OVERVIEW

The afternoon of December 7, 1941, lazily unfolded on the East Coast of the United States without incident. At about 2:30 P.M., NBC’s radio network was finishing a broadcast of Sammy Kaye’s Sunday Serenade and CBS was about to go on the air with its normal afternoon news update. Suddenly the networks began reporting incredible news: the Empire of Japan had undertaken a huge aerial bombardment of the U.S. base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Accounts of Japanese attacks on Manila, in the Philippines, and on British-held Burma, also flooded in. The reports conveyed the stunning news that the entire American battle fleet in the Pacific had been wiped out; ultimately some 2,335 soldiers and sailors, along with 1,200 civilians, were killed in the attack. Panic gripped the residents of West Coast cities as air-raid sirens and reports of Japanese shelling of U.S. cities made the once-distant conflict an immediate reality.

The attack on Pearl Harbor drew the American people into the most destructive war in history. Renouncing the isolationism of the 1930s, many Americans enthusiastically endorsed Roosevelt’s argument that the United States, along with its allies, would fight to free the peoples of the world from fascist domination. Roosevelt, however, was faced with two enormous problems: defeating the most successful armies of conquest in world history and reconciling his war aims with those of the Allied leaders, Winston Churchill of Britain and Josef Stalin of the Soviet Union. Yet the Allies slowly began to turn the tide against Germany, Italy, and Japan, and Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill succeeded in overcoming their mutual distrust. By 1945 Europe was in ruins, Germany and Japan had been defeated, and the victors had turned to the problems of building a safer postwar order.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why did much of the American public oppose intervention in European affairs during the 1930s?
2. What national interests did Roosevelt think he was serving by opposing Germany and Japan?
3. What specific strategies did American military planners develop to defeat Japan, and why?
4. Why did Roosevelt and Churchill delay opening a second front against Germany?
5. What role did the Yalta and Potsdam conferences play in setting the stage for the Cold War?
6. What were some of the reasons why Truman decided to drop the atomic bomb?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did Allied leaders portray their cause as motivated by humanitarian or ideological beliefs? Which Allied actions during the war were consistent with these motives, and which seemed to pursue national self-interests or other considerations?
2. What national goals did Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill pursue during the war? How did their visions of the postwar world coincide, and how did they diverge?
3. How did the Allied leaders’ differences during the war foreshadow the conflicts of the Cold War?
4. Given the degree of human suffering that the atomic bomb brought to the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, do you believe that Truman was justified in choosing to drop it? Why or why not?
CHRONOLOGY

1933 Hitler takes power in Germany
1935 Italy invades Ethiopia
1936 Germany remilitarizes the Rhineland
1937 Japan invades China
September 1938 Munich conference; Germany occupies the Sudetenland
August 1939 German and Soviet Union sign nonaggression pact
September 1, 1939 Germany invades Poland; outbreak of Second World War in Europe
May 1940 Winston Churchill becomes prime minister of Britain
July 10, 1940 German forces conquer Paris
summer-fall 1940 Battle of Britain
March 1941 Congress passes Lend-Lease Act
June 22, 1941 Germany invades Soviet Union
July 1941 Japan invades French Indochina; The US announces embargo on Japan
August 1941 Roosevelt and Churchill issue the Atlantic Charter
December 7, 1941 Japan bombs Pearl Harbor
December 8, 1941 Congress declares war on Japan
December 11, 1941 Germany and Italy declare war on the United States
February 2, 1943 Germans surrender at Stalingrad
September 3, 1943 Allied invasion of southern Italy begins
September 1943 Italian government offers to surrender; Germans occupy Italy
November 1943 Teheran Conference
June 6, 1944 D-Day landing in Normandy
August 25, 1944 Allies capture Paris
December-January 1945 Battle of the Bulge
February 1945 Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin meet at Yalta
April 12, 1945 Roosevelt dies; replaced by Vice President Harry S. Truman
April 24, 1945 Soviet troops reach Berlin
April 30, 1945 Hitler commits suicide
May 8, 1945 Germany surrenders
July-August 1945 Allied leaders meet at Potsdam
August 6, 1945 The atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima
August 9, 1945 The atomic bomb is dropped on Nagasaki
September 2, 1945 Japan signs formal surrender declaration; end of Second World War

OUTLINE

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   A. Postwar Isolationism
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   C. Crises in Europe and Asia

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III. The War and its Aims, 1941–1944
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   D. The Potsdam Conference
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INTRODUCTION

Between 1939 and 1945 the United States went from being disinterested in world affairs to being a decisive force in the international arena. During the 1920s and 1930s, American policies had largely been isolationist, dedicated to avoiding entanglements in Europe and Asia in the name of concentrating on conditions closer to home. But as the United States wrestled with a difficult domestic issue, the Great Depression, an equally alarming crisis loomed overseas. In the late 1930s, as regimes in Japan, Germany, and Italy began conquering nearby regions and intimidating democratic states such as Britain and France, the United States' isolationist stance became increasingly difficult to maintain. With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, most of the American public opposed direct U.S. involvement, but widespread sympathy for the beleaguered Allies allowed President Franklin D. Roosevelt to take actions to oppose Japan and Germany. After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States energetically entered the war.

Roosevelt hoped that a defeat of the Axis powers would strengthen the cause of democracy around the world, but he had to reconcile his war aims with those of his allies, Winston Churchill of Britain and Josef Stalin of the Soviet Union. As the Allies slowly began to turn the tide against German and Japanese forces, the three men succeeded in overcoming their mutual distrust and put forward a series of diplomatic statements affirming that the war would create a freer and more just world order. But tensions lingered over how to reconcile the national interests of the Western powers and those of the Soviet Union. By 1945, with final victory in sight, the fighting gave way to an ideological rivalry between democracy and communism - and a growing political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The lines of the mid-20th-century Cold War had begun to emerge.

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY BETWEEN THE WARS

After the First World War, Americans turned their attention away from Europe to concentrate on domestic concerns. Americans' interest in foreign affairs only lessened with the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s, as trade protectionism and the need to improve the American economy took precedence over relations with Europe.

Postwar Isolationism
The end of World War I in 1918 marked the end of America's brief involvement as a major player on the world stage. President Woodrow Wilson, the main architect of America's intervention in the war, went to the Versailles peace conference in 1919 only to see most of his ideas for a just and equitable peace ignored by the victorious Allies. [1] The one part of Wilson's vision that did emerge from the conference - the idea of a League of Nations to settle international disputes - was rejected by isolationists in the U.S. Senate.

For the next 20 years the United States remained generally removed from European issues. The American public was cynical about the circumstances that had prompted U.S. entry into the recent war, and wished to avoid complex international alliances, instead preferring abstract statements of peace. A classic example was the Kellogg-Briand Pact, issued in April 1928 by French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand and U.S. secretary of state Frank Kellogg, proposing an international treaty to outlaw war. Although some 62 nations joined the United States and France in signing the treaty, it proved of little use in curbing international aggression in later years.

Foreign Policy during the 1930s
The worsening of the American economy during the 1930s caused an even stronger drift toward isolationism. In an attempt to combat the depression, in 1930 Congress passed the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act, placing stiff tariffs on imported goods. But the act simply depressed the economies of America's trading partners, who had trouble selling their products to the United States. Furthermore, the United States played only a minimal role in other efforts to foster
international cooperation: at a 1933 world economic conference in London, American delegates refused to change U.S. economic policies to help countries that wished to stay on the gold standard; in 1935 the Senate rejected American membership in the World Court.

Rather than help Europe, American policymakers focused their efforts during the 1930s on improving relations with nations closer to home, particularly in Latin and South America. Since the 1890s the United States had intervened militarily to create pro-American or democratic regimes in the region, based on the Monroe Doctrine's position that the Western Hemisphere was the United States' natural sphere of influence. But at his 1933 inauguration, Franklin D. Roosevelt announced that the United States would pursue a "good neighbor" policy toward Latin America, based on mutual respect, and renounced military intervention in Latin American affairs. In the next few years the United States concluded new treaties with various Latin and South American states and reduced American involvement in the political affairs of Cuba and Haiti.

Crises in Europe and Asia
Most Americans' determination to stay out of world affairs was further reinforced by the rise of militaristic and authoritarian dictators in Europe, whose actions seemed to promise a future war. Under Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany each pursued a policy of expansion based on appeals to national glory and imperial conquest. Hitler defied the Treaty of Versailles by occupying the Rhineland in 1936 and annexing German-speaking Austria in 1938. Encouraged by Germany's example, Mussolini invaded and conquered Ethiopia in 1935 and Albania in 1939.

On the other side of the globe, the empire of Japan was on the march in the Far East, threatening U.S. possessions in the region, particularly the Philippine Islands. In 1931 Japanese forces occupied the Chinese territory of Manchuria; in 1937 Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China, occupying most of the large cities along the Chinese coast. By 1940 the two nations were in a military stalemate: Japan was unable to defeat its much larger neighbor, while China's military suffered from internal political divisions.

Many Americans were happy to be far from the battlefields and wished for the United States to remain out of any conflict. Reflecting a popular belief that profit-seeking arms merchants and the self-aggrandizing policies of France and Britain had suckered the United States into World War I, Congress passed a series of neutrality acts between 1935 and 1937 that placed arms embargoes on all belligerent powers. [2] Roosevelt signed these measures, though he believed that they tended to hurt victim states rather than aggressors; in 1937 he openly called for the world community to "quarantine" expansionist states.

But Roosevelt failed to convince Americans to take a tougher line against international aggression, in part because the western European democracies, France and Britain, seemed especially reluctant to take strong stands against Germany and Italy. Britain and France had suffered greatly during the First World War and wanted to avoid any further destruction. Therefore, their leaders hoped to appease Hitler, allowing him to annex German-speaking areas to satisfy his territorial ambitions. The most significant attempt at appeasement came in September 1938, when Hitler demanded the Sudetenland region, part of Czechoslovakia, an ally of Britain and France. Emerging from a tense conference with Hitler in Munich, British prime minister Neville Chamberlain announced that he had agreed to Hitler's terms in exchange for a promise that Hitler would not invade the rest of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain argued that the Munich agreement promised the world "peace in our time," and the United States along with the rest of the world breathed a sigh of relief. But in March 1939 Hitler broke his promise and occupied all of Czechoslovakia; he also began to demand German-speaking areas of Poland. British and French diplomats now urgently solicited an alliance with Soviet leader Josef Stalin, but Stalin distrusted the West and in August agreed to a nonaggression pact with Hitler that divided Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union. Hitler invaded Poland on
September 1, 1939; Britain and France declared war on Germany shortly thereafter, and the world was once again at war.

**FROM NEUTRALITY TO WAR**

In September 1939 the United States watched from the sidelines as Hitler and Stalin rapidly conquered Poland and divided it between them. Roosevelt pledged official U.S. neutrality, backed by polls showing that over 90% of the American public wanted the country to stay out of war. But overwhelming German victories and devastating Allied losses changed American public opinion toward the conflict. Despite American military neutrality, Roosevelt admitted in a September radio broadcast that he could not ask Americans to "remain neutral in thought as well." Roosevelt and most Americans, reading reports of aggression and brutal occupation overseas, strongly sympathized with Britain, France, and Poland in their battles with Germany and with China in its war against Japan.

In 1939 American outrage over Poland translated into a new neutrality act that allowed belligerent powers, particularly Britain and France, to buy arms from the United States. The United States accordingly began taking steps to oppose Germany and Japan while not committing any troops to war. This ambivalence finally ended on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor brought an official American declaration of war.

**Blitzkriegs and Britain**

During the winter of 1939-1940, the world waited for an expected German invasion of the heavily fortified French-German border. As the months wore on, some critics began to refer to the tense situation as a "phony war." In the spring, however, Germany suddenly launched a series of blitzkriegs (or "lightning wars") that succeeded in defeating most of its neighbors.

In April and May 1940 the Germans ripped through Denmark and Norway. Other German forces swept through Belgium and the Netherlands in May and June. Using their position in Belgium, on June 5 German armies attacked France from the north, bypassing the main French defenses. The Germans captured Paris on July 10, 1940, after only six weeks of battle, and forced the French to sign a humiliating treaty creating a pro-German French regime, headquartered in Vichy.

With the Soviet Union remaining neutral toward Hitler, only the British, separated from the continent of Europe by the English Channel, stood against the seemingly unstoppable Germans. In the summer and autumn that followed, the two nations fought in the Battle of Britain, in which Hitler unsuccessfully attempted to break Britain's air power and spirit through heavy bombardment of British cities and military installations. Many Americans sympathized with the suffering of the British people facing German bombardments, the horrors of which were relayed nightly from London by radio correspondents.

The situation in Britain set the stage for U.S. involvement in the war. In May 1940 Roosevelt asked Congress to increase spending on American national defense and authorized sending surplus or outdated arms and munitions to Britain. In the same month, a more important development for the long-term relationship between the two countries took place: Winston Churchill replaced the ineffective Chamberlain as British prime minister. An inspiring speaker who had long warned of Hitler's growing power, Churchill famously pledged to fight the Germans on the beaches and in the streets of Britain, if necessary. But Churchill believed that an alliance with the United States was the key to Britain’s survival and eventual victory. Determined to win President Roosevelt’s friendship and support, Churchill frequently wrote Roosevelt and later visited the White House for long stays; a strong bond of cooperation grew between the two leaders.
Isolation and Intervention

Even an awareness of the dire straits facing Britain did not change most Americans' opposition to entering the war. Nevertheless, public sentiment in favor of providing some form of aid to the Allies had been growing since the invasion of Poland and accelerated with the fall of France. Many Americans foresaw dangers for the United States should Germany conquer Britain. With control of Europe - as well as the vast Asian and African empires formerly held by Britain and France - Germany might be unbeatable in any future confrontation.

Thus, in late 1940 Roosevelt further increased expenses for American military production and in September approved the first peacetime draft in U.S. history. He also announced that the United States was giving the British 50 old but renovated naval destroyers in return for naval and air bases in Britain's Atlantic territories. [3]

Roosevelt's moves prompted criticism from figures on the left, such as Norman Thomas and Senator Robert La Follette, as well as from conservatives, such as William Randolph Hearst and Montana senator Burton Wheeler, who formed an "America First Committee" opposed to the deal. The most notable spokesman for the America First group, aviator Charles Lindbergh, argued that the Nazis were unstoppable and that saving Britain would hurt American interests.

Opinion polls, however, found that a large majority of Americans supported providing Britain with economic and military aid, and most politicians responded. Dark-horse candidate Wendell Willkie, for example, was propelled to the Republican presidential nomination in 1940 largely on the strength of his support for providing aid to Britain. In the fall, Roosevelt, running for an unprecedented third term, repeatedly declared that the United States would not enter the war but warned the nation that dangerous waters lay ahead.

Aid Short of War

Roosevelt handily won reelection in November 1940 and soon began articulating a more forceful plan for American involvement in the war. The war, he told Congress in January 1941, meant that "the democratic way of life is being directly assailed in every part of the world." America had to take a stand to preserve that way of life, Roosevelt declared, and to create a world based on what he dubbed the Four Freedoms - freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. This was Roosevelt's clearest statement yet that the United States would take a powerful role in creating a new order in world affairs.

Roosevelt then worked out a plan to aid Britain and China, which were running out of money to buy American weapons, food, and uniforms. Roosevelt pressured Congress in March 1941 to pass the Lend-Lease Act, empowering the president to give or lend U.S. weapons and other supplies to nations fighting against the Germans or the Japanese. [4] These measures became even more urgent with a series of victories for the German, Italian, and Japanese powers (now in a formal alliance, known as the "Axis") in late 1940 and early 1941.

Backing up fumbling Italian efforts to conquer Greece, Hitler's units overwhelmed Yugoslavia and the rest of the Balkans and forced Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary to join the Axis. German troops similarly helped Italians in Libya repel a British offensive from Egypt. Hitler, concluding that Britain was impregnable from invasion, decided in mid 1941 to change tactics and wipe out any potential threat from the Soviet Union. In a June 1941 blitzkrieg invasion, the Germans poured deep into the Soviet Union, but were stopped just short of Moscow in December.

Responding to these devastating events, Roosevelt decided to take even stronger measures to aid the Allied cause. In August 1941 Roosevelt met with Churchill in a secret conference off the coast of Newfoundland. Roosevelt told Churchill that he would give American assistance in the war against the Germans but not declare war. The two leaders agreed to jointly issue a set of war aims known as the Atlantic Charter, which stated that the war was being waged in the name of
national self-determination and was not a war of conquest. The United States had committed itself to the defeat of Germany and the victory of Britain.

Roosevelt soon ordered the U.S. Navy to escort ships laden with war materials across the Atlantic, which was heavily patrolled by German U-boats. The Germans sank U.S. ships in the fall of 1941, after which Roosevelt ordered the navy to fire on German and Italian submarines. The United States was now in an undeclared shooting war with Germany in the Atlantic.

Conflict in the Pacific
Meanwhile, relations between the United States and Japan had worsened. The Japanese conquest of China plainly violated the American belief, pursued by American diplomats since the turn of the century, that China should be kept free from foreign domination. In July 1941, Japan went further, occupying the French colony of Indochina, which included Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Alarmed, the United States perceived in the Japanese move a bid to control all of Asia, threatening American interests in the region. The United States retaliated by cutting off all trade with Japan.

This decision posed a grave threat to the Japanese. Without the import of vital raw materials, most notably oil, the Japanese economy and military campaign in China would come to a halt. The United States had given Japan a difficult choice: either withdraw from Indochina and China or seek resources from somewhere else through invasion. The latter course would provoke war with the United States.

Japanese planners chose to invade British and Dutch possessions in the mineral- and oil-rich East Indies after knocking out all American military power in the Pacific. In September 1941 the imperial command decided to stage an attack on the main U.S. fleet in the Pacific, anchored at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. American intelligence officials had cracked Japanese secret codes in September 1940 but were unable to discover where or when a Japanese attack might come. [5] Meanwhile, diplomatic negotiations between the United States and Japan continued without resolution. [6]

Suddenly, on the morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese bombers appeared in the skies above Pearl Harbor. The bombers sank or damaged eight U.S. battleships and killed 2,403 Americans before returning to six aircraft carriers positioned 220 miles from Hawaii. At the same time, Japan launched offensives against the Philippine Islands, Guam, and Midway, as well as British-held Hong Kong and Malaysia, in order to acquire the resource-rich empire its planners had envisioned.

Shocked and angry Americans heard Roosevelt announce that December 7 would become "a day which will live in infamy" as he asked Congress for a declaration of war against Japan. On December 8 both houses of Congress declared war with only one dissenting vote, that of Montana representative Jeanette Rankin. The president still did not ask for a declaration of war against Germany, but Hitler elected to declare war on the United States on December 11.

By December 1941 the German-Japanese Axis seemed all-powerful. The Japanese had mauled the Americans at Pearl Harbor and scored rapid victories in the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines. German and Italian forces held much of North Africa and most of Europe except Britain, while Hitler's armies were nearing Moscow. But this very success by the Axis powers had brought the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union together in a Grand Alliance that would turn the tide of the war.

THE WAR AND ITS AIMS, 1941-1944
The biggest challenge faced by American military planners in 1941 and 1942 was finding a way to bring the country's power to bear on the situation in Europe and the Pacific. As a massive nationwide mobilization effort got underway, Roosevelt and his advisors met their Russian and
British counterparts and devised war strategies. Over the next few years, American forces intervened in the Pacific, North Africa, Italy, and finally France; in each theater American participation helped turn the tide against the Axis. By 1944 Allied leaders had begun to contemplate victory and draw up plans for a postwar world, but already lines of division between them had begun to appear.

**Wartime Alliances**

A week after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Churchill and Roosevelt met at the White House, formalizing what was already a close and productive relationship between the two leaders. At the same time, Stalin and Anthony Eden, Churchill's representative, met in Moscow. The two sets of talks established the Allies' partnership for the fight against Germany and Japan.

The Washington conference established joint goals for war production and a coordinated military command structure, ensuring that British and U.S. forces planned their efforts in unison. Despite sentiment in the United States that viewed Japan as the main aggressor, Roosevelt and Churchill agreed that Germany posed the greater global threat and should be defeated before Japan. For the time being, however, neither the United States nor Britain was strong enough to mount an attack on Germany across the English Channel; for many months, the Soviet Union would be the only force battling the Axis on the European continent. To help the Soviets, the United States and Britain sent over $11 billion in lend-lease trucks, food, and other supplies to the eastern front.

Stalin and Eden's meeting in Moscow, during which one could hear the boom of German guns approaching the city, was more tense than the Washington meeting. The hard-pressed Soviets had already lost many thousands of soldiers and much territory. Stalin wanted a permanent alliance with Britain and the United States. The question was, an alliance on what terms? Eden tried to get Stalin to accept the Atlantic Charter, specifically its declarations that conquered lands should be returned to their pre-1939 owners and that all liberated nations should be allowed to hold democratic elections.

Stalin, however, saw the Atlantic Charter as a threat. The Soviet leader wanted to use the war to retake land that Poland had conquered from the Soviet Union in 1921.

Poland was the source of much tension between Stalin and his Western Allies. Stalin recalled that in 1939, Poland, although weak militarily, had refused to conclude a defense treaty with the Soviet Union - part of the reason the Soviet leader had agreed to the nonaggression pact with Hitler. Blaming the Poles' stubbornness for Hitler's power in Europe, Stalin had decided that he would never agree to any European settlement that would again let armies sweep eastward, unimpeded, toward Moscow. He wanted assurances that any postwar Polish government would be friendly to the Soviet Union.

In May 1942, as the Soviet Red Army struggled alone against the German armies, Roosevelt invited Stalin's foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov to the White House to resolve the differences between the Soviet Union and the other Allies. Fearing the hard-pressed Soviets might make a separate peace with Germany, Roosevelt suggested to Molotov that after the war the four major allies - the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and China - should exert their military and political power in their regions of the world to ensure international peace.

Stalin enthusiastically agreed to this "four policemen" approach, believing that it was Roosevelt's way of promising him that at the war's end the West would allow governments friendly to Soviet interests to be installed in Eastern Europe. Roosevelt, however, probably only envisioned a general Soviet role in guaranteeing world security. Thus, even as the United States entered the war, Roosevelt's vision of the postwar world - as expressed in the Atlantic Charter - was on a collision course with that of the Soviet leader.
The American War Effort
Due to Roosevelt's war preparation programs, such as the draft and a military buildup, Americans in December 1941 were already partially prepared for war. The months after Pearl Harbor saw a host of government efforts to speed up industrial production of war materials and accelerate work on technological and scientific breakthroughs such as sonar and radar.

War preparation also had a profound effect on the American economy. Between 1941 and 1946, war-related government spending of some $300 billion provided almost full employment for civilians and finally ended the Great Depression. Government regulations also changed the nature of domestic economic production and processes. In order to direct limited materials to soldiers on the front without causing crippling inflation, war measures strictly controlled prices and rationed commodities such as gasoline, sugar, metal, and meat.

Providing the military with supplies was a formidable logistical challenge, but it was accompanied by the endurance and courage of the millions of American men and women on the battlefield. In the steamy jungle terrain of the South Pacific and the rain-drenched and mud-filled foxholes of Italy, American soldiers fought and survived dangerous battles, long periods of boredom, and dangerous diseases. By 1945 the United States had amassed the largest military force in its history: some 7 million servicemen in the army, 3.9 million in the navy, 2.3 million in the army air corps (forerunner to the present-day air force), and 600,000 in the marines.

The Pacific Theater, 1941-1942
Although Churchill and Roosevelt had agreed to make the defeat of Germany rather than Japan their first goal, the United States had a larger presence in the Pacific than in Europe. Thus, it was in the Pacific that the first direct battles involving American troops were fought. In the early months of the war these included a depressing litany of defeats for American forces. Japan quickly seized most American possessions in the Philippines in December 1941 and January 1942, although U.S. forces held on the Bataan Peninsula until April and on the fortified island of Corregidor, in Manila harbor, until May.

On December 22, 1941, the Japanese took Wake Island, about 1,000 miles from the western end of the Hawaiian archipelago.

In the first few months of 1942, Japanese offensives moving south and southeast toward Australia conquered British Burma and Singapore, the islands of the Dutch East Indies (modern-day Indonesia), northern New Guinea, and the Solomon and Gilbert Islands.

The Japanese forces continued their offensives, heading south on land across the island of New Guinea (to isolate British-allied Australia) and east by sea toward Hawaii. By taking Hawaii, they hoped to end the American threat in the Pacific before the United States had fully mobilized its resources.

But in both areas the American forces were able to halt the Japanese advance. In May 1942, at the Battle of the Coral Sea, American planes managed to sink a Japanese aircraft carrier and damage the enemy fleet, ending the Japanese drive toward Australia. In June, the Japanese military command attempted to deal a knockout punch to American forces by capturing Midway Island, at the end of the Hawaiian archipelago, and then quickly taking Pearl Harbor. But U.S. intelligence discovered the Japanese plan, allowing reinforcements to move to Midway; in the Battle of Midway (June 3-6), the Japanese lost four aircraft carriers and suffered a decisive defeat. Although in subsequent weeks its forces occupied several of the westernmost Aleutian Islands (off Alaska), Japan had reached the limit of its expansion in the Pacific and soon began to decline.

The European Theater, 1942-1943
In Europe the early and middle months of 1942 also saw the Axis powers reach the limit of their expansion. During the first six months of the year, German U-boats sank over 400 American ships
in the Caribbean and North Atlantic, until Allied planes and ships chased the subs away. In May and June, German troops under Lieutenant General Erwin Rommel moved from Libya almost to the heart of British-held Egypt, until being checked only seven miles from Alexandria on June 29 at El Alamein. In Russia, although a Soviet offensive early in the year succeeded in pushing German forces back from Moscow, the Germans launched a summer counter-offensive against southern Russia and the Caucasus Mountains, taking Stalingrad on September 13.

These reverses lent extra urgency to discussions between Allied leaders about opening a second front in Europe. While Roosevelt favored launching an immediate assault across the English Channel in late 1942, Churchill resisted this plan, arguing instead for bombing campaigns against German cities and military installations to slowly decrease German power. As a compromise, Churchill suggested an Allied invasion of North Africa, code-named "Operation Torch," that began on October 23. American and British forces landed in Vichy-occupied Morocco and Algeria and encountered little resistance; at the same time a major British offensive from Egypt succeeded in bottling up the Germans in Tunisia.

**Turning Points: 1943**

In 1943 Allied leaders faced the question of how to translate some of their early successes into a broad strategy for winning the war. In January Roosevelt and Churchill, encouraged by the victories in North Africa, agreed to invade Sicily and Italy, continuing to avoid a direct assault on occupied France. The Allies attacked Sicily in July and succeeded in taking the entire island by mid August. These measures brought an unexpected bonus when Italy’s King Victor Emmanuel III abruptly dismissed Mussolini and created a new government that offered to join the Allies. However, German troops soon rushed in to occupy Italy and later reinstalled Mussolini as the head of an Italian puppet government. American forces landing on the Italian mainland in September made little headway against Hitler's forces, unable to advance farther north than Naples before the end of the year.

Meanwhile, progress was being made on other fronts. In August 1942 the United States had launched a marine assault on the island of Guadalcanal, the first U.S. offensive in the Pacific. A desperate and costly battle ended in February 1943 with American control and a secure foothold in the South Pacific. Throughout 1943 American troops made more gains in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, retook the Aleutians, and began an advance in the central Pacific toward the Philippines. American success was made possible by a new strategy, known as "island-hopping," that took advantage of American air power by bypassing strongly fortified Japanese islands, cutting them off from reinforcements.

By May 1943 all German and Italian forces in Africa had been defeated.

At the same time, the Soviets had launched a fierce counterattack against the Germans at Stalingrad between November 1942 and February 1943. After casualties of 800,000 Axis soldiers and some 1 million Soviet soldiers, the surrounded German army in the region finally surrendered, effectively destroying Hitler's chances of conquest in Russia. The remainder of 1943 saw rapid Soviet advances along a broad north-south line; by the beginning of January 1944 Soviet troops outnumbered their German counterparts by nearly two to one.

**The Teheran Conference**

The first meeting between Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin took place in November 1943 in Teheran, Iran, and came at a generally auspicious time for the Allies. Nevertheless, the main subject of the meeting was the opening of the second front against German-held France, repeatedly postponed by Roosevelt and Churchill. At the meeting they agreed that this operation would come in mid 1944; in exchange, Stalin would open a front against Japan once Germany had been defeated.
Teheran marked the high point of good will between the three leaders, as they genially agreed on the broad outlines of a future world order. Roosevelt did not protest Stalin's obvious intention to play a leading role in postwar Eastern Europe, and both Roosevelt and Churchill agreed that the Soviet Union could retake the territory in eastern Poland that it had lost in 1921. (In return for losing this land, Poland would receive parts of eastern Germany after Germany was defeated.) Roosevelt also received a crucial assent from Stalin for Soviet participation in a global peacekeeping assembly, later known as the United Nations. Roosevelt believed that the organization could only succeed if all major world powers, including the Soviets, were committed to it. With these agreements the Allies had begun the task of translating their close wartime partnership into a structure that might be able to guarantee global peace.

1944: Victory in View
In early 1944, with the spirit of cooperation between the major Allies now stronger than ever, Allied forces attacked German and Japanese troops on a number of fronts. Intensive bombardment of German military installations in France and Germany began in January, in preparation for a cross-channel invasion.

In the Soviet Union, Soviet forces continued moving westward against Hitler's troops, pushing deep into the Ukraine and the Crimea and capturing Sevastopol in May. Allied forces in the Pacific approached the Philippines and Japan, conquering positions in the Marshall Islands and opening another front by invading Burma.

In Italy, following months of struggle with German troops, Allied units finally captured Rome on June 4.

But all eyes were on the planned Allied landing in Northern France, which Hitler had anticipated and reinforced his defenses to counter. If the western Allies failed to win a foothold in France, Hitler would be able to rush troops back to Russia and possibly hold off the advancing Soviets. But an amphibious American, Canadian, and British assault on a 60-mile stretch of Normandy beaches, made by some 156,000 troops and supervised by American general Dwight Eisenhower, succeeded in establishing a landing zone on June 6, 1944. After D-Day, as it was known, the Allies poured some 1 million troops into France and struck eastward, taking Caen (July 18), St. Lô (July 25), and Paris (August 25).

Events moved rapidly thereafter. Over 2 million American, British, and other Allied troops had entered France by September 5, and German defenses crumbled. By September 11 all of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg had been liberated, and the next day Allied troops entered Germany. On the eastern front, Soviet troops invaded the Baltic states and East Prussia in the north and the Balkans and Hungary in the south. In the Pacific, American troops landed on Mindoro Island in the Philippines on December 15, and a series of naval battles destroyed most of Japan's remaining sea power. By late 1944, with Allied troops moving on all fronts toward Berlin and Tokyo, the defeat of the Axis was assured.

A WORLD REMADE: 1945
By early 1945 Allied leaders faced the question of how to construct a peaceful world order after the war. But the war wasn't over yet, and the Axis powers' stubborn resistance to Allied invasion created difficulties for discussions over the future of Europe and Asia. In particular, divisions had begun to emerge between Stalin's Soviet Union and his British and American allies. Diplomatic discussions only resolved these debates temporarily; in the long run they helped set the stage for a global Cold War.

Germany's Last Stand
On December 16, 1944, German forces launched a desperate counteroffensive through the Ardennes forest in Belgium, forcing thinly spread out Allied troops to retreat westward for 50 miles. This "Battle of the Bulge," the largest battle of the western front, ended when the Germans
failed to take Bastogne, Belgium. Although the battle stymied Allied progress in the west in January 1945, it diverted badly needed resources from the rest of Germany, leaving the country virtually undefended before an ensuing Allied advance.

In January the Soviets made rapid progress toward Berlin on their front. Only a few months before, in July 1944, Stalin, reasserting his hostility to Polish independence, had ordered his troops near Warsaw not to help an anti-German rebellion there, knowing that the Polish rebels were also anti-Soviet. Once the Germans had brutally put down the revolt, Soviet forces captured Warsaw from the Germans (January 17) and pushed on to the Oder River (January 23), only 36 miles from Berlin.

The Yalta Conference

Even as victory over Germany grew closer, relations among the Allies grew more strained. Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin, meeting at the Crimean town of Yalta in early February 1945, faced the question of what the world should look like after the war's end. Although the Allies had been issuing joint statements of principles for years, difficult problems emerged over how to put these principles into practice.

The most intense diplomatic disagreements between the western Allies and the Soviet Union concerned Poland, now occupied by Soviet forces.

Stalin demanded the installation of a Polish government that would be friendly to Moscow. He refused to recognize the prewar Polish leadership - which was headquartered in London as a "government in exile" - and in 1944 had set up a rival pro-Soviet regime in the town of Lublin. Britain and France had pledged to defend the independence of Poland back in 1939, only to see Stalin occupy half of that nation in his deal with Hitler; Soviet troops had also killed 15,000 Polish army officers in the Katyn Massacre of 1940. The Poles themselves, as well as westerners, were thus highly alarmed by the possibility of Communist rule.

To Roosevelt and Churchill, Stalin's attitude toward the Polish question reflected the Soviet leader's broader desire to amass power in Eastern Europe. This put Roosevelt and Churchill in a quandary: given that the Soviet Union had suffered a truly staggering number of deaths - some 6 million troops and 10 million civilians by the war's end - the Western leaders couldn't really oppose Stalin's determination that Russia never again be invaded from the west. But any pro-Soviet government that Stalin installed in Poland probably wouldn't be created by democratic elections and thus would violate the principles of national self-determination proclaimed by the western Allies in the Atlantic Charter. It would also engender domestic opposition in the United States from Polish-Americans and congressmen who opposed Soviet control of postwar Poland. More broadly, such a move would establish the precedent that those German-held countries liberated by Soviet troops might also have pro-Soviet regimes installed in them - further increasing Communist influence in Europe.

In the end, the Yalta agreement, while vague and contradictory, yielded to Soviet demands on many points.

It promised independent and democratic regimes in Poland and Eastern Europe, yet implicitly conceded that pro-Soviet parties would have a large - perhaps dominant - role in these regimes. Stalin again agreed to enter the war in the Pacific - in the event of an invasion of Japan, Soviet help would save American lives - but a secret agreement with Roosevelt gave the Soviets a sphere of influence in Asia, notably in northern Korea (later a site of Cold War tension).

The decisions at Yalta thus ratified Stalin's control over large parts of Europe and Asia. In subsequent years, as the disagreements between the West and the Soviets escalated into the Cold War, critics charged that Roosevelt, who lacked Churchill's keen mistrust of Stalin, sold out Eastern Europe at Yalta and emboldened Soviet aggression. But historians have noted that the
Soviets had already occupied much of Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Roosevelt was determined to bring the Soviets into the war on Japan and to include them in the United Nations. For these reasons most historians have concluded that there was little short of direct war that Roosevelt - in poor health and to die from a cerebral hemorrhage within a month - could have done to oppose Stalin's designs.

**Final Moves in Europe and the Pacific**

Before the postwar world could be arranged, however, the Axis had to be defeated, and it was now the turn of the western Allies to push quickly toward Berlin. Beginning their final offensive on February 8, Allied troops crossed the Rhine River at Remagen on March 7 and rapidly dominated the German heartland. On April 11 American troops stopped at the Elbe River, which Allied leaders had agreed would be the easternmost limit of the American occupation zone in Germany. The Soviets, meanwhile, encountered fierce resistance in eastern Germany, only entering Berlin on April 24. Hitler committed suicide on April 30 and all German forces surrendered on May 8, known as "Victory in Europe," or V-E Day.

In the Pacific theater, the naval war against Japan had largely ended by late 1944, but the prospect of a drawn-out and deadly invasion of the Japanese home islands loomed. Japanese forces, given instructions to fight to the death without reinforcements and now bolstered by kamikaze suicide missions, hoped to inflict massive losses and hold off the Allied demand for "unconditional surrender." It took a month for American forces to eliminate Japanese resistance on the bunker- and cave-filled island of Iwo Jima, at a cost of 8,500 American lives (as against perhaps 21,000 Japanese). On April 1, 1945, American troops landed on the island of Okinawa, meant to be the main base for a future invasion of Japan. It took some three months and 50,000 American casualties before Japanese resistance in Okinawa ended; over 100,000 Japanese defenders died in the battle.

**The Potsdam Conference**

The Potsdam conference, held from late July to early August 1945, brought the leaders of Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union together for the last time. But the faces had changed: President Harry Truman now represented the United States, having taken office after Roosevelt's death in April, and Churchill left mid-conference after being voted out of office in British elections. The turnover in leaders brought a new sense of uncertainty and mistrust to the proceedings. Much of the tension could be attributed to the suspicion felt by American and British officials for what they saw as aggressive moves by the Soviets. Stalin demanded that Germany never be permitted to wage war again, proposing to take $20 billion in reparations from any future German state. The western Allies resisted this demand, fearing the effects high reparations would have on rebuilding a democratic Germany. (A compromise allowed the Soviets to gain some reparations, in the form of industrial machinery and equipment, from the western occupation zones.) Stalin was also adamant that pro-Soviet governments be established in Soviet-conquered areas of Eastern Europe; his blunt message and hostile tone discouraged Western leaders, particularly Truman.

Eventually the Allies found broad agreement in several punitive steps against Germany, which lost its territory east of the Oder River.

Until new central governments could be set up, Germany, Austria, and the German capital of Berlin were divided into military occupation zones between the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France.

German-speaking populations in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland were forcibly moved to Germany, as the Allies hoped to end the chaotic mixture of nationalities in Eastern Europe that had given Hitler's aggression a pretext.
The Potsdam conference ended on August 2, with the Allies issuing a demand for Japan's unconditional surrender.

**Defeat of Japan**  
In 1945 Japan was only lightly defended against American attack; huge firebombings of Japanese cities (the first, against Tokyo on March 9, killed 83,000 people) went unopposed. But American planners estimated that an invasion of the Japanese home islands, scheduled for November 1945 and March 1946, would cost 50,000 American casualties in its first phases alone. At the same time, President Truman was presented with a new weapon: the atomic bomb, successfully tested in July 1945 at Alamogordo, New Mexico.

Apparently under the misimpression that the bomb would only destroy military targets, Truman chose to use it on the city of Hiroshima, after the Japanese government failed to respond to an Allied ultimatum to surrender or face "utter devastation." On August 6, 1945, a B-29 bomber called Enola Gay dropped the bomb, destroying Hiroshima and ultimately causing death or injury to 160,000 people. After a second bomb destroyed Nagasaki on August 9, ultimately killing between 60,000 and 80,000 people, the Japanese government offered to surrender on the condition that the Japanese emperor be allowed to keep his throne. The Allies accepted, just after the Soviet Union had declared war on Japan. On August 15 the Japanese people heard the voice of their emperor, Hirohito, announcing the surrender over the radio. On September 2, 1945, the Japanese government brought the war to an end with their official surrender on board the battleship Missouri in Tokyo harbor.

Historians continue to debate Truman's motivation for dropping the bomb. Truman later argued that the tenacious Japanese defense of Iwo Jima and Okinawa had convinced him that using the atomic bomb was the only way to prevent massive American casualties. Yet some military and scientific advisers maintained after the war that Japan was ready to surrender and that there was no reason to drop the bomb. Several historians, therefore, have argued that Truman was influenced in his decision by fear of the Soviet Union. Truman was mindful of Stalin's promise to open another front against Japan, which could result in the further expansion of Soviet influence. Truman and his advisers may thus have seen the bomb as a way to bring the war to a quick end before the Soviets could exercise their power in Asia. Regardless of Truman's specific motives, the historical record clearly shows that as the Second World War was coming to an end, the possibility of a broader confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union was already shaping American policies.

**CONCLUSION**

World War II ravaged huge parts of the world, leaving some 17 million soldiers and 18 million civilians dead. Germany had lost some 4 million lives, and its major cities, such as Hamburg and Dresden, were in ruins; Japan had also suffered massive losses, including over 2 million dead. The cities of even a victorious state such as Britain lay in ruins. Furthermore, as American and Soviet troops liberated Nazi work and death camps, the world saw for the first time the extent of Hitler's Holocaust, which had killed over 6 million European Jews. American losses in the war had been comparatively small: by the end of the war, the United States had suffered 294,000 battle deaths and 114,000 deaths from accidents, diseases, and other causes. In addition, the United States had escaped major destruction of its economic infrastructure.

Just as World War II transformed the world, so did it transform the United States' role in world affairs. Between 1939 and 1945 the United States had moved from being a neutral party in the war to being the world's largest military superpower. Diplomatic successes played as important a role as military triumphs in this development; Roosevelt's ability to take the lead role in the Grand Alliance helped to ensure that American power would endure after the war's end. But the same forces had propelled the Soviet Union to superpower status as well, and as the last shots of World War II were fired, the Cold War was just beginning. In the coming years the United States
and the Soviet Union would collide over the very issues raised by their brief cooperation during the Second World War.

**FOOTNOTES**

[1] Wilson had long argued that the peace would have to be founded on non-punitive measures and the principle of self-determination for the peoples of Europe. British and French leaders, on the other hand, had suffered heavily during the war and demanded that Germany be severely punished for starting the war. The final Treaty of Versailles largely rejected Wilson’s arguments, assigning Germany sole guilt for the war, saddling Germany with $33 billion in reparations debts and giving large German-speaking regions to Poland and Czechoslovakia.

[2] Between 1934 and 1936, a Senate investigation led by Senator Gerald P. Nye looked into allegations that American munitions manufacturers had led the United States into World War I. American financiers and arms makers had undoubtedly grown wealthy during the war, and the committee suggested — although without any concrete proof — that these interest groups had pressured the U.S. government to intervene on the side of the Allies. This understanding of America’s involvement in the First World War deeply influenced the neutrality acts passed by Congress in the late 1930s.

[3] Instead of submitting the agreement for congressional approval, Roosevelt signed an executive order giving the ships to Churchill. Congress, along with the rest of the country, found out about the agreement from the newspapers.

[4] By the end of the war, the United States had spent over $50 billion in lend-lease aid, with some $32 billion going to Britain.

[5] Conspiracy theorists have wondered since the war’s end whether Roosevelt knew of the attack on Pearl Harbor in advance and chose not to warn the country so as to better mobilize the nation’s anger for war. Historians, however, have not found direct evidence of such advance knowledge on the part of any American official. Weeks before the Pearl Harbor attack, intelligence analysts had been predicting a Japanese attack somewhere in the Pacific, but most expected it to hit the Philippines.

[6] Much of the American anger about the attack on Pearl Harbor was based on the feeling that it was a “sneak attack,” undertaken by Japan while its diplomats were sitting at the negotiating table. Roosevelt himself mentioned this issue in his War Message to Congress on December 8. The Japanese envoy to Washington, Saburo Kurusu, had been instructed by his government to notify American officials that talks had broken down at 1 P.M. on December 7, shortly before the attack was scheduled, but Kurusu was delayed until 2 P.M., when news of Pearl Harbor had just reached the nation. Kurusu was apparently unaware of the fact that his negotiations with American officials had been camouflage for the attack.