

THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-1945

The Second World War was the most destructive war ever fought by mankind. It started with the German invasion of Poland on 1st Sept 1939 and ended with the surrender and destruction of Japan on 14th August 1945.

The war was fought between the axis powers of Italy, Japan and Germany (Rome-Tokyo- Berlin axis) against the allied powers led by Britain, France, Russia and USA.

A number of factors played a role in the occurrence of this destructive war as analysed below;

CAUSES

1. The Versailles Peace Settlement 1919 played various roles to the occurrence of WWII as analysed below;

a) It has been argued that the Versailles settlement of 1919 sowed seeds for the outbreak of the Second World War. The peace treaty was very unrealistic in its attempt to create a lasting peace. It was a dictated treaty that Germany was forced to endorse (sign) without negotiation. The German delegates were not allowed to defend themselves and although they tried to defend themselves in writing, their defense was ignored. The delegates were treated like criminals who were escorted in and outside the hall of mirrors. This created a strong desire for revenge, which partly made Hitler to adopt aggressiveness towards WWII.

b) The Versailles settlement imposed unfair penalties on Germany that left her longing for a war of revenge. The disarmament clause destroyed Germany's navy, air force and reduced her army to 100,000 soldiers armed with 'sticks'. Worst of all, other powers especially France and Britain started rearming themselves. This gave Hitler an excuse to rearm Germany and attack smaller nations like Poland that made the outbreak of the Second World War inevitable.

c) Article 231 of the settlement entirely blamed Germany for the outbreak of World War I and article 232 imposed an impossible sum of 6.6 million dollars as war reparations. This irritated Germany because she was accused and made to pay for a gigantic crime where everybody that fought was guilty.

The payment of the reparations suffocated Germany's economy and contributed to the great economic depression of 1929-35. Hitler capitalised on this to rise to power and challenge the Versailles peacemakers which climaxed into the Second World War.

d) The territorial clause denied Germany most of her colonies in Europe, Asia and Africa. Germany lost many of her nationals and resources to the newly created states like Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

This was very unrealistic because it also neglected President Woodrow Wilson's principle of self-determination and nationalism. Indeed, Hitler's invasion of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland (that sparked off the war) were partly to liberate the Germans who were deliberately scattered in Europe by the peacemakers. This is why TAYLOR argues that; The Guns which saluted the signing of the settlement opened the Second World War.

e) Nevertheless, it was not only Germany that came out of the Versailles settlement with a quest for revenge. Italy and Japan that had fought on the side of the triple entente against triple alliance were very disappointed by their rewards. Japan regarded the rewards of a few Islands and some parts of China as poor compensations for her role and complained bitterly hence her occupation of Manchuria. This engineered hostility that led to WWII.

2. The Appeasement policy of Joseph Neville Chamberlain was also instrumental in causing the Second World War. It was a deliberate move to satisfy the demands of aggressive powers provided that they were within the boundaries of reality and common sense. The policy was based on dialogue and compromise as opposed to violence as a solution to axis aggression. This is because there was a general feeling that the Versailles treaty was very unfair to the axis powers and that they should not be opposed if the Second World War was to be avoided.

Neville Chamberlain of Britain started the policy in collaboration with France. He argued that; another major war could be avoided by pleasing aggressive powers like Germany. It contributed in the following ways;

a) It was due to this policy that no military action was taken against Japan when she occupied Manchuria (1931), Mussolini when he invaded Ethiopia (1935) and on Hitler when he invaded the Rhine lands (1936), Austria (1938) and Czechoslovakia (1938). Appeasement reached its' climax in the Munich conference of Sept. 1938 (Metternich agreement) where Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister and Deladier, the French Prime Minister accepted Germany's annexation of Sudetenland (part of Czechoslovakia) and Hitler promised that he would not make any other territorial demand or wage any more aggression.

Unfortunately, success and absence of military intervention gave Hitler and his allies a false impression that the appeasers were cowards and would never fight them whatever the provocation. It is this feeling that encouraged Hitler to invade Poland and refuse to withdraw as demanded by Britain and France. This set the world ablaze in the holocaust of the Second World War.

b)Appeasement policy gave Hitler a "breathing space" time to re organise Germany and ally with Italy and Japan. The lack of intervention against aggression caused by appeasement policy was used by Hitler to strengthen Germany economically and militarily in preparation for war. It should be emphasised that Hitler's occupation of Rhine lands, annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia increased Germany's economic and military strength, which encouraged him to invade Poland that triggered off the war.

c)On the other hand, he used it to strengthen diplomatic relations and form the Roma-Berlin- Tokyo axis. The re organisation of Germany and formation of axis alliance made appeasement policy a boomerang/ backfire that led to the outbreak of the Second World War.

d)Appeasement policy undermined the League of Nations leading to the collapse of international diplomacy. It contradicted the idea of collective security making the league unable to act against Fascist and Nazis aggressions, because Britain and France who were pursuing the policy were the most influential members in the League of Nations. This made the Fascists and Nazis to embark on a series of aggression without fear of reaction from the league.

e)Besides, appeasement policy contributed to the rise of Mussolini and Hitler to power and consequently the spread of Fascism and Nazism in Europe. Mussolini and Hitler opposed and fought against the spread of communism and socialism from Russia. On the other hand, Britain and France were also threatened by the spread of socialism and communism since the Russian revolutions of 1917. This made Britain and France to indirectly support Fascist and Nazis aggression through appeasement policy. They calculated that Fascism and Nazism would destroy communism and socialism, which would also leave the Fascists and Nazis weakened and exhausted. Unfortunately, the Fascists and Nazis waged a series of aggression under the guise of fighting communism, gained strength and provoked the outbreak of World War II by 1939.

NB. It has to be rewinded back that Britain and France decided to appease Germany and her allies because of the unfairness of the Versailles treaty.

3. The resurrection of alliance system in the inter war period also led to the outbreak of World War II. Italy, Germany and Japan formalized the Rome-Berlin - Tokyo axis in 1937. Britain, France, USA, Belgium and Poland formed the allied or democratic powers. These alliances were based on divergent and conflicting ideologies. The allied powers were struggling to promote democracy while the axis powers were propagating and promoting totalitarianism/dictatorship. These ideologies were very incompatible and that is why the German invasion of Poland was magnified into the Second World War due to ideological differences. Once again, the alliance system had divided Europe into two hostile and antagonistic camps that made the Second World War inevitable.

NB. It has to be noted that the revival of alliance system in the inter war period can be traced to the Versailles settlement of 1919. Germany, Italy and Japan that formed the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo axis were birds of the same feathers that were unfairly treated at the Versailles settlement. It was therefore only a matter of time that the three powers converged with a common aim of revenging against the signatories of the settlement. This also forced the "Versailles powers" to form the democratic alliance as a counter measure to the axis alliance hence WWII.

4. The arms race just Like in World War I, also contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War. Hitler got an excuse to rearm Germany because other powers did not disarm but were instead rearming themselves secretly. He (Hitler) argued that ...because other powers had not disarmed as they had promised, it was wrong to keep Germany helpless. It made Germany to embark on an intensive rearmament programme. Consequently, Hitler started a grand scheme of conscripting 500,000 men into the German armed force.

He modernised the German air force and it became one of the strongest in the world. The same challenge was taken by Japan and Italy. This made the axis powers to be confident of themselves and adopted an aggressive foreign policy that climaxed into the Second World War. On the other hand, Britain and France could not just sit back and watch these developments. They reacted by adopting a large-scale rearmament programme. Each power became anxious to display its military might and hopped for an opportunity which was sparked off by Hitler's invasion of Poland.

5 The weakness of the League of Nations as a peacekeeping body also led to the outbreak of the Second World War. The activities of the League of Nations were monopolised by Britain and France who unfortunately undermined it by pursuing appeasement policy. The League failed to enforce general disarmament which provided Hitler with an opportunity to rearm Germany and provoke the war. Besides, the League had no army of its own and it was considered "a toothless backing bull dog". Although article 16 provided that member states should send troops if necessary, a resolution was passed in 1923 that each country was free to decide whether or not to fight in a crisis situation. This gave ceremonial burial to the idea of collective security, which facilitated aggression in Europe.

In other words, the weaknesses of the League of Nations encouraged Hitler's aggression in Europe that drove the world into the Second World War. By 1939, all the axis powers had pulled out of the League of Nations which made it even more difficult to restrain their aggression.

NB. However, a logical flashback reveals that the League of Nations was an offspring of the Versailles settlement (Woodrow Wilson's 14th point). Its role amongst others was to defend the Versailles settlement which was however not the case hence the occurrence of WWII by 1939.

6. The effect of Economic depression also played a role in the outbreak of the Second World War. The slump/depression caused a global political, social and economic crisis. This gave an opportunity for Hitler to rise to power. As other countries were busy handling the problems caused by the depression, Germany used the opportunity to rearm herself. She devoted most of her resources to the army, navy and air force.

The depression also made some powers to resort to aggression as a way of securing raw materials and markets. Mussolini urged the Italians to be war like and resurrect the former Roman Empire if they were to survive the depression. He became practical when he invaded Ethiopia in 1935.

Economic crisis also forced Japan to invade Manchuria in 1931 in order to exploit coal and silk. Hitler's invasions of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Rhine lands and Poland were partly for market and economic prosperity.

Economic depression destroyed international relations which degenerated into the Second World War. It made nations to protect their markets through protectionism and high tariffs, which increased tension and hostility that gradually graduated into the Second World War.

7. The rise and role of dictators and aggressors undermined world peace and led to the outbreak of the Second World War. In the inter war period, militants like Mussolini of Italy, Hitler of Germany, Hirohito of Japan and General Franco of Spain overthrew democratic governments and created autocratic governments based on blood and iron policy. The dictators converged in the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo axis and embarked on foreign aggression that was intended to promote dictatorship and destroy democracy. It created a struggle by democratic powers like Britain, France and USA to contain such aggressions, stop the growing influence of dictatorship and consolidate democracy in Europe. This created fear, panic, suspicion and hatred that exploded into war in the aftermath of German invasion of Poland. To this extent, it is justifiable to argue that the Second World War was in fact a struggle between two contradictory ideologies.

8. The rise and growth of nationalism in Europe also conditioned the outbreak of the Second World War. The Versailles peacemakers of 1919 were guided by their selfish national interests at the expense of German nationalism. Consequently, German nationals were scattered in the newly created states like Austria, Czechoslovakia, Sudetenland and Poland. The scattered Germans were incited by propaganda from the Germans in Germany (Hitler inclusive) to demand either for reunion with their mother country or full independence. The Germans and Hitler argued that it was double standards to subject Germans foreign control when the First World War was fought for self-determination i.e. Independence of nations. This provided Hitler with a convenient pretext to annex Austria, Czechoslovakia, Sudetenland and Poland, which led to the outbreak of the Second World War.

9. Imperialism also accounted for the outbreak of the Second World War by 1939. Britain and France manipulated the Versailles Settlement of 1919 to satisfy their imperial desires and undermined defeated powers most especially Germany. They distributed German colonies in Asia and Africa amongst themselves using the mandate commission of the League of Nations. The need to compensate the loss of German territories and influence made Germany to embark on a series of aggression that climaxed into the invasion of Poland and the outbreak of the Second World War.

Alongside Germany, Japan and Italy also had burning desires to expand their territories and influence which explains why Japan invaded Chinese territory of Manchuria and Italy occupied Ethiopia. This forced France and Russia to sign an agreement in 1935 to check on German, Japanese and Italian imperialism. Thus

Imperialism led to fear, suspicion, antagonism and aggression that made the outbreak of World War II inevitable.

10. World War II was also caused by anti-Semitic / racial feelings and activities against the Jews in Italy and Germany. The Nazis led by Hitler and Fascists under Mussolini's leadership had a grand programme to exterminate/Wipe out the Jews from Germany and Italy respectively. Consequently, the Jews were harassed, persecuted and massacred by Nazis and Fascist hardliners. It was opposed and condemned by France, Britain, Russia and USA. This is what amongst other reasons attracted other powers to join the war against Germany when she attacked and invaded Poland in 1939.

11. Role of Press propaganda was also responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War. The mass media in Germany and Poland caused war fever by over exaggerating atrocities committed by each other. Hitler used the German newspapers and radio stations to exaggerate the persecution of the 2.5million Germans in Poland. This incited the Germans in Germany and those in Poland against Polish authorities. The Polish newspapers and radios also magnified the threats of German government and Germans in Poland against the Polish government. Press propaganda created suspicion, fear, panic and tension that were used by Germany to attack Poland. It should also be noted that press reports about the atrocities committed by German soldiers in the event of invasion of Poland is what terrified other powers, like Britain, Russia and France to join the war against Germany hence WWII

12. The threat of communism in Western Europe also contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War. After the Russian revolution of 1917, communism spread to Eastern Europe and started threatening Western Europe by 1939. Communist influence set in a struggle by workers and peasants against exploitation and segregation. This favoured the rise of dictators and their aggressions in Europe. Hitler of Germany, Mussolini of Italy and Hirohito of Japan took advantage of the fear of communism amongst western capitalist countries and launched a series of aggressions in the 1930's. They did it under the pretext of fighting communism, which went unopposed up to 1938. It should be stressed that Britain and France considered Fascist and Nazi aggressions a lesser evil than communist threat and that partly explains why they pursued appeasement policy, which is one of the factors responsible for the outbreak of the second world war.

13. The Spanish civil war 1931-1939 was an event that led to the outbreak of the Second World war. In 1935, General Franco moved to North America from where he coordinated a rebellion against the republican government. From 1936-39 there was a disastrous confrontation between General Franco's rebels supported by Italy and Germany against the republican government supported by Russia, Britain, USA and France. The war ended in 1939 with the overthrow of the Republican government by General Franco who established a Fascist state in Spain. This intensified the hostility, hatred and antagonism of Italy, Spain and Germany against Britain, Russia and France, which became a rehearsing, ground for the outbreak of the Second World War. On the other hand, the war increased the prestige of Italy and Germany and gave them confidence of success in an event of any other war. It's this false confidence from the Spanish Civil war that dragged Hitler to attack Poland, which sparked off the Second World War. The rise of General Franco and Fascism in Spain consolidated totalitarianism / dictatorship in Europe, alongside Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany. This encouraged Hitler to invade Poland with assured support from General Franco and Mussolini hence the outbreak of World War II. -Furthermore, the consolidation of totalitarianism threatened the security of Britain, France and Russia forcing them to take action against Germany after the German occupation of Poland.

14. The German invasion and occupation of Poland, 1st September 1939 became the immediate event for the outbreak of the Second World War. After occupying Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia, Hitler stepped up his claims for the Polish Corridor, port of Danzig and Posem. Hitler falsely hoped that Britain and France would not interfere as they had done when he occupied the Rhine lands, Austria and Czechoslovakia. With this false impression, Germany under Hitler attacked Poland from all fronts and almost brought it to ruins. Britain and France gave Hitler an ultimatum to withdraw within 24 hours that Hitler defied. This made Britain and France to declare war on Germany on 3rd September 1939. They were joined by Russia, the United States plus their colonies while Germany was joined by Italy, Japan and their colonies hence the occurrence of WWII.

REASONS FOR APPEASEMENT POLICY TOWARDS DICTATORS: **1.** The Russian and communist threat forced Britain to pursue appeasement policy. The influence of Russia and communism in the Middle East, China and Europe was a great obstacle to the British interests. There was also panic amongst the propertied classes of Britain. Thus, Chamberlain saw communist threat as more dangerous than fascist and Nazi aggressions and decided to compromise with the Nazis and Fascists through appeasement policy.

Moreover, the axis powers carried their aggression under the guise of fighting communism which could not be resisted by Britain.

2. The need to maintain the balance of power also made Britain to adopt appeasement policy in the inter war period. The British expectation was that the axis powers and Russia would fight and destroy themselves through aggression, which would favour her policy of isolationism. It was hoped that the axis powers could liquidate the Soviet Union, which would eliminate the Russian domination of the world through communism. It was with this reasoning that Britain did not put up any resistance against German aggression in Austria, Czechoslovakia and indirectly supported Japan and Italy to occupy Manchuria and Abyssinia respectively.

3. The unrealistic nature of the Versailles settlement created a public sympathy for Germany and her allies in Britain. It was argued that a disarmed and weakened Germany was "a vast Centre of economic depression" and a line of weakness for communism. This forced Britain to try to relax the most unrealistic clauses of the Versailles treaty through appeasement policy that was to bring reconciliation and peace in Europe.

4. Internal weakness of Britain after World War I was another reason why she used the policy of appeasement. Appeasement was; almost pre-determined by the precarious state of her economy and indecision in policy. Economic depression had created problems like inflation, mass unemployment and huge debt burden. It is this precarious economic condition that created an imaginary fear of communism. It also made Britain to emphasise German economic recovery for her own economic recovery since Germany was her best customer at one time. Thus, the British economic problems forced her to follow a policy of peace which was to give her time to re organise her economy.

5. Besides economic weakness, Britain was also militarily weakened and exhausted that she could not easily fight the axis' aggression. USA and USSR had become the world super powers and Britain had lost her pre-war customers which also left her militarily weakened. Chamberlain admitted that Britain was not prepared for a full-scale war and this is partly responsible for the British policy of appeasement.

6. The bad experience of the First World War also gave rise to appeasement policy in the interwar period. It had caused socio-economic and political destructions and disturbances to the whole world. War was therefore seen as the worst experience of mankind and there was every need to avoid it at whatever cost. This is what forced Britain and even France to follow the policy of concession and peace through the appeasement policy.

7. The anti-colonial movements especially in Asia tied the hands of Britain that she could not fight the axis' aggression. By 1919, there were revolutionary movements in British colonies that diverted the British attention towards Africa. This could not enable her fight the axis' aggression in Europe and that is why she used the policy of appeasement.

8. The weaknesses of the League of Nations was yet another reason for the British policy of appeasement. The League of Nations had no army of its own and relied on sanctions which proved useless against the Nazi and fascist aggression in Europe. This made Chamberlain to hijack the role of the League and pursue appeasement policy. He argued that war could be avoided through settling disputes by personal contacts and negotiations with the axis powers, which gave rise to appeasement policy.

9. The withdrawal of USA from the League of Nations also gave rise to appeasement policy in the history of Europe, USA was the brain behind the League of Nations and she was a world military and economic super-power. Her withdrawal left European politics in the hands of Britain and France who were weak economically and militarily and hence incapable of fighting the axis powers. If USA had joined the League of Nations, the League would have been strengthened and there would be no need to appease the axis powers.

10. The inability of the British politicians to properly understand the character and ambitions of the axis powers made Britain to pursue appeasement policy. They thought that the axis powers were fighting communism yet they were using communism as a camouflage of their hidden ambition to dominate the world. Chamberlain falsely believed that Hitler meant business and would honour his word if the injustice done to Germany at Versailles were reversed. This is why he appeased Hitler at the Munich conference of 1939 in which Germany was appeased with Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia. It was only when Hitler attacked Poland and Britain declared war on Germany on 3rd September 1939 that Chamberlain realised his blunders. He admitted this on the same day (3rd September 1939) in his remarks that;

This is a sad day to all of us and to none is it sadder than to me. Everything that I have worked for, everything that I have hope for, everything that I have believed in life has crushed into ruins.

ROLE OF EUROPEAN POWERS AND PERSONALITIES IN THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

1. GERMANY/HITLER'S ROLE

a) Germany was primarily responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War. Hitler started the arms race in order to avenge the disarmament clause of the Versailles settlement and dominate Europe. This was adopted by other powers and created hostility, fear, panic and recklessness that led to the Second World War.

b) Hitler created the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo axis to oppose and destroy the influence of the western democratic powers led by Britain and France. This made the western powers to form the democratic alliance that divided Europe into two antagonistic camps leading to the Second World War

c) Germany led by Hitler boycotted the League of Nations and left it weakened. The Nazi aggression challenged and made the League of Nations to fail to preserve peace in the interwar period. The weakness of the League opened way for war other than diplomacy as a means of settling world disputes hence the outbreak of the Second World War.

d) The German and Hitler's aggressions in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Rhine lands, Sudetenland and Poland disorganised Europe and led to the

outbreak of the Second World War. It also encouraged other powers like Japan and Italy to become aggressive. This escalated tension in Europe and led directly to war when Germany occupied Poland in 1939.

e) Hitler and Germany misinterpreted the British desires for peace through appeasement policy as a sign of weakness and cowardice. This made him to embark on a vicious cycle of aggression that led to the Second World War. Hitler is therefore accused of abusing appeasement policy, which caused war.

f) The German/Hitler's invasion of Poland on 1st September 1939 was the immediate event that led to the Second World War. It made Britain and France to realise the futility of appeasement policy and declare war on Germany that began the Second World War.

g) The German/Hitler's defiance to the British and French ultimatum after the invasion of Poland is what made Britain and France to declare war on her (Germany). When Germany invaded Poland, the French and British gave her an ultimatum to withdraw within 24 hours which Hitler refused to abide by.

2. BRITAIN

a) Gave moral support to aggression by the axis powers as a counter measure to communism in Europe. She encouraged the Japanese aggression in Manchuria, Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the Nazi aggressions in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Rhine lands. This provoked a vicious cycle of aggression that climaxed into the German invasion of Poland and the outbreak of the Second World War.

b) The British policy of appeasement was a boomerang that contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War. It was regarded by Hitler and Mussolini as a sign of weakness and cowardice. This encouraged fascist and Nazi aggressions that reached its peak in the German invasion of Poland and began the Second World War.

c) Britain was also entangled in the arms race that created fear, panic, recklessness, which graduated to war in 1939.

d) She was a champion of the democratic alliance that antagonised the axis alliance and caused war in 1939. Besides, Britain had allied with Poland which encouraged her to take a bold stand against Germany and declare war after the German invasion.

If Poland had not relied on British support, she would have possibly looked for a diplomatic solution other than war against Germany's occupation of her territory.

e) It was Britain that declared war on Germany on 3rd September 1939, which magnified the conflict between Germany and Poland into the Second World War. This was after Germany's refusal to withdraw from Poland as demanded by the ultimatum.

f) Britain was 'a big force' behind the unrealistic Versailles settlement that sowed seeds for the outbreak of the Second World War. The settlement was very unfair to Germany, Japan and Italy and left them with nostalgia to revenge. This forced them to converge in the axis alliance and wage a series of aggression that climaxed into the Second World War.

3. FRANCE

a) France is blamed for supporting Chamberlain's policy of appeasement that led to a series of aggression and the outbreak of war in 1939. If France had not supported or opposed Chamberlain's policy, it's possible that he would have dropped it and handled the Nazi and Fascist aggression militarily. This was bound to threaten Mussolini and Hitler and hence reduce aggression in Europe. Consequently, Hitler would have possibly not invaded Poland and the Second World War would have been avoided in 1939.

b) France was the 'greatest shareholder' of the unrealistic Versailles settlement that became a foundation for the outbreak of the Second World War. The Versailles settlement was chaired by Clemenceau who skillfully and carefully manipulated the terms of the settlement to punish Germany for her crimes in the First World War and the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 - 1871. This irritated Germany and left her determined to revenge, which led to the outbreak of the war in 1939.

c) France is also blamed for her involvement in the arms race and alliance system. She entered into a number of alliances in order to strengthen her diplomatic position against Germany. In Sept 1920 she signed the Franco-Belgian treaty; which was a military alliance against Germany. Similar treaties were signed with Poland in Feb 1921, Czechoslovakia in 1924, Rumania in 1926 and Yugoslavia in 1927. This divided Europe into two armed and antagonistic camps that exploded into the Second World War in the aftermath of the German invasion of Poland.

d) France is accused of collaborating with Britain to declare war on Germany on 3rd September 1939. If France had not supported Poland against Germany, the German-Polish conflict would have remained a localized affair between the two states. Thus, the French involvement is what magnified it into a European war and finally the Second World War.

4. RUSSIA

a) Russia is blamed for signing a non-aggressive treaty with Germany in 1939. This encouraged Hitler to invade Poland on September 1939 that triggered the Second World War. The treaty gave Hitler a false impression that Russia would not join the war against her and this is partly why she violated the British and French ultimatum to withdraw. However, Russia changed and joined the allied powers against Germany.

b) The spread and threat of Russian communism led to the rise of Hitler and Mussolini who played a leading role in the outbreak of the Second World War. It also made Britain to pursue appeasement policy, which indirectly facilitated aggression by the axis powers and led to the outbreak of war in 1939.

c) Russia's isolation from the League of Nations which also blocked communist countries in Eastern Europe from the League left the League weakened. It made the League a narrow association of a few Western powers and therefore failed to capture European public opinion. This provided a line of weakness for aggression and explosion of the Second World War.

d) Russia is also accused for joining Britain, France and Poland against Germany. This escalated the war to Eastern Europe which graduated to the Second World War.

5. JAPAN AND ITALY

a) Japan and Italy were accused for the outbreak of the Second World War for waging aggression, which partly encouraged Hitler's aggression that led to war in 1939. Japan is blamed for invading the Chinese territory of Manchuria and Italy is accused for her invasion of Abyssinia. These started a series of aggression that climaxed into the Second World War by 1939.

b) Japan and Italy were also blamed for arms race and alliance system that contributed to war by 1939. They were accused of joining Germany in the German centered Rome-Berlin-Tokyo axis alliance in 1937. This assured Hitler of support in case of war and therefore encouraged him to invade Czechoslovakia and Poland that sparked off the Second World War.

c), Japan and Italy assisted Germany against allied powers in the Second World War. This strengthened Germany and made it impossible to fight upto 1945. Indeed Japan put a stiff resistance in the east that was only broken by the US atomic bombs in August 1945.

d) Lastly Japan was accused for her reckless bombing of the U.S fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 1941. This is what provoked U.S.A to join the war against the axis powers.

6. POLAND

a) Although Poland fought a defensive war, she was blamed for signing a military pact/agreement with Britain in 1939. This threatened Germany for Germany could not tolerate a strong neighbor with powerful connections to Britain. This partly forced Germany to declare war on Poland and destroy her before it was too late.

b) Poland was also accused of occupying the German territories of Danzig, Posen, Upper Silesia and a corridor of land that passed through Germany to the Baltic Sea. These included 2.5 million German nationals that were given to her at the Versailles conference of 1919. When Hitler demanded for the German territories and nationals, Poland refused which forced Hitler to declare war and set the ball rolling for the Second World War. However, the blame for this largely rests on Britain and France who had given Poland such territories and populations at the Versailles conference of 1919.

c) Lastly, Poland was accused of declaring war on Germany after the German invasion of her territory in 1939. Although this was justifiable, she is blamed for ignoring diplomacy as a priority in resolving conflicts.

CONSEQUENCES/ EFFECTS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR: The Second World War was the most disastrous event in the history of the world. In the war, the axis powers were finally defeated in 1945 and the allied powers came out victorious. The war affected all aspects of human life as well as international politics of that time and the present generation. Generally, the war had positive and negative consequences in the social, political and economic structures of the world some of which can be traced up to the present era.

Positive consequences

- i)** The war gave rise to European economic integration and regional economic organisations to improve the welfare of mankind. This led to the formation of organisations like the Organisation of European Economic Co-operation and Development (O.E.E.C.D), European Coal and Steel Community (B.C.S.C), European Free Trade Association (E.F.T.A) and European Economic Community (E.E.C) in 1958. After the war, American companies that had made abnormal profits from producing war related products bought shares in European countries which led to the formation of multi-national companies. These companies expanded their investment throughout the world e.g. B.A.T, Pepsi cola and oil companies such as Shell and Caltex.
- ii)** The war led to the defeat and downfall of great military dictators of Europe. The pressure of the war forced Hitler to commit suicide while Mussolini was killed by his own soldiers towards the end of the war. This marked the collapse of Nazism and fascism in the history of Europe. Militaristic leaders in other areas like Spain and Japan were overthrown. These undermined totalitarianism and paved way for democratic governments throughout Europe.
- iii)** On the other hand, the war led to the liberation of states that were victims of aggression by the axis powers. The defeat of Germany and her allies was followed by the granting of independence to smaller states like Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Ethiopia that had been under German and Italian rules. This was done by the allied powers during and after the end of the war. A number of Germans, Italians and Japanese who had settled in such conquered territories were expelled to their mother lands after the war.

iv) The war led to the formation of U.N.O to replace the League of Nations whose weakness was responsible for the outbreak of the war. The idea for the formation of U.N.O came from Dumbarton Oaks war time conference of 1944 between USA, Britain, Russia and China.

Thereafter, the first draft of the U.N.O was signed in April 1945 at San Francisco. On Oct 1945, the U.N.O was officially proclaimed at its headquarter in New York with six (6) organs to facilitate its role in world affairs. The main concerns were peace, international co-operation and development.

v) The establishment of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948 and the rise of Zionism were occasioned by World War II. During the course of World War II, the Jews were persecuted and massacred by the Nazis, Fascists and Arabs. Consequently, Jewish immigrants flooded Palestine-and a serious conflict developed with the indigenous Palestinian Arabs. Britain tried in vain to resolve the conflict and referred it to the UN Security Council In 1947. In 1948, the Security Council created the Jewish state of Israel out of the Arab state of Palestine. However, this marked the beginning of a protracted conflict between the Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, which have been a constant threat to world peace.

vi) The war resulted into abandonment of appeasement policy. Appeasement policy that was intended to avoid war instead boomeranged and caused the outbreak of war in 1939. Chamberlain was so disappointed by Hitler's unending demands and invasion of Poland that he regretted for having pursued appeasement policy. The invasion made Britain and France to realise the blunder of appeasement policy and join the war against Germany. From then onwards, the policy was abandoned in the diplomatic politics of Europe.

vii) The Marshall Aid plan and Molotov plan were initiated to help the West and East respectively to revamp economies that were affected by the war. The Marshall Aid plan was an economic recovery scheme in which food, fuel, machinery, raw materials and money (valued at \$13 billion) were given to save the collapsing capitalist economies of Europe. The Russian Prime Minister Viache Molotov responded by initiating the Molotov plan to save the badly revenged socialist economies. These aids were to help the antagonistic blocs to reconstruct their economies and solve economic problems like inflation, unemployment, poverty and starvation.

viii) The rise and growth of nationalism in the Middle East, Asia and Africa were also due to the war. It led to the rise of USA and USSR who supported decolonisation movements especially in Africa against the British and

French colonial masters. The war also weakened France and Britain and thus weakened their abilities to manage their colonies which gave the colonised people chance to fight for their independence. The few people who fought in the war were inspired with revolutionary ideas that they used to champion the move towards independence. All these contributed to the decolonisation of countries such as Ghana, Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Palestine, Kuwait, Israel etc. One should acknowledge that the decolonisation process led to loss of colonies by European powers.

Negative consequences

ix) The war resulted into massive destruction of lives. Over 50 million people died as a direct consequence of the war. Of these, about 22 million were soldiers and 28 civilians. About 6 million Jews were exterminated in Germany and areas occupied by the Nazi troops during the war. There were mass killings in concentration camps which became death camps. Prisoners were made to dig mass graves where they were buried. Generally, about 12 million people lost their lives in concentration camps as a result of terror unleashed by the fascists and Nazis. The overall consequence was depopulation.

x) Properties whose value cannot be quantified were also destroyed during the war. Intensive bombardment of towns and cities demolished properties such as industries, houses and war machineries. Industrial towns like the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were completely razed to the ground by US atomic bombs which became the worst destruction in the history of mankind by 1970. This left behind the problem of reconstruction amidst financial crisis that befall the world due to the war.

xi) There was also a large influx of homeless refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. Thousands of them were kept in camps in Western Europe during and after the war. Most of these were people like the Jews who were fleeing the Nazi and fascist aggressions. This left the allied powers with the problem of how to repatriate and rehabilitate such displaced persons. This burden was shouldered by the international community through the UNO.

xii. On the other hand, there were migrations outside Europe. Fear of death in Europe forced some families and groups of individuals to flee as far as America, Australia and South Africa. War criminals who were wanted to answer charges for atrocities they committed during the war also fled across Europe as a strategy of evading arrest.

xiii) The Second World War changed the balance of power and led to the rise of USA and USSR as super powers. The Soviet/Russian soldiers consolidated communism in Eastern Europe and Russia emerged as a super power commanding great influence in Eastern Europe. USA that did not suffer much from the war and whose atomic bombing of Japan brought the war to an end also emerged from the west as a dominant power. The rise of USA and USSR were at the expense of Britain, France and Germany who were the hitherto traditional superpowers.

xiv) The emergence of USA and USSR led to intense rivalry, suspicion, hatred and conflict that gave rise to cold war. This was partly because of the struggle by Soviet Union/Russia to consolidate and spread communism, which was antagonized by American determination to spread capitalism. This divided the world into two antagonistic ideological camps, which led to the formation of NATO by USA in 1949 and Warsaw Pact by USSR in 1955. It should be noted that Russia planted communist regimes in her areas of occupation that threatened western powers and led to the cold war. On the other hand, countries that did not want to identify themselves with the two antagonistic camps under the leadership of India formed the Non Align Movement.

XV) Economic decline was direct consequence of World War II. Productive sectors like agriculture, trade, transport, communication and industries were disrupted and destroyed during the war. The British and French economies were shattered. This brought famine, starvation, inflation and unemployment to millions of survivors.

xvi) Germany was partitioned into two separated by the famous Berlin wall. The East belonged to Russia and had a socialist government while West Germany that was given to USA Britain and France had a capitalist government. This was to punish Germany for her aggression that had led to the outbreak of the first as well as the second world wars. It was also to weaken Germany in order to safeguard Europe and the world from further German aggression and war.

NB. The division of Germany ended with the reunification of Germany in 1991
This only ended when the compensation bill was cleared.

xvii) Japan was devastated by the Second World War. She became a physical ruin, an economic desert and a Centre of political turmoil/ confusion. The Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were razed to the ground by American atomic bombs whose effects were still being felt up to 1970. She was also forced to abandon her claims of Manchuria that was given back to china. Worst of all Japan was colonised by USA in order to compensate for the destruction of USA's fleet at Pearl Harbour in 1944. This only ended when the compensation bill was cleared.

xviii) It also stimulated rapid scientific innovations that led to the production of weapons of mass destruction. The war witnessed the use of atomic bombs for the first time in the history of mankind. This was used by USA with devastating impact on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After the war, Russia, Japan, Britain, Iraq, North Korea and Pakistan embarked on research in the production of weapons of mass destruction. This was responsible for the nuclear crisis that has degenerated to war in post-World war II era. It also enhanced arms and rearmament in post-World war II era.

However from the summer of 1942, the rapid advancement of the axis troops were systematically checked and reversed. The Nazi and Fascist troops lost several battles and by 1944 they were defeated.

REASONS FOR THE DEFEAT OF THE AXIS POWERS/GERMANY

1 The axis powers were faced with internal opposition that made them vulnerable. Germany, Italy and Japan had dictators who were very unpopular, which made their own people to turn against them. This explains why Mussolini was arrested and executed by his own fellow fascists, which led to the surrender of Italy. This also partly made Hitler to commit suicide and marked the defeat of Germany as well. On the other hand, there was patriotism in allied countries due to charismatic leadership of Winston Churchill, FD Roosevelt, Truman and Stalin. Their popularity made it very easy to mobilise resources most especially manpower to fight and defeat the axis powers.

2. Externally, the axis powers were faced with internal resistance from the countries that they invaded and occupied. By 1941, the axis powers had successfully occupied countries like Poland, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and states of Eastern Europe. The axis rule in these states was very brutal, autocratic and full of atrocities. Such states formed resistance movements and waged a series of resistance to the axis forces e.g. local militias snipped at axis forces and blew up bridges while factory workers sabotaged industrial production through vandalism and go slow tactics. In Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Marshall Tito mobilised the Yugoslavs and successfully repulsed German troops. Such resistance diverted and weakened axis forces to the advantage of allied powers. Resistance groups also provided military information and direction to allied powers that made the defeat of Germany and her allies inevitable.

3. The naval superiority of the allied powers also explains the defeat of the axis powers. Britain and USA had the best navy in the world. They used their naval power to dominate the European coastlines and made it impossible for the axis powers to get reinforcements from Europe. In 1941, the British and American navy sunk the German sub marine and surface raiders.

4. Technological superiority of allied powers also account for their success against axis powers. Britain and USA manufactured more sophisticated fighter jets, tanks and planes, missiles, bombs and warships. In 1940, Britain produced a radar that easily detected allied warplanes and ships before they could bombard her strategic military bases. The manufacture of atomic bomb by USA and its disastrous impact on Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 is what stopped Japanese stubborn resistance and ended the war.

5. Lack of foresight was also responsible for the defeat of the axis powers. They ignored the necessity of fighter planes. Japan for instance concentrated on the production of battleships that made her vulnerable to bombings by the allied warplanes. Germany also made a mistake of concentrating on the production of "V" rockets at the expense of strengthening her air defense. On the other hand, the allied powers concentrated on the production of warplanes, missiles and radars. These tilted the military balance of power in favour of the allies and led to the defeat of the axis powers.

6. Hitler's military blunder was also responsible for the success of the allied powers. He underestimated the military strength of allied powers. Hitler invaded England with a misconception that none of the British colonies would assist her. He and his troops were demoralised when British colonies rallied behind their master to fight against axis powers. Hitler's invasion of Russia named Operation Barbarossa (June 1941) was a military disaster. He did not effectively plan for winter and this exposed his troops to the disastrous consequences of winter, hence Nazi troops failed to defeat Russia in 1942. This demystified the view that German troops were invincible and morale boosted Russian and other powers determination to fight Germany.

7. The success of the allied powers was also determined by the size of their population and number of colonies. USA was supported by the whole of North and South America, France and Britain enjoyed support from their several colonies in Africa and common wealth states like South Africa, India, Egypt and East Africa. The 1919 treaty of Versailles deprived Germany of her colonies, which were given to France and Britain as mandate states. Thus the axis powers had few populations and colonies that made them to be outnumbered in the battlefield.

8. Shortage of raw materials and supplies to the Axis powers also accounted for the success of the allied powers. The League of Nations imposed economic embargo on Japan in 1931, Italy in 1935 and Germany in 1936. This made them unable to import the necessary war materials like rubber, cotton, copper, atomic and oil products to reinforce their military strength. It also created a serious economic crisis that affected the morale, strength and determination of the axis troops to the advantage of the allied powers.

9. Paradoxically, the allied powers were actively involved in trade and others like USA and USSR gained prosperity by producing war related materials. For example, Russia shifted her industries to rural mountains of the East after the German occupation of the West and produced vast quantities of arms and other war materials. USA's war industry was producing 120 warplanes and 70,000 tanks per year. These developments compared to economic crisis of the axis powers made the axis powers unable to withstand the allies after 1942.

10. The role played by USA in the war led to the defeat of axis powers. President FD Roosevelt had considered World War II as a European war and promised neutrality with USA. However, there was a radical policy change in which USA started supplying arms free of charge to Britain and France according to the Lease-lend act of March 1941. In the same year (1941), Japan invaded Hawaii Island and destroyed American pacific fleet at Pearl Harbour, which prompted USA to join the war against the axis powers. The involvement of USA boosted the allied powers with badly needed financial, human and technical resources since she had the most stable economy. For instance, USA freely supplied tanks, warships, fighter planes that shifted the military balance of power in favour of allied powers.

11. Press propaganda through the mass media e.g. newspaper, radio and magazines also aided the success of allied nations against axis powers. Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill used the London times and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to inform the world that the allies were fighting dictatorship, persecution and barbaric leadership. Franklin D Roosevelt utilised the Voice of America (VOA) to mobilise Americans and the whole world to fight the axis powers. Such press propaganda created a negative public opinion against axis powers and made it difficult to mobilise the masses for effective military campaign. It also favoured the formation of resistance movements in areas controlled by axis powers that made the success of allied powers inevitable.

12. The downfall of Italy in September 1943 and the defection of Badoglio who succeeded Mussolini was paramount in the success of allied powers against axis powers. In the aftermath of Anglo-American invasion of Italian mainland on 3rd September 1943, Badoglio withdrew Italy from the axis camp and joined the allied powers. This betrayed axis powers and led to leakage of military secrets and information to the advantage of allied powers. It also reinforced the allied camp given that Italy was used as a strategic base for aircraft and store for war materials. These played a crucial role in the subsequent defeat of Germany and Japan that marked the triumph of allied powers in World War II.

13. The death of prominent axis leaders i.e. Mussolini and Hitler also contributed to the defeat of axis powers. By 1945, Italy and Germany could no longer withstand the fire power of allied nations and there was public outcry for immediate end of the war. In 1943, Mussolini fled to Northern Italy from where he was assassinated by disgruntled fascist supporters. He was replaced by Badoglio who defected and helped the allied powers against the axis powers. In 1945, Hitler out of desperation committed suicide in a bunker. He was succeeded by a weak willed Admiral Doenitz who accepted to surrender unconditionally on 7th May 1945. The death of Mussolini and Hitler denied Japan of their inspiring leadership and support and that was why she (Japan) surrendered unconditionally in the aftermath of the dual bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

14. The role of US atomic bombings was the most instrumental in the final success of the allied powers. Japan had occupied vast parts of the east and defeated the US troops at Pearl Harbour in 1941. They had high morale and determination to fight even after the surrender of Germany and Italy. However, they were demoralised and hence surrendered because of the USA's atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. USA used US B-29 bomber to demolish Hiroshima on 6th Aug 1945 and Nagasaki on 9th Aug 1945. This forced Japan into unconditional surrender that marked the final success of the allied powers and hence defeat of the axis powers.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- 1.** To what extent did Adolf Hitler contribute to the occurrence of WWII by 1939?
- 2.** Assess the role of Germany to the occurrence of the Second World War.
- 3.** How far did the Versailles Conference lead to another world crisis between 1919 and 1939?
- 4.** Examine the significance of WWII in the history of Europe.
- 5.** Account for the defeat of the Axis powers by 1945.
- 6.** Account for Joseph Chamberlain's adoption of the appeasement policy in the interwar period.

