World War II

World War II, or the Second World War (often abbreviated as WWII or WW2), was a global conflict lasting from 1939 to 1945, involving most of the world's nations—including all of the great powers—eventually forming two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis. It was the most widespread war in history, with more than 100 million military personnel mobilised. In a state of "total war", the major participants placed their entire economic, industrial, and scientific capabilities at the service of the war effort, erasing the distinction between civilian and military resources. Marked by significant events involving the mass death of civilians, including the Holocaust and the only use of nuclear weapons in warfare, it was the deadliest conflict in human history, [1] resulting in 50 million to over 70 million fatalities.

The war is generally accepted to have begun on 1 September 1939, with the invasion of Poland by Germany, and subsequent declarations of war on Germany by France and most of the countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth. Germany set out to establish a large empire in Europe. From late 1939 to early 1941, in a series of campaigns and treaties, Germany conquered or subdued much of continental Europe; amid Nazi-Soviet agreements, the nominally neutral Soviet Union fully or partially occupied and annexed territories of its six European neighbours, including Poland. Britain and the Commonwealth remained the only major force continuing the fight against the Axis in North Africa and in extensive naval warfare. In June 1941, the European Axis launched an invasion of the Soviet Union, giving a start to the largest land theatre of war in history, which, from that moment on, tied down the major part of the Axis military power. In December 1941, Japan, which had been at war with China since 1937, and aimed to dominate Asia, attacked the United States and European possessions in the Pacific Ocean, quickly conquering much of the region.

The Axis advance was stopped in 1942 after the defeat of Japan in a series of naval battles and after defeats of European Axis troops in North Africa and, decisively, at Stalingrad. In 1943, with a series of German defeats in Eastern Europe, the Allied invasion of Fascist Italy, and American victories in the Pacific, the Axis lost the initiative and undertook strategic retreat on all fronts. In 1944, the Western Allies invaded France, while the Soviet Union regained all territorial losses and invaded Germany and its allies. The war in Europe ended with the capture of Berlin by Soviet and Polish troops and the subsequent German unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945. The Japanese Navy was defeated by the United States, and invasion of the Japanese Archipelago ("Home Islands") became imminent. The war in Asia ended on 15 August 1945 when Japan agreed to surrender.

The war ended with the total victory of the Allies over Germany and Japan in 1945. World War II altered the political alignment and social structure of the world. The United Nations (UN) organisation was established to foster international cooperation and prevent future conflicts. The Soviet Union and the United States emerged as rival superpowers, setting the stage for the Cold War, which lasted for the next 46 years. Meanwhile, the influence of European great powers started to decline, while the decolonisation of Asia and Africa began. Most countries whose industries had been damaged moved towards economic recovery. Political integration, especially in Europe, emerged as an effort to stabilise postwar relations.

Chronology

The start of the war is generally held to be 1 September 1939, beginning with the German invasion of Poland; Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later. Other dates for the beginning of war include the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War on 7 July 1937. [3] [4]

Others follow British historian A. J. P. Taylor, who held that there was a simultaneous Sino-Japanese War in East Asia, and a Second European War in Europe and her colonies. The two wars merged in 1941, becoming a single global conflict, at which point the war continued until 1945. This article uses the conventional dating.^[5]

The exact date of the war's end is not universally agreed upon. It has been suggested that the war ended at the armistice of 14 August 1945 (V-J Day), rather than the formal surrender of Japan (2 September 1945); in some European histories, it ended on V-E Day (8 May 1945). However, the Treaty of Peace with Japan was not signed until 1951. [6]

Background

World War I radically altered the diplomatic and political situations in Eurasia and Africa, with the defeat of the Central Powers, including Austria-Hungary, Germany and the Ottoman Empire; and the 1917 Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia. Meanwhile, the success of the Allied Entente powers including the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Italy, Serbia, and Romania, and the creation of new states from the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the Russian Empire, resulted in fundamental changes to the map of Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the war, major unrest in Europe rose, especially irredentist and revanchist nationalism and class conflict. Irredentism and revanchism were strong in Germany because she was forced to accept significant territorial, colonial, and financial losses as part of the Treaty of Versailles. Under the treaty, Germany lost around 13 percent of its home territory and all of its overseas colonies, while German annexation of other states was prohibited, massive reparations were imposed, and limits were placed on the size and capability of Germany's armed forces. [7] Meanwhile, the Russian Civil War had led to the creation of the Soviet Union. After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin seized power in the USSR and repudiated the New Economic Policy favouring the Five Year Plans instead. [8]

The German Empire was dissolved in the German Revolution of 1918–19, and a democratic government was formed which was known as the Weimar Republic. During the interwar period, domestic civil conflict occurred in Germany involving nationalists and reactionaries versus communists and moderate democratic political parties. A similar scenario occurred in Italy. Although Italy as an Entente ally made some territorial gains, Italian nationalists were angered that the terms of the Treaty of London upon which Italy had agreed to wage war on the Central Powers, were not fulfilled with the peace settlement. From 1922 to 1925, the Italian Fascist movement led by Benito Mussolini seized power in Italy with a nationalist, totalitarian, and class collaborationist agenda that abolished representative democracy, repressed political forces supporting class conflict or liberalism, and pursued an aggressive foreign policy aimed at forcefully forging Italy as a world power, and promising to create a "New Roman Empire." In Germany, the Nazi Party led by Adolf Hitler pursued establishing such a fascist government in Germany. With the onset of the Great Depression, Nazi support rose and, in 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany, and in the aftermath of the Reichstag fire, Hitler created a totalitarian single-party state led by the Nazis. [10]

The Kuomintang (KMT) party in China launched a unification campaign against regional warlords and nominally unified China in the mid-1920s, but was soon embroiled in a civil war against its former Chinese communist allies. [11] In 1931, an increasingly militaristic Japanese Empire, which had long sought influence in China [12] as the first step of its right to rule Asia, used the Mukden Incident as justification to invade Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchukuo. [13] Too weak to resist Japan, China appealed to the League of Nations for help. Japan withdrew from the League of Nations after being condemned for its incursion into Manchuria. The two nations then fought several minor conflicts, in Shanghai, Rehe and Hebei, until signing the Tanggu Truce in 1933. Thereafter,

Chinese volunteer forces continued the resistance to Japanese aggression in Manchuria, and Chahar and Suiyuan. [14]

Adolf Hitler, after an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the German government in 1923, became the Chancellor of Germany in 1933. He abolished democracy, espousing a radical, racially motivated revision of the world order, and soon began a massive rearmament campaign. [15] Meanwhile, France, to secure its alliance, allowed Italy a free hand in Ethiopia, which Italy desired as a colonial possession. The situation was aggravated in early 1935 when the Territory of the Saar Basin was legally reunited with Germany and Hitler repudiated the Treaty of Versailles, speeding up his rearmament programme and introducing conscription. [16]

Hoping to contain Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy formed the Stresa Front. The Soviet Union, concerned due to Germany's goals of capturing vast areas of eastern Europe, wrote a treaty of mutual assistance with France. Before taking effect though, the Franco-Soviet pact was required to go through the bureaucracy of the League of Nations, which rendered it essentially toothless. [17] [18] However, in June 1935, the United Kingdom made an independent naval agreement with Germany, easing prior restrictions. The



Benito Mussolini (left) and Adolf Hitler (right)

United States, concerned with events in Europe and Asia, passed the Neutrality Act in August.^[19] In October, Italy invaded Ethiopia, with Germany the only major European nation supporting the invasion. Italy then revoked objections to Germany's goal of absorbing Austria.^[20]

Hitler defied the Versailles and Locarno treaties by remilitarizing the Rhineland in March 1936. He received little response from other European powers. [21] When the Spanish Civil War broke out in July, Hitler and Mussolini supported fascist Generalissimo Francisco Franco's nationalist forces in his civil war against the Soviet-supported Spanish Republic. Both sides used the conflict to test new weapons and methods of warfare, [22] and the nationalists won the war in early 1939. Mounting tensions led to several efforts to strengthen or consolidate power. In October 1936, Germany and Italy formed the Rome-Berlin Axis. A month later, Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, which Italy would join in the following year. In China, after the Xi'an Incident the Kuomintang and communist forces agreed on a ceasefire in order to present a united front to oppose Japan. [23]

Pre-war events

Invasion of Ethiopia

The Second Italo-Abyssinian War was a brief colonial war that began in October 1935 and ended in May 1936. The war was fought between the armed forces of the Kingdom of Italy (*Regno d'Italia*) and the armed forces of the Ethiopian Empire (also known as Abyssinia). The war resulted in the military occupation of Ethiopia and its annexation into the newly created colony of Italian East Africa (*Africa Orientale Italiana*, or AOI); in addition, it exposed the weakness of the League of Nations as a force to preserve peace. Both Italy and Ethiopia were member nations, but the League did nothing when the former clearly violated the League's own Article X.^[24]

Spanish Civil War

Germany and Italy lent support to the Nationalist insurrection led by general Francisco Franco in Spain. The Soviet Union supported the existing government, the Spanish Republic which showed leftist tendencies. Both Germany and the USSR used this proxy war as an opportunity to test improved weapons and tactics. The deliberate Bombing of Guernica by the German Condor Legion in April 1937 contributed to widespread concerns that the next major war would include extensive terror bombing attacks on civilians. [25] [26]



The ruins of Guernica after the bombing.

Japanese invasion of China



A Chinese machine gun nest in the Battle of Shanghai, 1937.

In July 1937, Japan captured the former Chinese imperial capital of Beijing after instigating the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which culminated in the Japanese campaign to invade all of China. The Soviets quickly signed a non-aggression pact with China to lend materiel support, effectively ending China's prior cooperation with Germany. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek deployed his best army to defend Shanghai, but after three months of fighting, Shanghai fell. The Japanese continued to push the Chinese forces back, capturing the capital Nanjing in December 1937 and committed the Nanking Massacre.

In June 1938, Chinese forces stalled the Japanese advance by flooding

the Yellow River; although this manoeuvre bought time for the Chinese to prepare their defenses at Wuhan, the city was taken by October. [28] Japanese military victories, however, did not bring about the collapse of Chinese resistance that Japan had hoped to achieve, instead the Chinese government relocated inland to Chongqing to continue their resistance. [29]

Japanese invasion of the Soviet Union and Mongolia

On 29 July 1938, the Japanese invaded the USSR and were checked at the Battle of Lake Khasan. Although the battle was a Soviet victory, the Japanese dismissed it as an inconclusive draw, and on 11 May 1939 decided to move the Japanese-Mongolian border up to the Khalkhin Gol River by force. After initial successes the Japanese assault on Mongolia was checked by the Red Army that inflicted the first major defeat on the Japanese Kwantung Army. [30] [31]

These clashes convinced some factions in the Japanese government that they should focus on conciliating the Soviet government to avoid interference in the war against China and instead turn their military



Soviet troops fought the Japanese during the Battle of Khalkhin Gol in Mongolia, 1939.

attention southward, towards the US and European holdings in the Pacific, and also prevented the sacking of experienced Soviet military leaders such as Georgy Zhukov, who would later play a vital role in the defence of Moscow.^[32]

European occupations and agreements

Further information: Anschluss, Appeasement, Munich Agreement, German occupation of Czechoslovakia, and Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

In Europe, Germany and Italy were becoming bolder. In March 1938, Germany annexed Austria, again provoking little response from other European powers. European powers. Encouraged, Hitler began pressing German claims on the Sudetenland, an area of Czechoslovakia with a predominantly ethnic German population; and soon France and Britain conceded this territory to him, against the wishes of the Czechoslovak government, in exchange for a promise of no further territorial demands. Soon after that, however, Germany and Italy forced Czechoslovakia to cede additional territory to Hungary and Poland. In March 1939, Germany invaded the remainder of Czechoslovakia and subsequently split it into the German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the pro-German client state, the Slovak Republic.



From left to right (front): Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, Mussolini, and Ciano pictured before signing the Munich Agreement.

Alarmed, and with Hitler making further demands on Danzig, France and Britain guaranteed their support for Polish independence; when Italy conquered Albania in April 1939, the same guarantee was extended to Romania and Greece. [37] Shortly after the Franco-British pledge to Poland, Germany and Italy formalised their own alliance with the Pact of Steel. [38]

In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact,^[39] a non-aggression treaty with a secret protocol. The parties gave each other rights, "in the event of a territorial and political rearrangement," to "spheres of influence" (western Poland and Lithuania for Germany, and eastern Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Bessarabia for the USSR). It also raised the question of continuing Polish independence.^[40]

Course of the war

War breaks out in Europe

On 1 September 1939, Germany and Slovakia—a client state in 1939—attacked Poland. On 3 September 1939 France and Britain, followed by the countries of the Commonwealth, declared war on Germany but provided little support to Poland other than a small French attack into the Saarland. Britain and France also began a naval blockade of Germany on 3 September which aimed to damage the country's economy and war effort. On 17 September 1939, after signing a cease-fire with Japan, the Soviets also invaded Poland. Though Poland was divided by Germany, the Soviet Union, Lithuania and Slovakia; the Poles did not surrender and established a Polish Underground State and the insurgent Home Army, and continued to fight on Allied fronts outside Poland. In the Romanian Bridgehead operation, some 120,000 Polish troops were evacuated to France, along with much of the Polish Air Force and Poland's Enigma codebreakers. During this time, Japan launched its first attack against Changsha, a strategically important Chinese city, but was repulsed by late September.



Common parade of German Wehrmacht and Soviet Red Army on 23 September 1939 in Brest, Eastern Poland at the end of the Invasion of Poland. At centre is Major General Heinz Guderian and at right is Brigadier Semyon Krivoshein.

Following the invasion of Poland and a German-Soviet treaty governing Lithuania, the Soviet Union forced the Baltic countries to allow it to station Soviet troops in their countries under pacts of "mutual assistance." [48] [49] [50] Finland rejected territorial demands and was invaded by the Soviet Union in November 1939. [51] The resulting conflict ended in March 1940 with Finnish concessions. [52] France and the United Kingdom, treating the Soviet attack on Finland as tantamount to entering the war on the side of the Germans, responded to the Soviet invasion by supporting the USSR's expulsion from the League of Nations. [50]



German troops by the Arc de Triomphe, Paris, after the 1940 fall of France.

In Western Europe, British troops deployed to the Continent, but in a phase nicknamed the Phoney War by the British and "Sitzkrieg" (*sitting war*) by the Germans, neither side launched major operations against the other until April 1940. ^[53] The Soviet Union and Germany entered a trade pact in February 1940, pursuant to which the Soviets received German military and industrial equipment in exchange for supplying raw materials to Germany to help circumvent the British blockade. ^[54]

In April 1940, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway to secure shipments of iron ore from Sweden, which the Allies were about to

disrupt.^[55] Denmark immediately capitulated, and despite Allied support, Norway was conquered within two months.^[56] In May 1940 Britain invaded Iceland.^[57] British discontent over the Norwegian campaign led to the replacement of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain by Winston Churchill on 10 May 1940.^[58]

Axis advances

Germany invaded France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg on 10 May 1940, the same day Neville Chamberlain resigned as British Prime Minister. ^[59] The Netherlands and Belgium were overrun using blitzkrieg tactics in a few days and weeks, respectively. ^[60] The French fortified Maginot Line was circumvented by a flanking movement through the thickly wooded Ardennes region, ^[59] mistakenly perceived by French planners as an impenetrable natural barrier against armoured vehicles. ^[61] British troops were forced to evacuate the continent at Dunkirk, abandoning their heavy equipment by the end of the month. On 10 June, Italy invaded France, declaring war on both France and the United Kingdom; ^[62] twelve days later France surrendered and was soon divided into German and Italian occupation zones, ^[63] and an unoccupied rump state under the Vichy Regime. On 3 July, the British attacked the French fleet in Algeria to prevent its possible seizure by Germany. ^[64]

In June, during the last days of the Battle of France, the Soviet Union rigged elections in the Baltic states and forcibly and illegally annexed them;^[49] it then annexed the region of Bessarabia in Romania. Whereas the increased cooperation between the USSR and Nazi Germany, which included broad economic cooperation, limited military assistance, population exchange and border agreements made the former a *de facto* German ally,^[65] [66] Soviet takeover of the Baltic states, Bessarabia and North Bukovina had been seen with disquiet by Germany.^[67] [68] This, as well as growing tensions over spheres of influence demonstrated the impossibility of further expansion of Nazi-Soviet cooperation, and both states had begun the countdown to war.^[69]

With France neutralized, Germany began an air superiority campaign over Britain (the Battle of Britain) to prepare for an invasion.^[70] The campaign failed, and the invasion plans were canceled by September. Using newly captured French ports, the German Navy enjoyed success against an over-extended Royal Navy, using U-boats against British shipping in the Atlantic.^[71] Italy began operations in the Mediterranean, initiating a siege of Malta in June, conquering British Somaliland in August, and making an incursion into British-held Egypt in September 1940. Japan increased its blockade of China in September by seizing several bases in the northern part of the now-isolated French Indochina.^[72]



The Battle of Britain ended the German advance in Western Europe.

Throughout this period, the neutral United States took measures to assist China and the Western Allies. In November 1939, the American Neutrality Act was amended to allow 'cash and carry' purchases by the Allies. ^[73] In 1940, following the German capture of Paris, the size of the United States Navy was significantly increased and, after the Japanese incursion into Indochina, the United States embargoed iron, steel and mechanical parts against Japan. ^[74] In September, the United States further agreed to a trade of American destroyers for British bases. ^[75] Still, a large majority of the American public continued to oppose any direct military intervention into the conflict well into 1941 ^[76]

At the end of September 1940, the Tripartite Pact united Japan, Italy and Germany to formalize the Axis Powers. ^[77] The Tripartite Pact stipulated that any country, with the exception of the Soviet Union, not in the war which attacked any Axis Power would be forced to go to war against all three. ^[78] During this time, the United States continued to support the United Kingdom and China by introducing the Lend-Lease policy authorizing the provision of materiel and other items ^[79] and creating a security zone spanning roughly half of the Atlantic Ocean where the United States Navy protected British convoys. ^[80] As a result, Germany and the United States found themselves engaged in sustained naval warfare in the North and Central Atlantic by October 1941, even though the United States remained officially neutral. ^[81] ^[82]

The Axis expanded in November 1940 when Hungary, Slovakia and Romania joined the Tripartite Pact. [83] These countries participated in the subsequent invasion of the USSR, with Romania making the largest contribution to recapture territory ceded to the USSR and pursue its leader Ion Antonescu's desire to combat communism. [84] In October 1940, Italy invaded Greece but within days was repulsed and pushed back into Albania, where a stalemate soon occurred. [85] In December 1940, British Commonwealth forces began counter-offensives against Italian forces in Egypt and Italian East Africa. [86] By early 1941, with Italian forces having been pushed back into Libya by the Commonwealth, Churchill ordered a dispatch of troops from Africa to bolster the Greeks. [87] The Italian Navy also suffered significant defeats, with the Royal Navy putting three Italian battleships out of commission by carrier attack at Taranto, and neutralising several more warships at Cape Matapan. [88]

The Germans soon intervened to assist Italy. Hitler sent German forces to Libya in February, and by the end of March they had launched an offensive against the diminished Commonwealth forces. ^[89] In under a month, Commonwealth forces were pushed back into Egypt with the exception of the besieged port of Tobruk. ^[90] The Commonwealth attempted to dislodge Axis forces in May and again in June, but failed on both occasions. ^[91] In early April, following Bulgaria's signing of the Tripartite Pact, the Germans intervened in the Balkans by invading Greece and Yugoslavia following a coup; here too they made rapid



progress, eventually forcing the Allies to evacuate after Germany conquered the Greek island of Crete by the end of May. [92]

The Allies did have some successes during this time. In the Middle East, Commonwealth forces first quashed a coup in Iraq which had been supported by German aircraft from bases within Vichy-controlled Syria, [93] then, with the assistance of the Free French, invaded Syria and Lebanon to prevent further such occurrences. [94] In the Atlantic, the British scored a much-needed public morale boost by sinking the German flagship *Bismarck*. [95] Perhaps most importantly, during the Battle of Britain the Royal Air Force had successfully resisted the Luftwaffe's assault, and the German bombing campaign largely ended in May 1941. [96]

In Asia, despite several offensives by both sides, the war between China and Japan was stalemated by 1940. In order to increase pressure on China by blocking supply routes, and to better position Japanese forces in the event of a war with the Western powers, Japan had seized military control of southern Indochina^[97] In August of that year, Chinese communists launched an offensive in Central China; in retaliation, Japan instituted harsh measures (the Three Alls Policy) in occupied areas to reduce human and material resources for the communists. ^[98] Continued antipathy between Chinese communist and nationalist forces culminated in armed clashes in January 1941, effectively ending their co-operation. ^[99] With the situation in Europe and Asia relatively stable, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union made preparations. With the Soviets wary of mounting tensions with Germany and the Japanese planning to take advantage of the European War by seizing resource-rich European possessions in Southeast Asia, the two powers signed the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact in April 1941. ^[100] By contrast, the Germans were steadily making preparations for an attack on the Soviet Union, amassing forces on the Soviet border. ^[101]

The war becomes global

On 22 June 1941, Germany, along with other European Axis members and Finland, invaded the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. The primary targets of this surprise offensive^[102] were the Baltic region, Moscow and Ukraine, with an ultimate goal of ending the 1941 campaign near the Arkhangelsk-Astrakhan line, connecting the Caspian and White Seas. Hitler's objectives were to eliminate the Soviet Union as a military power, exterminate Communism, generate *Lebensraum* ("living space")^[103] by dispossessing the native population^[104] and guarantee access to the strategic resources needed to defeat Germany's remaining rivals.^[105]



German infantry and armoured vehicles battle the Soviet defenders on the streets of Kharkov,
October 1941.

Although the Red Army was preparing for strategic counter-offensives before the war [106] *Barbarossa* forced the Soviet supreme comman

before the war, ^[106] Barbarossa forced the Soviet supreme command to adopt a strategic defence. During the summer, the Axis made significant gains into Soviet territory, inflicting immense losses in both personnel and materiel. By the middle of August, however, the German Army High Command decided to suspend the offensive of a considerably depleted Army Group Centre, and to divert the Second Panzer Group to reinforce troops advancing towards central Ukraine and Leningrad. ^[107] The Kiev offensive was overwhelmingly successful, resulting in encirclement and elimination of four Soviet armies, and made further advance into Crimea and industrially developed Eastern Ukraine (the First Battle of Kharkov) possible. ^[108]

The diversion of three quarters of the Axis troops and the majority of their air forces from France and the central Mediterranean to the Eastern Front^[109] prompted Britain to reconsider its grand strategy. ^[110] In July, the UK and the Soviet Union formed a military alliance against Germany^[111] The British and Soviets invaded Iran to secure the Persian Corridor and Iran's oil fields. ^[112] In August, the United Kingdom and the United States jointly issued the Atlantic Charter. ^[113]

By October, when Axis operational objectives in Ukraine and the Baltic region were achieved, with only the sieges of Leningrad^[114] and Sevastopol continuing, a major offensive against Moscow had



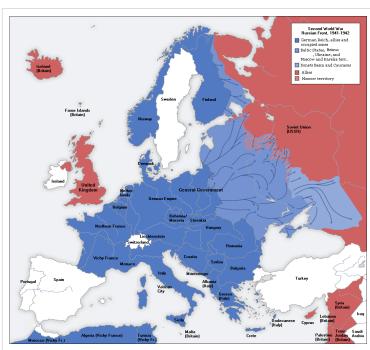
Soviet counter-attack during the battle of Moscow, December, 1941.

been renewed. After two months of fierce battles, the German army almost reached the outer suburbs of Moscow, where the exhausted troops^[116] were forced to suspend their offensive. ^[117] Large territorial gains were made by

Axis forces, but their campaign had failed to achieve its main objectives: two key cities remained in Soviet hands, the Soviet capability to resist was not broken, and the Soviet Union retained a considerable part of its military potential. The *blitzkrieg* phase of the war in Europe had ended. [118]

By early December, freshly mobilised reserves^[119] allowed the Soviets to achieve numerical parity with Axis troops. ^[120] This, as well as intelligence data that established a minimal number of Soviet troops in the East sufficient to prevent any attack by the Japanese Kwantung Army, ^[121] allowed the Soviets to begin a massive counter-offensive that started on 5 December along a 1000 kilometres (620 mi) front and pushed German troops 100–250 kilometres (62–160 mi) west. ^[122]

German successes in Europe encouraged Japan to increase pressure on European governments in south-east Asia. The Dutch government agreed to provide Japan oil supplies from the Dutch East Indies, while refusing to hand over political control of the colonies. Vichy France, by contrast, agreed



The Axis-controlled territory in Europe at the time of its maximal expansion (1941–42).

to a Japanese occupation of French Indochina.^[123] The United States, United Kingdom and other Western governments reacted to the seizure of Indochina with a freeze on Japanese assets, while the United States (which supplied 80 percent of Japan's oil^[124]) responded by placing a complete oil embargo.^[125] That meant Japan was essentially forced to choose between abandoning its ambitions in Asia and the prosecution of the war against China, or seizing the natural resources it needed by force; the Japanese military did not consider the former an option, and many officers considered the oil embargo an unspoken declaration of war.^[126]

Japan planned to rapidly seize European colonies in Asia to create a large defensive perimeter stretching into the Central Pacific; the Japanese would then be free to exploit the resources of Southeast Asia while exhausting the over-stretched Allies by fighting a defensive war. To prevent American intervention while securing the perimeter it was further planned to neutralise the United States Pacific Fleet from the outset. On 7 December (8 December in Asian time zones), 1941, Japan attacked British and American holdings with near-simultaneous offensives against Southeast Asia and the Central Pacific. These included an attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor, landings in Thailand and Malaya and the battle of Hong Kong.

These attacks led the U.S., Britain, Australia and other Allies to formally declare war on Japan. Germany and the other members of the Tripartite Pact responded by declaring war on the United States. In January, the United States, Britain, Soviet Union, China, and 22 smaller or exiled governments issued the Declaration by United Nations, which affirmed the Atlantic Charter. The Soviet Union did not adhere to the declaration; it maintained a neutrality agreement with Japan, and exempted itself from the principle of self-determination. From 1941, Stalin persistently asked Churchill, and then Roosevelt, to open a 'second front' in France. The Eastern front became the major theatre of war in Europe and the many millions of Soviet casualties dwarfed the few hundred thousand of the Western



The February 1942 Fall of Singapore saw 80,000 Allied soldiers captured and enslaved by the Japanese.

Allies; Churchill and Roosevelt said they needed more preparation time, leading to claims they stalled to save Western lives at the expense of Soviet lives. [134]

Meanwhile, by the end of April 1942, Japan and her ally Thailand had almost fully conquered Burma, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, and Rabaul, inflicting severe losses on Allied troops and taking a large number of prisoners. Despite a stubborn resistance in Corregidor, the Philippines was eventually captured in May 1942, forcing the government of the Philippine Commonwealth into exile. Japanese forces also achieved naval victories in the South China Sea, Java Sea and Indian Ocean, and bombed the Allied naval base at Darwin, Australia. The only real Allied success against Japan was a Chinese victory at Changsha in early January 1942. These easy victories over unprepared opponents left Japan overconfident, as well as overextended. [139]

Germany retained the initiative as well. Exploiting dubious American naval command decisions, the German navy ravaged Allied shipping off the American Atlantic coast. Despite considerable losses, European Axis members stopped a major Soviet offensive in Central and Southern Russia, keeping most territorial gains they achieved during the previous year. In North Africa, the Germans launched an offensive in January, pushing the British back to positions at the Gazala Line by early February, followed by a temporary lull in combat which Germany used to prepare for their upcoming offensives.

Axis advance stalls

In early May 1942, Japan initiated operations to capture Port Moresby by amphibious assault and thus sever communications and supply lines between the United States and Australia. The Allies, however, intercepted and turned back Japanese naval forces, successfully preventing the invasion. [144] Japan's next plan, motivated by the earlier Doolittle Raid, was to seize Midway Atoll and lure American carriers into battle to be eliminated; as a diversion, Japan would also send forces to occupy the Aleutian Islands in Alaska. [145] In early June, Japan put its operations into action but the Americans, having broken Japanese naval codes in late May, were fully aware of the plans and force dispositions and used this knowledge to achieve a decisive victory at Midway over the Imperial Japanese Navy. [146]



American dive bombers engage the *Mikuma* at the Battle of Midway, June 1942.

With its capacity for aggressive action greatly diminished as a result of the Midway battle, Japan chose to focus on a belated attempt to capture Port Moresby by an overland campaign in the Territory of Papua. [147] The Americans planned a counter-attack against Japanese positions in the southern Solomon Islands, primarily Guadalcanal, as a first step towards capturing Rabaul, the main Japanese base in Southeast Asia. [148]

Both plans started in July, but by mid-September, the battle for Guadalcanal took priority for the Japanese, and troops in New Guinea were ordered to withdraw from the Port Moresby area to the northern part of the island, where they faced Australian and United States troops in the Battle of Buna-Gona. [149] Guadalcanal soon became a focal point for both sides with heavy commitments of troops and ships in the battle for Guadalcanal. By the start of 1943, the Japanese were defeated on the island and withdrew their troops. [150] In Burma, Commonwealth forces mounted two operations. The first, an offensive into the Arakan region in late 1942, went disastrously, forcing a retreat back to India by May 1943. [151] The second was the insertion of irregular forces behind Japanese front-lines in February which, by the end of April, had achieved dubious results. [152]



Soviet soldiers attack a house during the Battle of Stalingrad, 1943.

On Germany's eastern front, the Axis defeated Soviet offensives in the Kerch Peninsula and at Kharkov, [153] and then launched their main summer offensive against southern Russia in June 1942, to seize the oil fields of the Caucasus and occupy Kuban steppe, while maintaining positions on the northern and central areas of the front. The Germans split the Army Group South into two groups: Army Group A struck lower Don River while Army

Group B struck south-east to the Caucasus, towards Volga River. ^[154] The Soviets decided to make their stand at Stalingrad, which was in the path of the advancing German armies.

By mid-November the Germans had nearly taken Stalingrad in bitter street fighting when the Soviets began their second winter counter-offensive, starting with an encirclement of German forces at Stalingrad^[155] and an assault on the Rzhev salient near Moscow, though the latter failed disastrously. By early February 1943, the German Army had taken tremendous losses; German troops at Stalingrad had been forced to surrender^[157] and the front-line had been pushed back beyond its position before the summer offensive. In mid-February, after the Soviet push had tapered off, the Germans launched another attack on Kharkov, creating a salient in their front line around the Russian city of Kursk. [158]

By November 1941, Commonwealth forces had launched a counter-offensive, Operation Crusader, in North Africa, and reclaimed all the gains the Germans and Italians had made. [159] In the West, concerns the Japanese might utilize bases in Vichy-held Madagascar caused the British to invade the island in early May 1942. [160] This success was offset soon after by an Axis offensive in Libya which pushed the Allies back into Egypt until Axis forces were stopped at El Alamein. [161] On the Continent, raids of Allied commandos on strategic targets, culminating in the disastrous Dieppe Raid, [162] demonstrated the Western Allies' inability to launch an invasion of continental Europe without much better preparation, equipment, and operational security. [163]



British Crusader tanks moving to forward positions during the North African Campaign.

In August 1942, the Allies succeeded in repelling a second attack against El Alamein and, at a high cost, managed to deliver desperately needed supplies to the besieged Malta. [164] A few months later, the Allies commenced an attack of their own in Egypt, dislodging the Axis forces and beginning a drive west across Libya. [165] This attack was followed up shortly after by an Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa, which resulted in the region joining the Allies. [166] Hitler responded to the French colony's defection by ordering the occupation of Vichy France; [166] although Vichy forces did not resist this violation of the armistice, they managed to scuttle their fleet to

prevent its capture by German forces. [167] The now pincered Axis forces in Africa withdrew into Tunisia, which was conquered by the Allies in May 1943. [168]

Allies gain momentum

Following the Guadalcanal Campaign, the Allies initiated several operations against Japan in the Pacific. In May 1943, Allied forces were sent to eliminate Japanese forces from the Aleutians, and soon after began major operations to isolate Rabaul by capturing surrounding islands, and to breach the Japanese Central Pacific perimeter at the Gilbert and Marshall Islands. By the end of March 1944, the Allies had completed both of these objectives, and additionally neutralised the major Japanese base at Truk in the Caroline Islands. In April, the Allies then launched an operation to retake Western New Guinea. [171]



Soviet II-2 planes attacking a *Wehrmacht* column during the Battle of Kursk, July 1, 1943.

In the Soviet Union, both the Germans and the Soviets spent the spring and early summer of 1943 making preparations for large offensives in Central Russia. On 4 July 1943, Germany attacked Soviet forces around the Kursk Bulge. Within a week, German forces had exhausted themselves against the Soviets' deeply echeloned and well-constructed defences^[172] [173] and, for the first time in the war, Hitler cancelled the operation before it had achieved tactical or operational success.^[174] This decision was partially affected by the Western Allies' invasion of Sicily launched on 9 July which, combined with previous Italian failures, resulted in the ousting and arrest of Mussolini later that month.^[175]

On 12 July 1943, the Soviets launched their own counter-offensives, thereby dispelling any hopes of the German Army for victory or even stalemate in the east. The Soviet victory at Kursk heralded the downfall of German superiority, [176] giving the Soviet Union the initiative on the Eastern Front. [177] [178] The Germans attempted to stabilise their eastern front along the hastily fortified Panther-Wotan line, however, the Soviets broke through it at Smolensk and by the Lower Dnieper Offensives. [179]

In early September 1943, the Western Allies invaded the Italian mainland, following an Italian armistice with the Allies. [180] Germany responded by disarming Italian forces, seizing military control of Italian areas, [181] and creating a series of defensive lines. [182] German special forces then rescued Mussolini, who then soon established a new client state in German occupied Italy named the Italian Social Republic. [183] The Western Allies fought through several lines until reaching the main German defensive line in mid-November. [184]

German operations in the Atlantic also suffered. By May 1943, as Allied counter-measures became increasingly effective, the resulting sizable German submarine losses forced a temporary halt of the German Atlantic naval campaign. In November 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill met with Chiang Kai-shek in Cairo and then with Joseph Stalin in Tehran. The former conference determined the post-war return of Japanese territory, while the latter included agreement that the Western Allies would invade Europe in 1944 and that the Soviet Union would declare war on Japan within three months of Germany's defeat.

From November 1943, at the 7-week Battle of Changde, the Chinese forced Japan to fight a costly war of attrition, while awaiting Allied relief. [188] [189] In January 1944, the Allies launched a series of attacks in Italy against the line at Monte Cassino and attempted to outflank it with landings at Anzio. [190] By the end of January, a major Soviet offensive expelled German forces from the Leningrad region, [191] ending the longest and most lethal siege in history. The following Soviet offensive was halted on the pre-war Estonian border by the German Army Group North aided by Estonians hoping to re-establish national independence. This delay slowed subsequent Soviet operations in the Baltic Sea region. [192] By late May 1944, the Soviets



British troops firing a mortar during the Battle of Imphal, North East India, 1944.

had liberated Crimea, largely expelled Axis forces from Ukraine, and made incursions into Romania, which were repulsed by the Axis troops. ^[193] The Allied offensives in Italy had succeeded and, at the expense of allowing several German divisions to retreat, on 4 June Rome was captured. ^[194]

The Allies experienced mixed fortunes in mainland Asia. In March 1944, the Japanese launched the first of two invasions, an operation against British positions in Assam, India, [195] and soon besieged Commonwealth positions at Imphal and Kohima. [196] In May 1944, British forces mounted a counter-offensive that drove Japanese troops back to Burma, [196] and Chinese forces that had invaded northern Burma in late 1943 besieged Japanese troops in Myitkyina. [197] The second Japanese invasion attempted to destroy China's main fighting forces, secure railways between Japanese-held territory and capture Allied airfields. [198] By June, the Japanese had conquered the province of Henan and begun a renewed attack against Changsha in the Hunan province. [199]

Allies close in

On 6 June 1944 (known as D-Day), after three years of Soviet pressure, [200] the Western Allies invaded northern France. After reassigning several Allied divisions from Italy, they also attacked southern France. [201] These landings were successful, and led to the defeat of the German Army units in France. Paris was liberated by the local resistance assisted by the Free French Forces on 25 August [202] and the Western Allies continued to push back German forces in Western Europe during the latter part of the year. An attempt to advance into northern Germany spear-headed by a major airborne operation in the Netherlands ended with a failure. [203] After that, the



Allied Invasion of Normandy, 6 June 1944

Western Allies slowly pushed into Germany, unsuccessfully trying to cross the Rur river in a large offensive. In Italy the Allied advance also slowed down, when they ran into the last major German defensive line.



Red Army units crossing the stream. Summer 1944.

On 22 June, the Soviets launched a strategic offensive in Belarus (known as "Operation Bagration") that resulted in the almost complete destruction of the German Army Group Centre. [204] Soon after that, another Soviet strategic offensive forced German troops from Western Ukraine and Eastern Poland. The successful advance of Soviet troops prompted resistance forces in Poland to initiate several uprisings, though the largest of these, in Warsaw, as well as a Slovak Uprising in the south, were not assisted by the Soviets and were put down by

German forces. [205] The Red Army's strategic offensive in eastern Romania cut off and destroyed the considerable German troops there and triggered a successful coup d'état in Romania and in Bulgaria, followed by those countries' shift to the Allied side. [206]



Polish insurgents during the Warsaw Uprising.

In September 1944, Soviet Red Army troops advanced into Yugoslavia and forced the rapid withdrawal of the German Army Groups E and F in Greece, Albania and Yugoslavia to rescue them from being cut off. By this point, the Communist-led Partisans under Marshal Josip Broz Tito, who had led an increasingly successful guerrilla campaign against the occupation since 1941, controlled much of the territory of Yugoslavia and were engaged in delaying efforts against the German forces further south. In northern Serbia, the Red Army, with limited support from Bulgarian forces, assisted the Partisans in a joint liberation of the capital city of Belgrade on 20 October. A few

days later, the Soviets launched a massive assault against German-occupied Hungary that lasted until the fall of Budapest in February 1945. [208] In contrast with impressive Soviet victories in the Balkans, the bitter Finnish resistance to the Soviet offensive in the Karelian Isthmus denied the Soviets occupation of Finland and led to the signing of Soviet-Finnish armistice on relatively mild conditions, [209] [210] with a subsequent shift to the Allied side by Finland.

By the start of July, Commonwealth forces in Southeast Asia had repelled the Japanese sieges in Assam, pushing the Japanese back to the Chindwin River^[211] while the Chinese captured Myitkyina. In China, the Japanese were having greater successes, having finally captured Changsha in mid-June and the city of Hengyang by early August.^[212] Soon after, they further invaded the province of Guangxi, winning major engagements against Chinese forces at Guilin and Liuzhou by the end of November^[213] and successfully linking up their forces in China and Indochina by the middle of December.^[214]

In the Pacific, American forces continued to press back the Japanese perimeter. In mid-June 1944 they began their offensive against the Mariana and Palau islands, scoring a decisive victory against Japanese forces in the Philippine Sea within a few days. These defeats led to the resignation of Japanese Prime Minister Tōjō and provided the United States with air bases to launch intensive heavy bomber attacks on the Japanese home islands. In late October, American forces invaded the Filipino island of Leyte; soon after, Allied naval forces scored another large victory during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, one of the largest naval battles in history. [215]

Axis collapse, Allied victory

On 16 December 1944, Germany attempted its last desperate measure for success on the Western Front by marshalling German reserves to launch a massive counter-offensive in the Ardennes to attempt to split the Western Allies, encircle large portions of Western Allied troops and capture their primary supply port at Antwerp in order to prompt a political settlement.^[216] By January, the offensive had been repulsed with no strategic objectives fulfilled.^[216] In Italy, the Western Allies remained stalemated at the German defensive line. In mid-January 1945, the Soviets attacked in Poland, pushing from the Vistula to the Oder river in Germany, and overran East Prussia.^[217] On 4 February, U.S., British, and Soviet leaders met in Yalta. They agreed on the occupation of post-war Germany,^[218] and when the Soviet Union would join the war against Japan.^[219]



American and Soviet troops meet in April 1945, east of the Elbe River.

In February, the Soviets invaded Silesia and Pomerania, while Western Allies invaded Western Germany and closed to the Rhine river. By March, the Western Allies crossed the Rhine north and south of the Ruhr, encircling the German Army Group B, [220] while the Soviets advanced to Vienna. In early April, the Western Allies finally pushed forward in Italy and swept across Western Germany, while Soviet forces stormed Berlin in late April; the two forces linked up on Elbe river on 25 April. On 30 April 1945, the Reichstag was captured, signalling the military defeat of Third Reich. [221]



A devastated Berlin street in the city centre post Battle of Berlin, taken 3 July 1945.

Several changes in leadership occurred during this period. On 12 April, U.S. President Roosevelt died and was succeeded by Harry Truman. Benito Mussolini was killed by Italian partisans on 28 April. [222] Two days later, Hitler committed suicide, and was succeeded by Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz. [223]

German forces surrendered in Italy on 29 April. The German instrument of surrender was signed on 7 May in Rheims, ^[224] and ratified on 8 May in Berlin. ^[225] German Army Group Centre resisted in Prague until 11 May. ^[226]

In the Pacific theatre, American forces accompanied by the forces of the Philippine Commonwealth advanced in the Philippines, clearing Leyte by the end of April 1945. They landed on Luzon in January 1945 and seized Manila in March, leaving it in ruins. Fighting continued on

Luzon, Mindanao and other islands of the Philippines until the end of the war. [227]

In May 1945, Australian troops landed on Borneo, overrunning the oilfields there. British, American and Chinese forces defeated the Japanese in northern Burma in March, and the British pushed on to reach Rangoon by 3 May. [228] Chinese forces started to counterattack in Battle of West Hunan that occurred between April 6 and June 7, 1945. American forces also moved towards Japan, taking Iwo Jima by March, and Okinawa by the end of June. [229] American bombers destroyed Japanese cities, and American submarines cut off Japanese imports. [230]

On 11 July, the Allied leaders met in Potsdam, Germany. They confirmed earlier agreements about Germany, [231] and reiterated the demand for unconditional surrender of all Japanese forces by Japan, specifically stating that "the alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction". [232] During this conference the United Kingdom held its general election, and Clement Attlee replaced Churchill as



Atomic explosion at Nagasaki, 9 August 1945.

Prime Minister. ^[233] When Japan continued to ignore the Potsdam terms, the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August. Between the two bombs, the Soviets, pursuant to the Yalta agreement, invaded Japanese-held Manchuria, and quickly defeated the Kwantung Army, which was the primary Japanese fighting force. ^[234] ^[235] The Red Army also captured Sakhalin Island and the Kuril Islands. On 15 August 1945 Japan surrendered, with the surrender documents finally signed aboard the deck of the American battleship USS *Missouri* on 2 September 1945, ending the war. ^[224]

Aftermath

The Allies established occupation administrations in Austria and Germany. The former became a neutral state, non-aligned with any political bloc. The latter was divided onto western and eastern occupation zones controlled by the Western Allies and the USSR, accordingly. A denazification program in Germany led to the prosecution of Nazi war criminals and the removal of ex-Nazis from power, although this policy moved towards amnesty and re-integration of ex-Nazis into West German society. [236] Germany lost a quarter of its pre-war (1937) territory, the eastern territories: Silesia, Neumark and most of Pomerania were taken over by Poland; East Prussia was divided between Poland and the USSR, followed by the expulsion of the 9 million Germans from these provinces, as well as of 3 million Germans from the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, to Germany. By the



The Supreme Commanders on 5 June 1945 in Berlin: Bernard Montgomery, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Georgy Zhukov and Jean de Lattre de Tassigny

1950s, every fifth West German was a refugee from the east. The USSR also took over the Polish provinces east of the Curzon line (from which 2 million Poles were expelled), [237] Eastern Romania, [238] [239] and part of eastern Finland [240] and three Baltic states. [241] [242]



Prime Minister Winston Churchill gives the "Victory" sign to crowds in London on Victory in Europe Day.

In an effort to maintain peace, [243] the Allies formed the United Nations, which officially came into existence on 24 October 1945, [244] and adopted The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, as a common standard for all member nations. [245] The alliance between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union had begun to deteriorate even before the war was over, [246] Germany had been *de facto* divided, and two independent states, Federal Republic of Germany and German Democratic Republic [247] were created within the borders of Allied and Soviet occupation zones, accordingly. The rest of Europe was also divided onto Western and Soviet spheres of influence. [248] Most eastern and central European countries fell into the Soviet sphere, which led to establishment of Communist led regimes, with full or partial support of the Soviet occupation authorities. As a result, Poland, Hungary, [249] Czechoslovakia, [250] Romania, Albania, [251] and East

Germany became Soviet Satellite states. Communist Yugoslavia conducted a fully independent policy causing tension with the USSR. $^{[252]}$

Post-war division of the world was formalised by two international military alliances, the United States-led NATO and the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact; [253] the long period of political tensions and military competition between them, the Cold War, would be accompanied by unprecedented arms race and proxy wars. [254]

In Asia, the United States occupied Japan and administrated Japan's former islands in the Western Pacific, while the Soviets annexed Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. [255] Korea, formerly under Japanese rule, was divided and occupied by the US in the South and the Soviet Union in the North between 1945 and 1948. Separate republics emerged on both sides of the 38th parallel in 1948, each claiming to be the legitimate government for all of Korea, which led ultimately to the Korean War. [256] In China, nationalist and communist forces resumed the civil war in June 1946. Communist forces were victorious and established the People's Republic of China on the mainland, while nationalist forces retreated to Taiwan in 1949. [257] In the Middle East, the Arab rejection of the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine



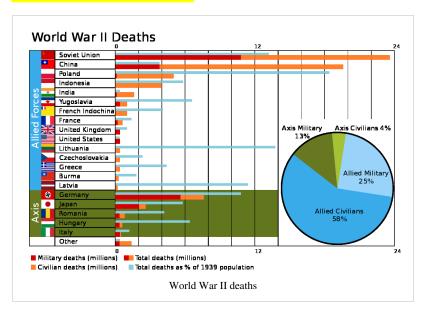
World map of colonization at the end of the Second World War in 1945. With the end of the war, the wars of national liberation ensued, leading to the creation of Israel, the often bloody decolonization of Asia and (somewhat later) of Africa.

and the creation of Israel marked the escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While the European colonial powers attempted to retain some or all of their colonial empires, their losses of prestige and resources during the war rendered this unsuccessful, leading to decolonisation. [258] [259]

The global economy suffered heavily from the war, although WWII participants were affected differently. The US emerged much richer than any other nation; it had a baby boom and by 1950 its gross domestic product per person was much higher than that of any of the other powers and it dominated the world economy. [260] [261] The UK and US pursued a policy of industrial disarmament in Western Germany in the years 1945–1948. [262] Due to international trade interdependencies this led to European economic stagnation and delayed European recovery for several years. [263] [264] Recovery began with the mid 1948 currency reform in Western Germany, and was sped up by the liberalization of European economic policy that the Marshall plan (1948–1951) both directly and indirectly caused. [265] [266] The post 1948 West German recovery has been called the German economic miracle. [267] Also the Italian [268] [269] and French economies rebounded. [270] By contrast, the United Kingdom was in a state of economic ruin, [271] and continued relative economic decline for decades. [272] The Soviet Union, despite enormous human and material losses, also experienced rapid increase in production in the immediate post-war era. [273] Japan experienced incredibly rapid economic growth, becoming one of the most powerful economies in the world by the 1980s. [274] China returned to its pre-war industrial production by 1952. [275]

Impact

Casualties and war crimes



Estimates for the total casualties of the war vary, because many deaths went unrecorded. Most suggest that some 60 million people died in the war, including about 20 million soldiers and 40 million civilians. [276] [277] [278] civilians died because of starvation, disease, massacres, bombing and deliberate genocide. The Soviet Union lost around 27 million people during the war, [279] including 8.7 million military and 19 million civilian deaths.^[280] One of every four Soviet citizens was killed or wounded in that war. [281] Germany sustained 5.3

million military losses, mostly on the Eastern Front and during the final battles in Germany. [282]

Of the total deaths in World War II approximately 85 percent—mostly Soviet and Chinese—were on the Allied side and 15 percent on the Axis side. Many of these deaths were caused by war crimes committed by German and Japanese forces in occupied territories. An estimated $11^{[283]}$ to $17^{[284]}$ million civilians died as a direct or indirect result of Nazi ideological policies, including the systematic genocide of around six million Jews during The Holocaust along with a further five million Roma, Slavs, homosexuals and other ethnic and minority groups. [285] Roughly 7.5 million civilians died in China under Japanese occupation, [286] and hundreds of thousands (varying estimates) of ethnic Serbs, along with gypsies and Jews, were murdered by the Axis-aligned Croatian Ustaše in what would become Yugoslavia, with retribution-related killings of Croatian civilians later in the war. [287]

The best-known Japanese atrocity was the Nanking Massacre, in which several hundred thousand Chinese civilians were raped and murdered. Between 3 million to more than 10 million civilians, mostly Chinese, were killed by the Japanese occupation forces. Mitsuyoshi Himeta reported 2.7 million casualties occurred during the *Sankō Sakusen*. General Yasuji Okamura implemented the policy in Heipei and Shantung. [290]

The Axis forces employed limited biological and chemical weapons. The Italians used mustard gas during their conquest of Abyssinia, while the Imperial Japanese Army used a variety of such weapons during their invasion and occupation of China (see Unit 731) [292] [293] and in early conflicts against the Soviets. [294] Both the Germans and Japanese tested such weapons against civilians [295] and, in some cases, on prisoners of war. [296]



Chinese civilians to be buried alive by Japanese soldiers.

While many of the Axis's acts were brought to trial in the world's first international tribunals, ^[297] incidents caused by the Allies were not. Examples of such Allied actions include population transfer in the Soviet Union and Japanese American internment in the United States; the Operation Keelhaul, ^[298] expulsion of Germans after World War II, mass rape of German women by Soviet Red Army; the Soviet Union's Katyn massacre, for which Germans faced

counter-accusations of responsibility. Large numbers of famine deaths can also be partially attributed to the war, such as the Bengal famine of 1943 and the Vietnamese famine of 1944–45. [299]

It has been suggested by some historians that the bombing of civilian areas in enemy territory, including Tokyo and most notably the German cities of Dresden, Hamburg and Cologne by Western Allies, [300] which resulted in the destruction of more than 160 cities and the deaths of more than 600,000 German civilians [301] be considered as war crimes.

Concentration camps and slave work

Further information: The Holocaust, Consequences of German Nazism, Japanese war crimes, and Allied war crimes during World War II

The Nazis were responsible for The Holocaust, the killing of approximately six million Jews (overwhelmingly Ashkenazim), as well as two million ethnic Poles and four million others who were deemed "unworthy of life" (including the disabled and mentally ill, Soviet POWs, homosexuals, Freemasons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Romani) as part of a programme of deliberate extermination. About 12 million, most of whom were Eastern Europeans, were employed in the German war economy as forced labourers. [302]



Dead bodies in the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp after liberation, possibly political prisoners or Soviet POWs

In addition to Nazi concentration camps, the Soviet gulags (labour camps) led to the death of citizens of occupied countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, as well as German prisoners of war (POWs) and even Soviet citizens who had been or were thought to be supporters of the Nazis. [303] Sixty percent of Soviet POWs of the Germans died during the war. [304] Richard Overy gives the number of 5.7 million Soviet POWs. Of those, 57 percent died or were killed, a total of 3.6 million. [305] Soviet ex-POWs and repatriated civilians were treated with great suspect as potential Nazi collaborators, and some of them were sent to GULAG upon check by NKVD. [306]

Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, many of which were used as labour camps, also had high death rates. The International Military Tribunal for the Far East found the death rate of Western prisoners was 27.1 percent (for American POWs, 37 percent), [307] seven times that of POWs under the Germans and Italians. [308] While 37,583 prisoners from the UK, 28,500 from the Netherlands, and 14,473

from United States were released after the surrender of Japan, the number for the Chinese was only 56. [309]

According to historian Zhifen Ju, at least five million Chinese civilians from northern China and Manchukuo were enslaved between 1935 and 1941 by the East Asia Development Board, or *Kōain*, for work in mines and war industries. After 1942, the number reached 10 million. The U.S. Library of Congress estimates that in Java, between 4 and 10 million *romusha* (Japanese: "manual laborers"), were forced to work by the Japanese military. About 270,000 of these Javanese laborers were sent to other Japanese-held areas in South East Asia, and only 52,000 were repatriated to Java. [311]

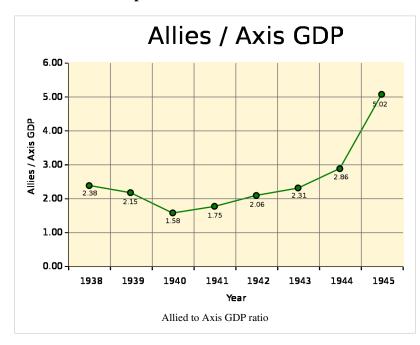
On 19 February 1942, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, interning thousands of Japanese, Italians, German Americans, and some emigrants from Hawaii who fled after the bombing of Pearl Harbor for the duration of the war. The U.S. and Canadian governments interned 150,000 Japanese-Americans, [312] [313] as well as nearly 11,000 German and Italian residents of the U.S. [312]

In accordance with the Allied agreement made at the Yalta conference millions of POWs and civilians were used as forced labor by the Soviet Union. ^[314] In Hungary's case, Hungarians were forced to work for the Soviet Union until 1955. ^[315]



Mistreated and starved prisoners in the Mauthausen camp, Austria, 1945

Home fronts and production





The Soviet T-34, the most-produced tank of the war, going to the front. Over 57,000 T-34s had been built in the USSR by 1945.

In Europe, before the outbreak of the war, the Allies had significant advantages in both population and economics. In 1938, the Western Allies (United Kingdom, France, Poland and British Dominions) had a 30 percent larger population and a 30 percent higher gross domestic product than the European Axis (Germany and Italy); if colonies are included, it then gives the Allies more than a 5:1 advantage in population and nearly 2:1 advantage in GDP. [316] In Asia at the same time, China had roughly six times the population of Japan, but only an 89 percent higher GDP; this is reduced to three times the population and only a 38 percent higher GDP if Japanese colonies are included.[316]

Though the Allies' economic and population advantages were largely mitigated during the initial rapid blitzkrieg attacks of Germany and Japan, they became the decisive factor by 1942, after the United States and Soviet Union joined the Allies, as the war largely settled into one of attrition. While the Allies' ability to out-produce the Axis is often attributed to the Allies having more

access to natural resources, other factors, such as Germany and Japan's reluctance to employ women in the labour force, [318] [319] Allied strategic bombing, [320] [321] and Germany's late shift to a war economy [322] contributed

significantly. Additionally, neither Germany nor Japan planned to fight a protracted war, and were not equipped to do so. [323] [324] To improve their production, Germany and Japan used millions of slave labourers; [325] Germany used about 12 million people, mostly from Eastern Europe, [302] while Japan pressed more than 18 million people in Far East Asia. [310] [311]

Occupation

In Europe, occupation came under two very different forms. In Western, Northern and Central Europe (France, Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries, and the annexed portions of Czechoslovakia) Germany established economic policies through which it collected roughly 69.5 billion reichmarks (27.8 billion US Dollars) by the end of the war; this figure does not include the sizable plunder of industrial products, military equipment, raw materials and other goods. Thus, the income from occupied nations was over 40 percent of the income Germany collected from taxation, a figure which increased to nearly 40 percent of total German income as the war went on. [327]



Soviet partisans hanged by German forces in January 1943

In the East, the much hoped for bounties of *Lebensraum* were never attained as fluctuating front-lines and Soviet scorched earth policies denied resources to the German invaders.^[328] Unlike in the West, the Nazi racial policy encouraged excessive brutality against what it considered to be the "inferior people" of Slavic descent; most German advances were thus followed by mass executions.^[329] Although resistance groups did form in most occupied territories, they did not significantly hamper German operations in either the East^[330] or the West^[331] until late 1943.

In Asia, Japan termed nations under its occupation as being part of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, essentially a Japanese hegemony which it claimed was for purposes of liberating colonised peoples. Although Japanese forces were originally welcomed as liberators from European domination in many territories, their excessive brutality turned local public opinions against them within weeks. During Japan's initial conquest it captured 4000000 barrels (m³) of oil (~5.5×10⁵ tonnes) left behind by retreating Allied forces, and by 1943 was able to get production in the Dutch East Indies up to 50 million barrels (~6.8×10⁶ t), 76 percent of its 1940 output rate. [333]

Advances in technology and warfare

Aircraft were used for reconnaissance, as fighters, bombers and ground-support, and each role was advanced considerably. Innovation included airlift (the capability to quickly move limited high-priority supplies, equipment and personnel); and of strategic bombing (the bombing of civilian areas to destroy industry and morale). Anti-aircraft weaponry also advanced, including defences such as radar and surface-to-air artillery, such as the German 88 mm gun. The use of the jet aircraft was pioneered, and though late introduction meant it had little impact, it led to jets becoming standard in worldwide air forces. [336]



U-995 Type VIIC at the German navy memorial at Laboe. Between 1939 and 1945, 3,500 Allied merchant ships (gross tonnage 14.5 million) were sunk at a cost of 783 German U-boats.

Advances were made in nearly every aspect of naval warfare, most notably with aircraft carriers and submarines. Although at the start of the war aeronautical warfare had relatively little success, actions at Taranto, Pearl Harbor, the South China Sea and the Coral Sea established the carrier as the dominant capital ship in place of the battleship. [337] [338] [339] In the Atlantic, escort carriers proved to be a vital part of Allied convoys, increasing the effective protection radius and helping to close the Mid-Atlantic gap. [340] Carriers were also more economical than battleships due to the relatively low cost of aircraft [341] and their not requiring to be as heavily armoured. [342] Submarines, which had proved to be an effective weapon during the

First World War^[343] were anticipated by all sides to be important in the second. The British focused development on anti-submarine weaponry and tactics, such as sonar and convoys, while Germany focused on improving its offensive capability, with designs such as the Type VII submarine and wolfpack tactics.^[344] Gradually, improving Allied technologies such as the Leigh light, hedgehog, squid, and homing torpedoes proved victorious.

Land warfare changed from the static front lines of World War I to increased mobility and combined arms. The tank, which had been used predominantly for infantry support in the First World War, had evolved into the primary weapon. [345] In the late 1930s, tank design was considerably more advanced than it had been during World War I, [346] and advances continued throughout the war in increasing speed, armour and firepower.

At the start of the war, most commanders thought enemy tanks should be met by tanks with superior specifications. ^[347] This idea was challenged by the poor performance of the relatively light early tank guns against armour, and German doctrine of avoiding tank-versus-tank combat. This, along with Germany's use of combined arms, were among the key elements of their highly successful blitzkrieg tactics across Poland and France. ^[345] Many means of destroying tanks, including indirect artillery, anti-tank guns (both towed and self-propelled), mines, short-ranged infantry antitank weapons, and other tanks were utilised. ^[347] Even with large-scale mechanisation, infantry remained the backbone of all forces, ^[348] and throughout the war, most infantry were equipped similarly to World War I. ^[349]

The portable machine gun spread, a notable example being the German MG42, and various submachine guns which were suited to close combat in urban and jungle settings. [349] The assault rifle, a late war development incorporating many features of the rifle and submachine gun, became the standard postwar infantry weapon for most armed forces. [350] [351]

Most major belligerents attempted to solve the problems of complexity and security presented by using large codebooks for cryptography with the use of ciphering machines, the most well known being the German Enigma machine. [352] SIGINT (*signals intelligence*) was the countering process of decryption, with the notable examples being the Allied breaking of Japanese naval codes [353] and British Ultra, which was derived from methodology given to Britain by the Polish Cipher Bureau, which had been decoding Enigma for seven years before the war. [354] Another aspect of military intelligence was the use of deception, which the Allies used to great effect, such as in operations Mincemeat and Bodyguard. [353] [355] Other technological and engineering feats achieved during, or as a result of, the war include the world's first programmable computers (Z3, Colossus, and ENIAC), guided missiles and modern rockets, the Manhattan Project's development of nuclear weapons, the development of artificial harbours and oil pipelines under the English Channel. [356]

Notes

Footnotes

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