mahatma Gandhi** actively used the war's **circumstances** to **strengthen the independence movement**.

Drishti Mains Question:

What were the main causes that led to the outbreak of World War II, and what was its global impact? How did these events shape the political landscape of India?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Mains:

- Q.** How far is it correct to say that the First World War was fought essentially for the preservation of balance of power? (2024)
- 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)

