

The Second World War

The Second World War broke out in 1939. The damage and destruction caused by this war surpassed all other wars.

The Second World War-Causes

Main causes of the Second World War were

Dissatisfaction with the Treaty of Versailles

- There was dissatisfaction in Italy and Germany with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Several harsh restrictions were imposed on Germany. It had a huge war indemnity and its mineral-rich areas of Saar and Rhineland were occupied by France.
- All German colonies in Asia and Africa were forcefully captured. Her military power was also reduced.
- All these harsh terms led to the emergence of militant nationalism.



The terms of the Treaty of Versailles created discontent in Germany and Italy.

Rise of Fascism and Nazism

- Fascism rose in Italy and Nazism spread in Germany. Both believed in the existence of a totalitarian state and opposed democracy.
- While Italy under Mussolini aimed at reviving the lost glory of the old Roman Empire, Germany wanted to re-establish the prestige of Germany in the international field. This could be done only by fighting wars. The Second World War thus became inevitable.

Policy of Appeasement

- The policy of appeasement refers to overlooking the aggressiveness of other countries. It means to accept the hostile demands of an aggressive nation to gain peace.
- The policy of appeasement was followed by Britain and France towards Germany and Italy as they thought that the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were very harsh for the two nations.
- Britain and France also wanted to check the growth of communism. They feared that Germany might become a communist power. Thus, they took no action when Germany militarised Rhineland and captured Austria and Czechoslovakia.

Japanese Invasion of China

- The Japanese government was following the policy of expansionism. It occupied Manchuria despite the opposition of the League and was showing aggression in other parts of China.
- No action was taken when China appealed to the League for help.
- Japan had joined the Berlin–Rome–Tokyo Axis to further expand its power in the region. It also conquered the British and American territories in China.



Japanese invasion of China

The western powers followed the policy of appeasement as they thought that Japanese aggression would further weaken China.

Failure of the League of Nations

- The League of Nations was created after the First World War to prevent future wars. USA refused to join the League, and the powerful member nations followed the policy of appeasement and were not interested in maintaining the principle of collective responsibility.

- The league took no action against the offending countries when
 - Poland seized a part of Lithuania in 1920
 - Japan captured Manchuria (China) in 1931
 - Italy annexed Ethiopia (Africa) in 1936
- As a result, many small nations lost faith in the League, and they entered alliances with other countries to protect their interests.

Invasion of Poland by Hitler (Immediate Cause)

- The invasion of Poland by Hitler in September 1939 was an immediate cause of the war. He occupied Poland because of the following reasons:
 - The Treaty of Versailles divided Germany into two parts. A part of German land route to Poland and the Port of Danzig were conceded to Poland. Germany wanted to regain her lost territories.
 - As the city of Danzig was mainly inhabited by the Germans, Hitler could easily connect with East Prussia.
 - Germany accused Poland of committing atrocities against German nationals in Poland.
- On 1 September 1939, the German armies marched into Poland. When France and Britain gave an ultimatum to Germany, the latter attacked France. On 3rd September, France and Britain declared war on Germany, marking the beginning of the Second World War.

Spread and Cause of the War

Soon, war broke out in all of Europe. Germany, Italy and Japan formed an alliance and came to be known as **Axis powers** and Britain, France and the USA came to be known as the **Allied powers**.

Soviet Russia also attacked Eastern Poland and occupied territories which were part of Russia earlier. Almost all countries were engulfed in the war. Only Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal and Turkey remained neutral.

- Germany conquered Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium by May 1940.
- Germany launched rapid military strikes on enemy lines. This came to be known as *blitzkrieg* which means a 'lightning war'.
- **Fall of France:** The German armies marched into France and by 14 June 1940, Paris fell into the hands of the German forces.
- **The Battle of Britain:** In the Battle of Britain, the German air force began bombing the British territories. In retaliation, the Royal Air Force of Britain conducted air raids on German territories.
- In June 1941, Hitler began the invasion of Soviet Russia against the peace agreement which was signed between Germany and Russia.
- **Battle of Stalingrad:** In August 1942, Hitler targeted Stalingrad, but the frigid temperature and counter attack by the Soviet troops forced the Germans to surrender. Thus, Germany lost the Battle of Stalingrad.
- **Battle of Berlin:** In April 1945, the Germans were caught between the British and Americans on one side and Russians on the other. When the Allies marched to Berlin to capture it, Hitler committed suicide, and on 7 May 1945, the last of the German armies surrendered.
- 8 May was celebrated as the **Day of Celebration** in Europe.

The Entry of USA into the War

America remained neutral during the beginning of the war. It had a naval fleet at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. Japan was fearful of the American naval fleet at Pearl Harbour. On 7 December 1941, Japan carried a surprise aerial attack on the American naval fleet at Pearl Harbour. The battle ships were sunk and important airfields were attacked. However, Japan did not destroy the ship repair facilities at the base and did not destroy the US carriers. About 3700 people were killed in the attack.

This incident aroused the indignation of the Americans, and thus, the latter joined the Second World War on 8 December 1941.

Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

- The Americans began their drive to liberate the islands in the Southwest Pacific. The American navy and air force destroyed the Japanese fleet, but Japan firmly held its position in Manchuria and in other places of China.
- The Japanese in the Philippines were offering stiff resistance to the American forces.
- The US by this time had developed an atomic bomb. After much debate, a decision to drop bombs on Japan was taken.
- On 6 August 1945, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. It destroyed half of the city and thousands of people were killed. The American government asked Japan to surrender, but the latter refused.
- USA dropped another atomic bomb on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945. The Japanese government surrendered without any conditions. This brought an end to the Second World War.

Damages caused by the War

- This was the deadliest war as over 50 million people including civilians and soldiers died in it. Apart from these, 12 million people died in concentration camps.
- The population size of many countries was reduced. While Poland lost about 20% of its population, the Soviet Union lost about 10% of its population.
- Heavy economic losses were suffered by the nations which participated in the war. Many colonies such as India, Myanmar and Sri Lanka also participated in the war on the side of the Allies.

Consequences of the War

The consequences of the war were

Defeat of the Axis Powers

- The axis powers—Germany, Italy and Japan—were defeated in the war. Germany faced the following consequences of the war:
 - Germany was divided into two zones—West Germany and East Germany. West Germany was administered by Britain, France and the USA with its capital at Bonn. It followed capitalism.
 - East Germany was occupied by the Soviet Union with East Berlin as its capital. It followed socialist ideologies.
- Japan and Italy were not divided into zones, but their military power was considerably reduced. The American army occupied Japan until 1952. After 1952, the Japanese had to administer their own affairs.
All territories which were seized by Japan were taken away.

Formation of the UN

- The United Nations was formed in 1945 to maintain international peace and security and to prevent the occurrence of any future wars.
- The heads of three powerful countries—President Roosevelt of America, Prime Minister Churchill of Britain and Stalin of Soviet Union convened a conference of representatives of all nations at San Francisco and drew up the 'Charter of the United Nations'. This led to the establishment of the United Nations.



Flag of the United Nations

Independence of Many Asian and African Nations

After the Second World War, many countries became independent. Some countries which became independent after the war were India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, China and Ghana.

Cold War

- USA and Soviet Union had fought together during the Second World War. But by the end of the war, ideological differences began to appear between both nations.
- While USA was following the capitalist model of economy, Soviet Union was following communism. This resulted in ideological differences between both countries.
- Although both countries did not engage in an actual fight with each other, there was uneasy political tension between the two. Both countries followed policies to strengthen themselves and to weaken the other. This period of uneasy tension and political instability is known as the **Cold War**.
- Both countries formed alliances and began piling up nuclear weapons. There were economic warfare, propagandas and proxy wars between the two countries. Although USA and the Soviet Union never fought a war with each other, they were extremely hostile to the other. Two blocs were formed:
 - **The Democratic and Capitalist Bloc:** It was led by the USA. The bloc comprised Britain, France, Italy, Canada, Australia, Greece, Pakistan and Turkey. It was also known as the Western Bloc. The countries in this bloc believed in liberal democracy and granting of all rights to the citizens. The Western Bloc criticised the communist ideology.
 - **The Communist Bloc:** This bloc was led by USSR. It was also known as the Eastern bloc or the Soviet Bloc. They criticised capitalist economy as they believed that it was against the interests of the working and poor classes. Communists also criticised western style of democracy as they felt that it was meant only for the rich and the upper middle class. Countries which were part of this bloc were Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania.

Thus, a period of uneasy tension followed after the Second World War. However, effort was made by every country (involved in the politics of the Cold War) not to engage in direct war with a country of the opposing camp.