

## TURMOIL AND WAR: 1914-1945

World War I drastically altered the economic, social, and political order and left disillusionment in its wake. At the end of World War I, many problems remained unresolved, which led to extended conflict among the nations of Europe. Complicating matters was the fact that revolution in Russia had brought into power a Marxist government that western powers perceived as a major threat to European stability. Any shred of optimism disintegrated with the Great Depression, a global economic collapse. Fascist governments grew stronger in nations afflicted by great turmoil: Italy, Spain, and Germany. Civil war in Spain foreshadowed the full-scale conflict that would emerge at the end of the 1930s. Efforts by France and Great Britain to avoid another European war were thwarted by the aggressive intent of Nazi Germany. Only through the combined efforts of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union was Germany defeated and peace restored to Europe, but by then, millions were dead and Europe was once again divided.

### KEY TERMS

Allied powers	fascism	New Economic Policy (NEP)	totalitarianism
appeasement	final solution	Normandy invasion	total war
authoritarian state	<i>fuhrerprinzip</i>	Nuremberg laws	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
Axis powers	general strike	propaganda	Treaty of Locarno
blitzkrieg	Great Depression	Schlieffen Plan	Treaty of Versailles
Bolsheviks	Hiroshima	Soviets	trench warfare
Cold War	League of Nations	Spanish Civil War	unconditional surrender
collectivization	<i>lebensraum</i>	Holocaust	war communism
conscription	mandates	Stalin grad	War Guilt Clause
Dadaism	National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazis)	Surrealism	Weimar Germany
Dawes Plan			Yalta

### KEY CONCEPTS

- Unprepared for war, Russia collapsed into revolution in 1917—first against the tsar and then against the provisional government—and finally a bitter civil war erupted. By 1921, Lenin ruled the USSR using a communist system, the first nation in the world to adopt communism as its national ideology.
- Modernism in the arts reflected the anxiety present in society, and artists no longer intended to realistically depict the world around them. As individual consciousness became the source of meaning in the world, artists hoped to capture their inner feelings and their own vision of reality in their works.
- At the end of World War I, communism had taken root in the Soviet Union, Germany was infuriated by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and aggressive fascist governments were undermining peace. European leaders failed to prevent another catastrophic conflict, and Europe plunged into World War II. Even more destructive than World War I, it left Europe divided between a pro-democratic West and a Soviet-backed East.
- The years 1919-1945 were marked by both optimism and great disillusionment. Europeans made economic progress during the 1920s, only to see it obliterated by the Great Depression. Authoritarian states appealed to many searching for hope and order in a bleak world. World War II brought substantial hardship, but European economies rebounded and went on to reach new economic heights following the war.
- Artists and intellectuals reflected the despair of the interwar years. German expressionists focused on the suffering of, and damages to, humanity caused by the First World War, Dadaists expressed a contempt for Western traditions, and surrealists portrayed an illogical and disturbing world in which objects were divorced from their normal context and the irrational became tangible. Traditional codes of behavior were also overturned, as women and youth sought greater freedom.

For a full discussion of the period 1914-1945, see *Western Civilization*, 8th and 9th editions, Chapters 25-27.

### THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

In the summer of 1914, myriad factors came together to unleash one of the great tragedies in world history.

A byproduct of nineteenth-century liberalism, nationalism fed intense rivalries in Europe. National honor was a high priority of European leaders, most of whom were

influenced by bombastic military leaders, and diplomacy was based on the principles of nationalism.

Many historians argue that European leaders used warfare to remedy domestic social problems, such as the push by minority groups – including the Serbs, Irish, and Poles – for political independence, and the socialist labor movement across Europe.

So dependent on the military, European powers created some of the largest armies known to mankind. Advances in transportation, communication, and public health allowed for armies of nearly one million troops. With such substantial forces, some European nations used conscription to force men to join, and governments depended on military leadership to make political decisions.

On June 28, 1914, Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife, Sophia, were assassinated in Sarajevo by a Bosnian nationalist. The Austrian government wanted to use the act to punish all Serbian nationalists. Emperor William II gave Austria a “blank check” – Germany’s “full support” for any reprisal against Serbia. Austria then sent an ultimatum so extreme that Serbia had no choice but to reject it. Austria declared war on Serbia, trusting that the conflict would be limited in scope and duration.

Mobilization is complex, demanding detailed planning and precise execution. Russia had the largest army in Europe and mobilization plans for war against both Germany and Austria. When Tsar Nicholas II called for a partial mobilization against Austria, he was told that would be impossible. The resulting full mobilization provoked Germany to declare war on Russia.

With the formation of the Triple Entente, Germany faced the probability of a two-front war. Its strategy for such a scenario was the Schlieffen Plan, which called for the German army to strike quickly against the French, taking Paris and forcing the French to surrender, and then turning quickly to the east and defeating the Russian army before it had a chance to fully mobilize. With the Schlieffen Plan, Germany was forced to declare war on France, which led Great Britain to declare war on Germany because Belgian neutrality had been violated by the German march toward Paris. In a matter of days, the great powers of Europe were at war. Across the continent, news of the war prompted enthusiasm. Nationalists welcomed it – even diehard socialists favored war.

## THE GREAT WAR

Eager troops marched off, sure they would be home for Christmas. But both the British and the Russians mobilized quickly. On the outskirts of Paris, the German advance was halted. The machine gun completely changed warfare. Its deadly efficiency spurred the digging of massive trench systems that would eventually stretch across much of Western Europe. The defining feature of World War I would be trench warfare.

In Eastern Europe, the Germans scored an early victory over the Russians, and then joined forces with the Austrians to push Russia back. With over two million soldiers dead, Russia

was no longer a serious problem to the Central Powers. Germany turned back to the west. Both sides found that frontal assaults to break through enemy lines were fruitless as wave after wave of soldiers was mowed down.

As the war turned into a stalemate, new allies were sought. When the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers, the Allied forces suffered a disastrous defeat in an attempt to establish a front near Constantinople. The British, led by Lawrence of Arabia, encouraged Arab leaders to revolt against the Ottomans, and by 1918, the Ottoman Empire was finished. The Allies also attacked German colonial holdings in Africa and Asia.

In 1917, the United States joined the war, abandoning neutrality when the Germans resumed unrestricted submarine warfare.

War on such a massive scale makes extraordinary demands on a nation. Governments centralized their powers, manipulated their economies, used propaganda to hold public support, and enlisted the citizenry to produce goods for the war effort. As a result, society changed in many ways during World War I. For example, labor unions gained more power because a satisfied workforce is needed to keep the war machine rolling; in addition, governments curtailed civil liberties, announcing that anyone speaking out against the war would face charges of treason.

Women also were significantly affected by the war. Wartime contingencies forced them to take jobs usually held by men in both offices and heavy industry. They also gained the right to vote. Many Europeans were persuaded that granting women suffrage would lend a moral dimension to national politics and perhaps prevent another war.

## REVOLUTION

The war brought misery to everyone, at home and on the front lines. As the death toll mounted, angry citizens openly challenged the status quo. In Russia the discontent led to full-scale revolution.

Russian dissatisfaction with tsarist rule had been felt long before World War I. But the war proved a catastrophe for Russia, whose huge army had been ineffective, as had Nicholas II and his wife, Alexandra, who ruled while Nicholas was at the front. Led by resentful top government officials, disenchantment with the monarchy grew. With working-class mothers leading the way, tens of thousands marched through Petrograd protesting the war and the near-starvation that many Russians faced. The army refused to put down the protest. On March 15, 1917, Nicholas II abdicated.

A liberal provisional government was established but was challenged at the outset by councils of workers and soldiers, divided between two factions: the moderate Mensheviks and more radical Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, called for the complete destruction of the capitalist system.

During the summer of 1917, the provisional government decided to remain in the war, launching an offensive that failed significantly. The Bolsheviks seized power and made

good on their earlier promises: land was given to the peasants, factories were turned over to the workers, and civil rights were accorded to women. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk ended Russia's involvement in the war.

### AP Tip

The Russian Revolution is often paired with the French and American Revolutions in compare-and-contrast questions in the AP exam. Be sure you understand how the fear and distrust that grew out of the rivalry between Russia and the West emerged during this time period. These attitudes shaped much of twentieth-century history.

Success did not come easily for the Communists (as the Bolsheviks were soon called), as various groups challenged Soviet rule. This culminated in a bloody three-year civil war. Across Russia, the Red Army fought against fragmented anti-Communist forces unable to effectively unite (the White Army). Strongly united behind a common purpose that allowed for coherent military strategy, the Communist forces won.

The Communists also had success with a policy of “war communism” that allowed them to nationalize industry, control agricultural production, and centralize government. A secret police force, the Cheka, was called on to eliminate all opposition. Thousands were executed, including the entire royal family.

## THE WAR ENDS

When Russia withdrew from the war, the Germans launched a massive offensive on the western front. At first the German gamble appeared to be successful, but with the arrival of fresh troops from America, the German advance was halted. As more American troops entered the battlefields, German leaders realized that victory was impossible. William II abdicated, and on November 11, 1918, a new German government signed an armistice.

The war devastated Europe. Some 9 million soldiers died; 22 million were wounded. The social fabric of European society was torn apart. Germany and Austria-Hungary experienced political upheaval. In Germany, radical socialists vying for political supremacy lost when leaders of the moderates instructed the army to kill the radicals' leaders. The senselessness of the war led many Europeans to search for peace. They found a voice in U.S. president Woodrow Wilson, who drew up an outline for lasting peace, the Fourteen Points. Key provisions were the elimination of secret diplomacy, the right of self-determination, and a “general association of nations” to help ensure democracy around the world.

## THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

Wilson's popularity throughout Europe did not soften the ambitions of the victors. Meeting in Paris in early 1919, David Lloyd George of Britain and Georges Clemenceau of France agreed that Germany should be held responsible for

the war and pay harsh reparations. The British aimed to secure their overseas empire, while the French wanted to protect themselves from future German aggression. After much compromise, they agreed to Wilson's League of Nations. On June 28, 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed. The Germans were outraged by the terms, particularly Article 231, the so-called War Guilt Clause.

Eastern Europe was also reconfigured. New nation-states were created to satisfy ethnic nationalism and serve as potential allies to France and Britain. Austria-Hungary was dismantled; Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia emerged as new nations, while the Balkans were reshaped to provide land for Romania and Serbia. The Ottoman Empire was dissolved into new Arab states; however, Britain and France controlled them as mandates on behalf of the newly created League of Nations.

The peace process put into place a structure that might have prevented future world wars. But protecting peace would require a vigorous effort by the global powers, and when the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, it was doomed. When the United States retreated into isolationism, Britain followed suit, and France found itself alone to face the wrath of Germany.

## A PRECARIOUS PEACE

One of the most difficult post-war situations involved Germany and France. In the name of national security, France insisted that Germany make reparations for World War I. After an initial payment, Germany realized that reparations were not economically or politically feasible. To force Germany to pay, France occupied the Ruhr valley, precipitating a German economic disaster. The Deutsche Mark became worthless, and German extremists grew in popularity.

To address the situation, an international commission proposed the Dawes Plan, calling for a reduction in reparations and U.S. loans for German economic recovery. The Dawes Plan relied on foreign investment, primarily from the United States. Although Germany's economy improved in the short run, the dependency on foreign economies proved detrimental at the onset of the Great Depression. France and Germany kept up momentum with further diplomacy, resulting in the Treaty of Locarno (1925), which established Germany's western borders. The agreement produced great optimism, later reinforced by the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which was designed to outlaw war as an “instrument of national policy.” These diplomatic measures, however, were unenforceable.

### AP Tip

Be sure you understand the weaknesses of post-war Germany and the Weimar Republic. Especially important is the growth of extremism in response to the economic and political instability of the 1920s and 1930s. These factors are key to understanding the rise of Nazi Germany.

## THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Economies in the United States and much of Europe flourished during the 1920s, giving many government leaders the impression that the market economy was impervious to decline. This was utterly disproved when the American stock market crashed in 1929. American investors pulled their money from European banks, forcing major European financial institutions to fail. As governments raised tariffs to protect home industry, the global market came to a standstill and nations around the world suffered.

Unemployment rapidly set upon nations, most severely in Germany. Long bread lines became a common sight, as Europeans took the brunt of the international economic crisis. Governments that had sung the praises of the free market now were reluctant to provide aid for citizens in dire circumstances. Demagogues who aroused the emotions and prejudices of the people offered simplistic explanations to the disastrous problems in many nations and attracted many new followers.

## THE RETREAT FROM DEMOCRACY

The myriad problems in the 1920s gave rise to stark social divisions that threatened national cohesion and democratic forms of governance. Many European countries embraced totalitarianism, establishing dictatorships that controlled the political, economic, and social spheres. Propaganda was one of the most important methods of taking control. Techniques of manipulation that had been developed during the war were adopted by extremists to convince a desperate public that only with a single leader and a single party could a nation's destiny be achieved. Democracy was derided as ineffective – even unhelpful.

Fascism took root in nations that had suffered humiliation and economic deprivation. Fascist leaders blended the principles of totalitarian rule with extreme nationalism to produce a form of government that denied individual freedoms in favor of the collective will of the masses or, in the cases of Italy and Germany, for the good of the state or the nation.

## FASCIST ITALY

Italy suffered greatly during World War I. When the country's demands for new territory after the war were rejected, extremists made the case that Italy had been cheated. In addition, high unemployment among returning soldiers set the stage for the rise of a fascist government.

Benito Mussolini led the fascist movement in Italy. Having been expelled from the Socialist Party, Mussolini formed the *Fascio di Combattimento* (League of Combat) in 1919 and took advantage of rising anticommunism to gain the support of middle-class industrialists. His supporters soon resorted to armed violence. Large numbers of war veterans formed black-shirted paramilitary groups that set out to intimidate political opposition.

Emboldened, the Fascists marched to Rome to seize

power in 1922. The gamble was successful, and Mussolini was named prime minister of Italy. Within three years, Mussolini had established a fascist dictatorship. The Fascists, however, never achieved total domination. For example, the mass media was not completely cooperative, and Italian youth rebelled against forced militarization. Even the Church, through the Lateran Accords, demanded recognition as the “sole religion of the state” in return for the Vatican's support of the Fascists.

## NAZI GERMANY

Among the many problems faced by the democratic Weimar Republic, established in Germany after the war, were weak leadership and severe economic problems exacerbated by the Great Depression. These difficulties provided an opening for the Nazi party, led by Adolf Hitler. A failed Austrian artist, Hitler had served in World War I and then moved to Munich to get involved in politics. He organized the National Socialist German Workers' Party – or Nazis – in 1921; it grew quickly in strength.

Confident of their popular support, Hitler and his followers staged an uprising at a Munich beer hall in 1923. The uprising failed, and Hitler was arrested and sentenced to prison, where he wrote *Mein Kampf*, an autobiographical account of the Nazi party and its underlying ideology. Hitler stressed German nationalism, anti-Semitism, anti-communism, and *Lebensraum*, the notion that superior nations have the right to expand their borders.

To further his goals, Hitler appealed to Germany's youth. As the economy continued to plummet during the 1930s and the Nazis gained seats in the Reichstag, members of Germany's elite were eager to cooperate with them. Wealthy industrialists and landed aristocrats envisioned Hitler as a pawn in their efforts to thwart the communists. Within months, however, the Nazis had used the German parliament to secure a dictatorship. By 1934, Hitler had become sole ruler of Germany and leader of the Third Reich.

### AP Tips

The Nazis succeeded for many reasons – discontent with the Weimar government; anger over the Treaty of Versailles; and economic factors, including the dramatic increase in German employment rates, a result of efforts to rearm. In addition, the German military elite agreed with Hitler's plan for expanding the country's borders. Finally, strong anticommunist factions across Western Europe, especially in France and Britain, supported Hitler's foreign policy.

Totalitarianism in Germany was based on Aryan racial superiority, and the German people would lead a global movement to assert Aryan dominance. The Nazis skillfully used public demonstrations to suggest mass support, and as in fascist Italy, women and children played an important role in advancing totalitarianism. Virulent anti-Semitism quickly became official government policy. The rights of Jews were limited by the Nuremberg Laws, which called for the political, social, and legal separation of Germany's Jewish population

from Aryan Germany. By the end of the 1930s, German Jews were being sent to concentration camps.

## THE SOVIET UNION

The communist victory in the Russian Civil War brought totalitarian government. The war's devastation forced communist leader Vladimir Lenin to institute his New Economic Policy in 1921, allowing for smallscale capitalism. In 1922, the Communists created the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Soviet Union. Lenin's death in 1924 set off a power struggle for Soviet leadership. Two camps formed within the Communist Party; the Left, led by Leon Trotsky, called for international revolution, while the Right called for "socialism at home." Joseph Stalin, party general secretary, used his position to gain control of the party, and Trotsky was soon expelled from it.

Stalin instituted radical measures to transform the Soviet Union into a modern industrial state. Five-year Plans outlined production goals, emphasizing heavy industry at the expense of agriculture. Propaganda campaigns were used to inspire workers, whose wages and working conditions declined throughout the period. Peasants were forced onto collective farms, and all private property was eliminated. Those who fought this policy met with severe retributionthe government even forced famines in recalcitrant regions such as the Ukraine. Those who openly disagreed with Soviet policy – be they military leaders or peasants – were sent to forced labor camps.

## THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The Great Depression gave rise to political instability in Spain until 1936, when the Popular Front, a coalition of antifascist parties including democrats and radical socialists, took control. The Spanish military rebelled, however, and launched a three-year civil war.

Led by General Francisco Franco, the right-wing rebels were aided by the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany. Hitler, in particular, saw the civil war as an opportunity to test military weapons and strategy. The Popular Front requested assistance from other European nations, but because it counted socialists among its members, only the Soviet Union would lend support.

Franco's forces overwhelmed the republican army. Many civilians died as a result of indiscriminate aerial bombing raids – the subject matter of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. With victory, Franco became dictator of Spain, a position he would hold until his death in 1975.

## CULTURE DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS

Two factors greatly changed European society during the interwar years: the advent of the eight-hour workday gave Europeans time to participate in leisure activities, once the exclusive domain of the wealthy; and the development of innovations, such as radio and motion pictures. Radio broadcasts became a familiar feature in much of Europe during the 1920s, and by the 1930s, going to the movies on a

weekly basis was a common activity.

Authoritarian governments grasped the significance of this new technology and quickly used it to control the masses. Radio broadcasts or motion pictures were ideal media for fascist propaganda. The 1934 documentary by German director Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will*, presented a Nazi political rally in Nuremberg in a sympathetic light meant to exploit viewer emotions.

Artists working in the postwar years were inspired by the war's destruction. Abstract art was embraced, and Dadaism and Surrealism emerged. Dadaists set out to create "anti-art," to reflect what they perceived as the insanity of life. Surrealists including Salvador Dali explored irrational thought and the world of the subconscious. Literature was influenced by Sigmund Freud's theories, many of which became part of the cultural landscape during the 1920s. Writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf used "stream of consciousness" to capture their fictional characters' thoughts through inner dialogues. Joyce's *Ulysses*, published in 1922, follows a day in the life of an ordinary Dubliner, through inner dialogues that underscore the complexity of human existence.

## THE ROAD TO WAR

In the long run, Hitler was determined to conquer Russia and its perceived inferior Slavic peoples. In Hitler's mind, the Russian Revolution had brought forth a weak government controlled by Jews. By invading Russia, Hitler could provide the German people with needed land (and oil) and use the Slavic people as slave labor. But first Hitler had to embark on a "diplomatic revolution" that would break Germany free from the confines of the Versailles Treaty and allow it to gain valuable territory in Eastern Europe.

The British especially turned to appeasement. When Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, he met with no military opposition from the French, who refused to confront Germany without first gaining the support of the British. By the end of 1936, Hitler had scrapped the Treaty of Versailles and formed military alliances with Italy and Japan. Neville Chamberlain, an ardent appeaser elected British Prime Minister in 1937, believed that the success of the British empire depended on German cooperation. Emboldened, Hitler carried out the *Anschluss* – the annexing of Austria – with no interference.

In 1938, British and French leaders met with Hitler in Munich to discuss Hitler's demand to annex the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia. Agreeing to all of Hitler's desires, Chamberlain declared that he had achieved "peace in our time." Recognizing Western democracies' lack of will, Hitler took all of Czechoslovakia. Next on Hitler's list was Poland. To invade Poland, he had to contend with the Soviet Union. In August of 1939, Hitler and Stalin signed the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, which divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence, and included the separation of Poland. On September 1, 1939, German forces invaded Poland. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

## **WAR**

In preparing for war, the Germans developed a new form of military warfare called Blitzkrieg, or “lightning war.” The idea was to knock out the enemy quickly through coordinated air strikes and mechanized infantry attacks. Air and ground assaults were launched with great success across Western Europe. The Germans conquered Poland within a month and divided it with the Soviets, who themselves had overtaken eastern Poland. After a period of inactivity, known as the “phony war,” the Germans resumed attacks on Western Europe in the spring. German troops quickly conquered Northern Europe, while the French surrendered three-fifths of their own nation to the Germans and placed the remaining territory under the authoritarian rule of Marshal Petain in the town of Vichy.

Once the war began, the SS started imposing Hitler’s Final Solution – the complete annihilation of the Jewish people of Europe. Many European Jews were sent to ghettos, and special strike forces exterminated entire Jewish villages in Eastern Europe. Before long, Hitler would call for the creation of death camps where Jews – along with Gypsies, Slavs, homosexuals, and the infirm – could be annihilated systematically.

British dissatisfaction forced Chamberlain to resign. Winston Churchill, the next British prime minister, despised Hitler and refused to capitulate. Hitler would have to invade. A successful amphibious assault would require control of the air, so the Germans launched a massive air campaign. At the start, British military bases and communication centers were targeted, but Hitler changed tactics: to destroy morale, he ordered the bombing of cities. In fact, however, morale subsequently soared. Churchill convinced Britons to “never surrender.”

Thwarted in Britain, Hitler turned elsewhere, sending German troops to North Africa to aid the Italian army. But his true ambition was to conquer the Soviet Union, and he was confident that his superb army could defeat the ill-trained, poorly led Soviet forces. Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, but the Soviets resisted, and by December, the Germans were bogged down at the start of an unusually harsh winter.

## **PEARL HARBOR**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan had worked to become a world power through industrialization. The Great Depression and ensuing economic crisis gave more influence to the Japanese military, which encouraged a policy of expansion in the Pacific Rim.

In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria and began an encroachment that led to full-scale war with the Chinese in 1937. Interested in Soviet-controlled Siberia, Japan formed an alliance with Hitler, and then turned its attention to European holdings to the south. This led to reprisals from the United States, which, in turn, prompted the Japanese surprise attack on the American naval fleet housed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii,

on December 7, 1941. The next day, the United States declared war on Japan. Three days later, Hitler declared war on the United States, bringing America into the European conflict.

## **TURNING POINTS**

The U.S. entry into the war resulted in the Grand Alliance among the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Although suspicious of one another, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin recognized that they had to unite to defeat Germany. Agreeing to secure an unconditional surrender from the Axis powers, they ensured a unified front and made an approach of divide and conquer challenging for Hitler.

World War II demanded even more from the home front than World War I. Every facet of society was influenced by the needs of the military. Large numbers of workers were given jobs in factories and on farms. In Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, women were recruited for the industrial workforce. Only in Germany did the female workforce not increase substantially, because conquered regions had become a source of forced labor there.

In the spring of 1942, the Axis nations were at their zenith of power: Japan controlled much of the Pacific, while Germany controlled most of Europe and North Africa. But the tide soon began to change. In North Africa, combined British and American forces defeated Erwin Rommel’s Afrika Korps. In the Pacific, U.S. forces knocked out four Japanese aircraft carriers at the Battle of Midway, crippling Japan’s offensive capability. A key victory came in Stalingrad, the focus of both Hitler and Stalin. Both men had ordered their forces to achieve victory at all costs. By winter, Soviet reserves had reached Stalingrad and surrounded German troops, forcing their surrender in February 1943. By the spring, German forces were on the defensive as the Red Army pushed toward Germany.

## **THE CONCLUSION**

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Stalin had been eager for British and American forces to open a western front as soon as possible. On June 6, 1944, Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy, catching the Germans by surprise. Within months, the Allies liberated Paris, and then turned their sights on Berlin. Desperate attempts by the Germans to regain the advantage – the Battle of the Bulge on the western front and the Battle of Kursk on the eastern front – proved unsuccessful. Allied victories continued during the winter of 1944-1945, and German defeat was only a matter of time. As the Red Army closed in, Hitler took his own life. The German high command surrendered a week later, on May 7, 1945.

The Allies turned their attention to Asia. After the victory at Midway, American forces had been slowly working their way across the Pacific, clearing one small island after another before closing in on the Japanese mainland. Convinced that an amphibious assault would lead to massive American

casualties, President Harry Truman instead ordered a newly created atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Three days later, on August 9, 1945, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and the Japanese surrendered, ending the most destructive war in history.

## **AFTERMATH**

The war's final death toll – both civilian and military – was over 60 million people, a large number of those in China and the Soviet Union. The economic devastation was hard to fathom; cities were in ruins, and all of Europe's infrastructure was severely damaged.

Victory came with many political challenges, starting with the Grand Alliance of Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin met throughout the war. The 1945 Yalta Conference set the stage for the Cold War: in return for Soviet military assistance against the Japanese, Roosevelt agreed to Soviet demands for both territory in East Asia and a role of influence in Eastern and Central Europe.

After Germany's surrender, the Grand Alliance deteriorated quickly. At their final meeting, in Potsdam in July 1945, Truman confronted Stalin on free elections in Eastern Europe, a point that Stalin was unwilling to concede. A few months later, Churchill publicly warned of an "iron curtain" across a divided Europe.