Ch. 34 – Origins of World War II/EQ: Could World War II have been prevented?

34.1 – Introduction
- In the 1930s, a German dictator, Adolf Hitler, took advantage of Germany’s troubles to stir up German nationalism.
- He rearmed the country, violating the Treaty of Versailles, and began to threaten his neighbors.
- In 1936, German troops occupied the Rhineland, a German region on the border with France.
- Although the Versailles Treaty banned military activities in this region, the League of Nations did nothing in response. Two years later, Hitler demanded that the Sudetenland, a German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia, be turned over to Germany. At this point, many Europeans feared that Hitler was pushing Europe toward war.
- France and Great Britain still bore the scars of World War I and would go to great lengths to prevent another conflict.
- France and Britain distrusted Hitler. Yet they had already decided on a policy of appeasement —yielding to an enemy’s demands in order to maintain peace.
- Munich Pact [Munich Pact: the 1938 agreement in which Britain and France appeased Hitler by agreeing that Germany could annex the Sudetenland, a German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia]

34.2 – Dictators and Militarists Rise to Power
- Hitler’s violation of the Treaty of Versailles boosted his popularity in Germany.
  - Germans hated paying war reparations, as the treaty required.
  - They also objected to the war-guilt clause, which blamed them for World War I.
- The nationalistic feelings aroused by the treaty allowed Hitler to seize control and turn Germany into a dictatorship.
  - Nationalism also helped strong leaders take power in Italy and Japan.
- In the Soviet Union, however, dictatorship emerged from a different source—communism.

Stalin Creates a Totalitarian Dictatorship in the Soviet Union
- By the early 1930s, Stalin had established a totalitarian dictatorship.
- Totalitarianism [totalitarianism: a system in which the government totally controls all aspects of a society, including the economy]
- Stalin set two main economic goals for the Soviet Union.
  - He wanted to raise agricultural production and to modernize industry.
  - In 1928, Stalin established a Five-Year Plan to reach his goals.
- Stalin also used brutal methods to strengthen his control of the Communist Party.
  - In 1934, he started to purge party officials by having them arrested, put on trial, and executed. By 1936, the Soviet secret police were rounding up and killing enormous numbers of party leaders, military officers, industrial managers, and others.
  - This Great Purge, which claimed millions of lives, ensured that remaining officials would be loyal to Stalin.

Mussolini Establishes a Fascist Dictatorship in Italy
- Benito Mussolini, a veteran of the war, took advantage of conditions in Italy to emerge as a national figure and eventually form a dictatorship.
- In 1919, Mussolini founded the first fascist political movement.
  - Fascism [fascism: a political movement based on an extreme nationalism in which the state comes first and individual liberty is secondary] is based on an extreme nationalism in which the state comes first and individual liberty is secondary.
  - Mussolini used his extraordinary skill at public speaking to promote fascism.
By 1922, fascists dominated several areas of Italy, and Mussolini prepared to take control of the whole country.

- Mussolini wanted to build Italy’s economy, and his industrial development and public works programs had some success.
  - He also hoped to turn Italy into a great European power, using the Roman Empire as a model.
  - Like the ancient Romans, he sought glory through military conquest.

**Hitler Leads the Rise of Nazism in Germany**

- In 1919, Adolf Hitler—Germany’s future leader—joined a small political party that later became known as the Nazi Party.
  - Under his leadership, this party would direct a mass movement based on a form of fascism known as Nazism [Nazism: a form of fascism that promoted the belief that Germans and other Nordic peoples were superior to other races].
  - Hitler laid out the Nazi philosophy in his book *Mein Kampf*, or “My Struggle.”
    - In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler said that the superior Aryan race was locked in a struggle with other races.
    - He introduced the idea of *Lebensraum*, or “living space,” declaring that Germany needed land on which Aryan settlers could raise large families.
    - Those families, in turn, would conquer more territory, expanding the German empire.
    - Eventually, Germany and the Aryan race would rule the world.
  - Germany’s economic depression gave Hitler the opportunity to spread his ideas.
  - Hitler’s extreme nationalism appealed to many voters.
  - As a result, Hitler was named chancellor, or prime minister.
  - He moved quickly to dissolve the republic, replacing German democracy with a totalitarian government.
    - The Nazis called this government the Third Reich—the successor to two earlier German empires.
    - They passed new laws targeting Jews, barring them from certain jobs and exposing them to persecution.
    - Jews and other “undesirables” were shipped off to concentration camps.
    - Hitler also centralized the government, placing Nazis in the main positions of authority.
    - In 1934, he became both president and chancellor, giving himself the title *der Führer*, or “the leader.”
    - Hitler now had complete command of Germany.
    - He set about building Germany’s military into a powerful war machine.

**The Military Takes Control of the Government in Japan**

- Like Germany, Japan had a mixed history of military rule and democracy.
- Before World War I, Japan had begun to industrialize.
- Lacking raw materials for industry, it relied on a strong military to obtain natural resources from other countries.
- After the war, however, Japan became less aggressive.
- It helped form the League of Nations in 1920.
- It also signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact, joining 14 other nations in a pledge to resolve disagreements peacefully.
- Civilians gained more power in the government, although Japan’s emperor continued to play a strong role.
- In the 1930s, however, the worldwide economic depression undermined civilian rule and caused Japan to move toward a policy of militarism [militarism: the glorification of military power and values].
  - The Japanese military began to increase its power and to play a greater role in politics.
  - Japan’s growing militarism was combined with an extreme form of nationalism.
  - Japanese militarism got another boost in 1941, when General Hideki Tojo became prime minister, replacing a civilian leader.
  - Tojo, an aggressive militarist, continued to develop the military and prepare the nation for war.
34.3 – Military Aggression meets a Weak Response

- During the early 1930s, Americans still strongly favored isolationism.
  - With the bitter memory of the first world war and the challenge of economic problems at home, they did not want the nation to become entangled in another war.
  - For this reason, President Franklin Roosevelt took no direct action against aggressive dictators in Asia and Europe.
  - He did, however, speak out against aggression in principle.

Militarists Expand Japan’s Empire

- One of the first examples of blatant aggression came in 1931, when Japan seized a portion of China.
  - The takeover of Manchuria had several major consequences.
  - It gave Japan a large piece of territory that was rich in resources. In addition, it began an era in which the military dominated the Japanese government.
  - It also isolated Japan from most other nations
  - More aggression followed in 1937.
  - The clash soon became a full-fledged war.
    - The Chinese army pulled back, but the Japanese caught up with them at the city of Nanjing.
    - After capturing the city, Japanese soldiers went on a six-week rampage known as the Rape of Nanjing.
    - They massacred as many as 300,000 Chinese civilians and brutally raped about 20,000 Chinese women.
    - The war did not stop there.
  - By the end of the year, Japan’s military occupied China’s main cities and much of its fertile land.
    - Roosevelt’s “quarantine” speech did nothing to stop Japan.
    - By 1941, Japan had added French Indochina to its Asian empire to go along with Formosa (now called Taiwan), Korea, large areas of China, and several small Pacific islands.

Europe’s Dictators Test the League of Nations

- Japan’s aggression tested the League of Nations.
  - The League failed to respond effectively to Japan’s challenge.
  - Throughout the 1930s, Germany and Italy would also test the League’s will.
  - Like Japan, Germany pulled out of the League of Nations in 1933. At the same time, Hitler began rebuilding the German military.
  - Meanwhile, Mussolini began his quest to build a New Roman Empire.
  - In May 1936, Italy officially annexed Ethiopia.
    - Hitler heartily approved of the invasion.
    - In October, he and Mussolini joined in a treaty of friendship that forged an alliance, known as the Rome–Berlin axis, between their countries.
  - Events in Spain also aided the growth of fascism.
    - In July 1936, a military rebellion started the Spanish Civil War [Spanish Civil War: a civil war from 1936 to 1939 in which the Spanish military and its right-wing allies, known as the Nationalists, overthrew Spain’s democratic republic].

Great Britain and France Seek to Appease Hitler

- Encouraged by events in Italy and Spain, and by his own successful occupation of the Rhineland, Hitler continued his campaign of expansion.
  - During this time, Britain and France did little to stop him, choosing instead to follow a policy of appeasement.
  - On March 12 of that year, Hitler’s army crossed the border into Austria without opposition.
    - The following day he proclaimed Anschluss, or “political union,” with Austria.
  - Hitler next wanted to take over Czechoslovakia.
    - By signing the Munich Pact in September 1938, he acquired the Czech region of the Sudetenland.
The U.S. Congress Legislates Neutrality

- During this period, the United States did little to thwart aggression.
- Congress passed additional neutrality acts designed to keep the United States out of European conflicts, such as the Spanish Civil War, in 1936 and 1937.
- Americans passionately supported this isolationism.
  - Like Europeans, they recalled the horrors of World War I and wanted to avoid getting drawn into a new conflict.
  - Roosevelt did, however, devote enormous energy to preserving peace.
  - He wrote letters to the aggressors and to League members, urging them to settle their differences through negotiation.

34.4 – Hitler Plunges into War

- Great Britain and France chose to avoid war with Germany by allowing Hitler to behave as he pleased.
- But Hitler had no interest in avoiding war and grew bolder with every aggressive step he took.
  - In March 1939, he broke the Munich Pact by invading Czechoslovakia and seizing control of Prague, the Czech capital.
  - As Churchill suspected, appeasement only made Hitler more eager to conquer new territory.
  - The takeover of Czechoslovakia finally caused Britain and France to draw a line in the sand.
  - They declared that if Germany made any further attacks on small states, then they would declare war.

Hitler Signs a Nonaggression Pact with Stalin

The German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, signed in August 1939, served the interests of both leaders. But Hitler already had plans to attack the Soviet Union, which had vast, fertile farmlands that were a key to fulfilling the quest for Lebensraum. Hitler also understood that Nazi Germany could not coexist for long with the communist USSR to its east.

German Armies Roll Across Europe

- With the Soviet Union neutralized, Hitler sprang into action. On September 1, 1939, the German army marched east into Poland.
  - Two days later, France and Britain—the Allied powers—declared war on Germany.
  - World War II had begun.
  - In Poland, the German armed forces relied on a strategy of blitzkrieg, the German military strategy during World War II of attacking without warning, or “lightning war.”
  - These attacks helped prevent Polish mobilization, the assembling of troops and equipment for war.
  - By the first of October, Germany and the USSR had complete control of the country.
- For the next few months, not much happened on the western front.
  - American newspapers began referring to this as the “Phony War.”
  - Then suddenly, in a series of lightning actions, the Germans struck.
  - Using blitzkrieg tactics, the main German force burst through Luxembourg and southern Belgium into France in just four days.
  - Then it began a dramatic drive toward the French coast.
- Meanwhile, Paris was about to fall to the Germans.
- Mussolini took this opportunity to declare war on Britain and France.
- Italy and Germany became known as the Axis powers.
  - On June 22, France surrendered to Germany.
  - Under the terms of the armistice, Germany would occupy three fifths of the country.
The southeast would become a puppet government known as Vichy France.

A puppet government is one that is run by citizens of a conquered country who carry out the policies of the conqueror.

Britain Fights on Alone

- Britain, now led by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, stood alone against the Axis powers.
  - German planes flew raids throughout the summer of 1940 and into the fall.
  - They attacked British ships, ports, airfields, radar stations, and industrial centers.
  - To counter this onslaught, the British sent up the fighter pilots of the Royal Air Force (RAF) in an engagement known as the Battle of Britain.
    - The RAF pilots, flying their Spitfires and Hurricanes, proved effective against the German air campaign.
    - By late August, they had downed more than 600 German aircraft, at a cost of 260 British planes.
- In September 1940, Britain launched its first bombing raid on Berlin.
  - Germany shifted its targets to British cities.
  - For the next several months, bombing attacks devastated sections of London and other large cities.
  - Londoners called this campaign the Blitz, a shortening of blitzkrieg.
  - By the spring of 1941, the number of raids dwindled.
- The British had successfully defended their homeland.
- That victory gave the Allies reason to believe that Hitler could be stopped.

34.5 – The United States Enters World War II

- After war broke out in Europe, isolationism lost some of its appeal for Americans. Most now openly supported the Allies. Hoping to keep the United States out of the war, Hitler sought to expand his alliance. In September 1940, Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact, making Japan a member of the Axis powers. The three nations agreed to provide mutual support in the event of an attack by a country not yet in the war. The attacker they had in mind was the United States. If the United States entered the war, it would have to fight on two fronts—Asia and Europe. Hitler hoped that the threat of a two-front war would ensure American neutrality for a while longer.

Roosevelt Inches Away from Neutrality

- The start of war put the United States in a risky position.
  - Americans feared getting drawn into the fighting, but they wanted to help the Allies.
  - France and Great Britain needed weapons.
  - Yet the neutrality acts banned the sale of arms to belligerent nations.
- In November 1939, Roosevelt pushed a bill through Congress that repealed the arms embargo.
  - This Neutrality Act of 1939 included a "cash-and-carry" provision.
  - Nations had to pay cash for materials and carry them away in their own ships.
  - After the fall of France, the United States finally began rearming itself in earnest.
  - Roosevelt was determined to provide Britain "all aid short of war" and urged Congress to adopt a plan to lend, not sell, arms to Britain.
- This legislation, the Lend-Lease Act [Lend-Lease Act: legislation passed by Congress in 1941 adopting a plan to lend arms to Britain], passed in March 1941, but only after heated public and congressional debate.
- In June 1941, Hitler broke the Nonaggression Pact by attacking the Soviet Union.
  - In August, Churchill and Roosevelt met in secret aboard a warship in Canadian waters of the North Atlantic.
  - There they prepared a declaration of common principles known as the Atlantic Charter.
Japan Attacks the United States

- From 1940 to 1941, Japan continued seeking raw materials through conquest.
- The United States tried to undercut Japan’s aggression in several ways.
  - By 1941, American intelligence officers had managed to intercept and decode secret messages from Japan to its foreign offices.
  - Late in the year, officers learned of a coming attack on American territory in the Pacific Ocean.
  - They thought the attack might target an American base in the Philippines.
  - Instead it was aimed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii—the home of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.
- On December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft carriers approached Hawaii.
  - From the carriers, more than 300 bombers and fighter planes launched the attack on Pearl Harbor.
  - In a little more than two hours, the Japanese sank or damaged 18 American ships.
  - At nearby airfields, Japanese warplanes damaged or destroyed about 300 military aircraft.
  - In all, the raid left more than 2,400 Americans dead and nearly 1,200 wounded.
  - The Japanese lost just 29 planes in the attack.
- The next day, Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan.
  - “Hostilities exist,” he said. “Our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger.”
  - Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States.
- Americans began to prepare for a conflict that would test the nation’s strength and courage.

Summary

By the 1930s, extreme nationalists had gained power in Italy, Germany, and Japan, which became known as the Axis powers. By seeking to expand through military conquest, these countries began World War II. In 1941, the United States entered the war as one of the Allied powers.

Totalitarianism  In 1924, Joseph Stalin became the dictator of the communist Soviet Union. Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler gained power by promising to restore German strength. He built up the German military and began a campaign of expansion. Similar actions took place in Italy under dictator Benito Mussolini and in Japan under Japanese militarists.

Munich Pact  Great Britain and France tried to appease Hitler. In the Munich Pact, they agreed to give him part of Czechoslovakia in return for peace. But Hitler continued with territorial expansion. Germany’s invasion of Poland in 1939 triggered World War II.

Neutrality Acts  A series of neutrality acts in the 1930s kept the United States from being drawn into European conflicts, including the Spanish Civil War. As World War II began, however, Franklin Roosevelt and Congress revised the acts to allow arms trading with the Allies.

Lend-Lease Act  Germany quickly occupied most of Europe and threatened to invade Great Britain. As German bombers ravaged British cities, the United States decided to help Britain by passing the Lend-Lease Act. This law allowed the United States to lend arms to Britain and, later, to the Soviet Union.

Attack on Pearl Harbor  On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. This attack caused the United States to declare war on Japan and enter World War II.