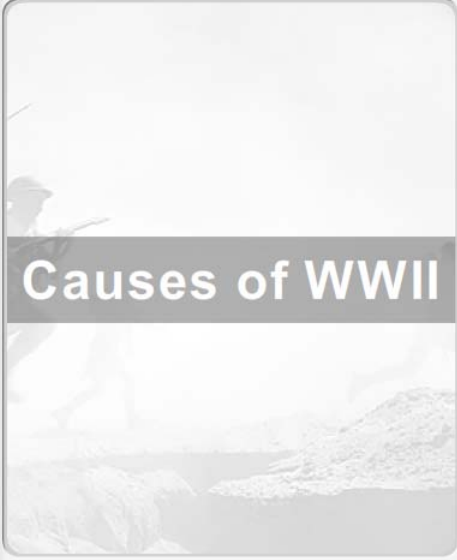


## Module 9: World War II

### Topic 1 Content: Causes of WWII

Causes of WWII

Using the arrows in the upper right corner of the activity, flip through the book to explore the causes of World War II.




The image shows a digital book cover for 'Causes of WWII'. The cover features a grayscale photograph of a soldier in a trench, looking towards the right. The title 'Causes of WWII' is overlaid in white text on a dark horizontal band across the middle of the image. The book is presented as a page in a digital viewer, with navigation arrows in the top right corner of the viewer's header.

## Treaties and Economies

Causes of WWII

### Treaties and Economies

- Terms of the Treaty of Versailles
  - Germany accepted sole blame for WWI
  - Pay reparations to Britain and France
- Reparation payments caused inflation in Germany
- Hitler blamed the Weimar Republic for signing the Treaty
- The Great Depression
- German Nationalism



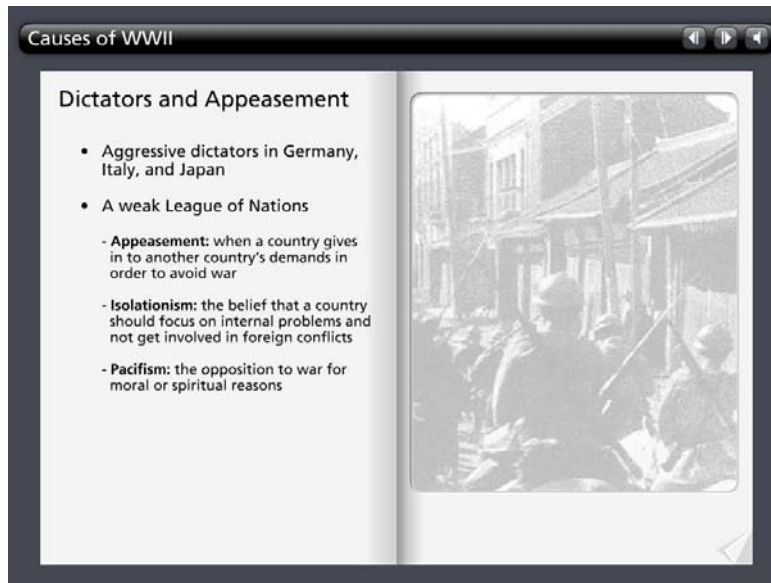
Though most people considered World War I to be “the war to end all wars,” only twenty years later, an even bigger war started - World War II. There were many issues and events that led to the start of World War II, including some that were consequences of World War I.

The terms that the victors of World War I assigned in the Treaty of Versailles, especially those that punished Germany, were a primary cause of World War II. The treaty made Germany accept the sole blame for World War I. Also, Germany had to pay war reparations to Britain and France, which caused extreme inflation in Germany. Hitler won supporters by criticizing the terms of the treaty. He blamed the Weimar Republic for signing the treaty, which stripped Germany of territory and restricted the country’s military.

The Great Depression affected the economy in Germany and internationally. In the midst of high unemployment and economic collapse, many people were drawn to extremist political movements. They hoped that radical changes might help restore some stability to the world. Adolph Hitler of Germany and Benito Mussolini of Italy were two fascist dictators who were able to capitalize on people’s misfortune to win supporters.

Hitler and Mussolini promoted a form of extreme nationalism and blamed other countries, or certain populations, like Jews, for their countries’ problems. In an effort to recall the glory days of the past, these dictators looked to build empires, like the Roman Empire in Italy. Meanwhile, the rest of the industrialized world in Europe and America was focused on internal problems that came from the Great Depression. These countries were not interested in problems that did not directly concern them. As a result, they did little to stop aggressive actions by Germany, Italy, or Japan.

## Dictators and Appeasement



Aggressive actions by Germany, Italy, and Japan started World War II. The other world powers did little in response to these aggressive acts, and the League of Nations was powerless to stop the invasions of member countries.

When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, the League condemned the action, but there was no threat of military force. Japan decided to leave the League and hold onto Manchuria. Then, Japan went on to conquer more of China in 1937. In 1935, Mussolini sent the Italian army to invade Ethiopia, a fellow member of the League of Nations. When the leader of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, protested the invasion, the League did nothing but institute limited sanctions against Italy. In 1938, Germany started invading and annexing neighboring countries. First, Germany took over Austria without firing a single shot. Then, Hitler turned to the Sudetenland, territories in Czechoslovakia where large numbers of German speaking people lived.

The response from other world powers was weak. Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, met with Hitler. In exchange for keeping the annexed territories, Hitler said that he would not invade any more areas. Britain's policy of giving in to Germany's demands in order to avoid war is known as appeasement.

During this time, many in Europe and the United States wanted to follow an isolationist approach toward foreign policy. Isolationism promotes the idea that countries focus on their own internal problems, rather than get involved in issues in other countries. Since the border issues in Europe, Africa, and China were so far from the U.S., isolationists argued these were not America's problems. Instead, they felt that politicians should focus on fixing the economic problems related to the Great Depression.

There were others who opposed war for moral reasons. After World War I, some people in the U.S. and Europe argued that countries should not go to war because modern war was violent and savage. This opposition to war is known as pacifism.

## Sudetenland Crisis

Causes of WWII

### Sudetenland Crisis

- **Sudetenland:** a territory in Czechoslovakia with ethnic Germans
- Munich Conference  
Leaders meet to solve issue
- Germany gets Sudetenland in act of appeasement
- Hitler breaks agreement and appeasement is seen as failure



The map shows Central Europe with several countries color-coded: Germany (blue), Czechoslovakia (yellow), Poland (red), and Hungary (orange). A cyan-colored region within Czechoslovakia is labeled 'Sudetenland' with a box and lines pointing to it. The map is presented as a slide with navigation arrows at the top.

In 1938, after taking control of Austria, Hitler continued his plans for expanding Germany. He demanded that Czechoslovakia give up control of the Sudetenland, which were territories inside Czechoslovakia that contained large numbers of ethnic Germans. This demand pushed Europe to the brink of war.

In order to defuse the situation, the major European powers met in Munich, Germany to discuss Hitler's demands. Hitler assured Britain's Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, that the Sudetenland would be his last demand and that he would not invade the rest of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain believed Hitler, and convinced France to appease Germany, in hopes that the countries could avoid war.

The Munich agreement was signed by Nazi Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy. Czechoslovakia did not even have a seat at the conference. Having offered up Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain famously declared that Europe had achieved "peace for our time."

Hitler saw Chamberlain's surrender to his demands as weakness, and six months later, invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia. Europe's attempts to appease Hitler and to curb his aggression failed, and Europe began to search for new ways to contain Nazi Germany.

## Nazi-Soviet Pact

Causes of WWII

### Nazi-Soviet Pact

- Hitler demands Polish Corridor
- Britain and France warn no appeasement this time
- Hitler wants to avoid war on two fronts
- Germany signs a non-aggression pact with Soviets
  - Neither will attack
  - Divided up parts of Europe



The map shows Poland in red, with a yellow area labeled 'Danzig' and a red area labeled 'Corridor' extending from the Danzig region to the German border. The rest of Germany is shown in blue. The labels 'Germany' and 'Poland' are placed on their respective territories.

In the Spring of 1939, Hitler demanded the return of the Polish Corridor, which was land taken from Germany after World War I. Britain and France warned Germany that there would be no appeasement this time, and that they would defend Polish territory. Hitler, not willing to back down, began to prepare for war. With the threat of war near, Hitler did not want to fight a war on two fronts, like Germany had during World War I. Fighting against the Russians and the Western powers had led to defeat in that war. Hitler wanted to remove the Soviet Union as a potential threat in the east.

Germany signed an agreement with the Soviet Union known as the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Under the terms of the agreement, each country pledged not to attack the other. In addition, the pact secretly divided Poland and parts of Northern and Eastern Europe between the Soviet Union and Germany.

Although fascism and communism were on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, Hitler and Stalin were still able to work out an agreement that benefited both countries. This pact was a shock to the rest of the world, since Hitler's hatred of communism and the Soviet Union was well known.

## Blitzkrieg

Causes of WWII

### Blitzkrieg

- **September 1, 1939**  
Germany invades Poland  
*Blitzkrieg* - lightning war using tanks and planes
- **September 2, 1939**  
Britain and France declare war on Germany
- **September 17, 1939**  
Soviet Union invades the eastern half of Poland
- **Winter/Spring 1939-40**  
Germany and Soviet Union invade Northern Europe (Finland, Norway and Denmark)

Winston Churchill becomes prime minister of Britain



On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland using a combination of planes and tanks known as a “blitzkrieg,” or lightning war. Poland was easily defeated by Germany’s stunning military strength. Britain and France responded by declaring war on Germany, but sent no troops to Poland’s aid. The war in Europe began. On September 17, the Soviet Union invaded the eastern half of Poland.

Germany would not fight Britain or France on the battlefield for six months. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union invaded Finland and other territories in Northern Europe, while Germany invaded the Northern European countries of Denmark and Norway, easily defeating both.

The threat of total war was on the horizon, and the British people selected a new leader. Neville Chamberlain resigned as Prime Minister and was replaced by Winston Churchill, a man who had long urged Britain to stand up to Hitler.