
UNIT 14 TWO WORLD WARS*

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14.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit You will learn about:

- changes introduced in international relations due to industrialization;
- continuities that came to be established between the two world wars as a single, uninterrupted process; and
- the ideological factors that kept the groupings in the wars identical in both cases.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

We have so far discussed the nature and consequences of industrial capitalism and the consequent rise of modern politics. In the earlier Units the growth of nation-states and the nature of imperialist rivalries have also been discussed. We understand, you are now better placed to see the two world wars as culmination of these diverse processes. Industrialization had signalled in fact the growth of new states that competed with each other for global domination and in the absence of mechanisms for peaceful resolutions of international rivalries, armed conflicts on an almost global scale became inevitable. Since Europe had already been divided into ideologically defined camps, the war also assumed ideological dimensions. In the First World War ideology was still in the background. But the Second World War definitely saw the alliance of liberal democracy and socialism opposed to the rightist dictatorial regimes. Interestingly the War did not fulfil the objective of either camp-annihilation of the other. Soon after the end of armed conflict therefore began an era of Cold War.

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14.2 FACTORS FOR THE WARS

The two wars were caused by a variety of factor. The beginning of the century witnessed the division of the world into major international forces based on distinct ideologies. These forces were well equipped with the weapons of modern warfare. In the initial decades of the 20th century they competed with each other for a domination of the entire world. Since their conflicts and rivalries could not be resolved through any peaceful mechanism, they resulted in the outbreak of the two world wars. Let us look at this aspect in some details.

14.2.1 National Economies and Political Rivalry

The industrial revolution had introduced significant alterations in the international balance of power. The emergence of nation-states and the growing industrial resources had made large scale state mobilizations of both human and material resources a new working possibility as a combat weapon. The opening years of the nineteenth century saw the industrial-manufacturing techniques extended beyond England to more and more states, such as Belgium (1815-30), Sweden, France, United States and Prussia (1840-60), Norway, Russia and Japan (1870-90). Gradually, then, the industrial development tended to move in the direction of a conflict far larger in size than anything in the past had actually taken place. In the following sections we shall detail these developments further. The latecomers in the field of industrialization used new instruments of capital markets — banks and financial institutions — new elements of business-organizations — joint-stock companies with limited liability and an active state policy of protectionism and promotion. The spread of railways forged the globe into a single world economy. Although, the technology of power still remained yoked to steam and coal, developments in electric power-generation and chemical-synthesis and the oil industry took a course of rapid growth in this period. The economic growth of industrial and industrializing countries further quickened after the 1880s. New technologies of electricity now accelerated the process of mass production. Modern assembly lines created new products (e.g. automobiles). Though Britain remained the dominant industrial power, however, the rapid growth of the American and German economies began to displace England from this position of pre-eminence from the 1880s. The growth of Japan after the Meiji restoration (1868) and industrialization of Russia further altered the global economic environment. The wider diffusion of industrialization resulted in fast growing acceptability in the use of coal energy. Even in 1913, coal provided, directly or indirectly, for about 90 per cent of global energy output. However, from the 1880s electric energy gradually became more important especially in the USA. American and German firms offered stiff competition to British manufacturers and also enjoyed technological superiority in chemical and electrical sectors in industries. Around the middle of the 19th century, the British economy was acting as the world's banker supplying long-term finance, particularly for the development of railways. The two other contenders in Europe — the French and the German — therefore, targeted those industrializing nations of Europe located at the periphery. After the 1890s and especially after 1900, French and German foreign investment also became more global in scope, being undertaken increasingly in the United States, Latin America, Africa, Russia and China. As a direct result of these economic developments, Europe saw the emergence of multiple centres of politico-economic power competing with each

other and also trying simultaneously to displace Britain from its position of pre-eminence in world economic affairs.

A crisis seemed imminent as the expanding industrialization tended to globalise the economy. In fact, the world system of capitalism was still working in the form of competing “national economies”. The closing years of the nineteenth century did see the crystallization of this trend. The latecomers in the field of industrialization (such as Prussia, Russia and Japan) were staking claims beyond the “national territories”. Economic and political rivalries now began to take the shape of ideological groupings. The Pan-German League, founded in 1893 and representing right-wing conservative forces, wanted economic and territorial control over Central Europe. They claimed Belgium, the French iron ore district of Longwy-Briey, the French channel coast to the Somme and a Mediterranean base at Toulon, along with Poland and the Baltic states. They also envisaged a Central European federation comprising Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland under the leadership of Germany together with German, French and Belgian colonies attached to it. In May 1915, the central federation of German industries and other industrial and agrarian interests gave their support to these plans. It was not incidental that Germany’s alliances during war and the treaties of Bucharest and Brest-Litovsk (1918) fulfilled these dreams to a great extent. Hitler not only wanted a union (Anschluss) with Austria but also aimed to get sufficient living-space (Lebensraum) for the German ‘people’.

The Italian right-wing similarly used class-concepts of ‘proletarian’ (have-nots) and ‘plutocratic’ (have) nations to redefine international relations and to claim colonies for a ‘proletarian’ Italy. In Japan, similarly, the right-wing militant nationalists (Black Dragon Society 1901), Empire Foundation Society (1926), and Japan Production Party (1931), demanded an “equitable distribution of world resources”. They even favoured military action to establish “A Co-prosperity Zone” in the East under Japanese leadership.

14.2.2 International Relations and Formation of Camps

Industrialization created multiple centres of power and threw new claimants in the race for global domination. There was, however, no mechanism to adjudicate rival claims and resolve conflicts. The attempts made to resolve conflicts lacked direction. The First and Second Hague Conferences (1899 and 1907) failed to achieve anything concrete on the issue of armament reduction. The Court of Arbitration set up at Hague to deal with inter-state conflicts also proved futile. The anticipation of a large-scale war loomed large. The armament race and military build-ups by the European powers, in anticipation of this war, continued at a frenzied pace. The apparent purpose of such military build-ups — protection of (feeble) national economies — got public support in good measure. The system of military alliances used by the European powers for security purposes meant that in the eventuality of a real war the fighting would not only involve the two sides but would bring a number of other countries, too, in the fray. Such alliances could force a country to go to war against an ‘enemy’ with which it had no direct conflict. The secrecy of the terms of alliances could also have disastrous consequences. In 1879, Germany and Austria-Hungary agreed to go to war if either country was attacked by Russia. Italy joined the agreement in 1882, and it became known as the Triple Alliance. In 1894, France and Russia agreed to

mobilize (i.e., call up troops) if any nation in the Triple Alliance mobilized forces. They agreed to help each other if either were attacked by Germany. In 1904, alarmed by German naval buildup, Britain ended their “splendid isolation”. It not only settled the past differences over colonies but also signed the Entente Cordiale (friendly agreement) with France. Although the agreement contained no pledges of military support, the two countries began to discuss joint military plans. In 1907, Russia joined the Entente Cordiale, and it became known as the Triple Entente. These alliances left Europe divided into two hostile camps.

The two camps fought in 1914-1918 the World War I to resolve the question of global domination. The treaties (of Versailles, Riga, Lausanne, Locarno. etc.) simply redrew the map of Europe. Four great empires, the Russian Romanov, the Hohenzollern, the Habsburg, and the Ottoman faced defeat and collapsed. Russia underwent a bloody civil war before the establishment of Communist rule. Germany became a republic, suffering from the stigma of defeat and burdened by Allied reparations. The victorious western democracies gained territories. France, for instance, gained Alsace-Lorraine which was with Germany since 1871.

Britain acquired more colonial possessions, but the safety of its empire remained perilous. In fact, the problem of global domination to resolve itself persisted even after a war of such colossal proportion. In 1922, the British were compelled to accept naval parity with America to abandon the Anglo-Japanese alliance, so useful to them in protecting their Far Eastern empire. Italy and Japan remained dissatisfied with their territorial gains. Discontent over the severity of the Allied peace terms and squabbles over the newly drawn frontiers contained seeds of future conflicts.

The idea of a world organization for maintaining peace in the globe was proposed by Woodrow Wilson, the American president. But it did not generate much hype as the treaty of Versailles, the cornerstone of this organization — the League of Nations — was not ratified even by America. Moreover, the defeated powers were also not invited to become members. Germany was allowed to join the League only in 1926. Partial success was achieved in naval disarmament in 1921 and 1930 when Britain, USA and Japan agreed to impose restrictions on their own cruisers, destroyers and submarines. However, the League sponsored Disarmament Conference in Geneva (1932-34) failed to reach any agreement. Cracks began to appear in global peace in the early 1930s. The League lacked the executive powers to impose peaceful solutions. Japanese Militarism, Italian Fascism and German Nazism became increasingly strident in their demands.

In 1931, Japanese forces seized Manchuria, a region of China rich in natural resources. And made it a puppet state called Manchukuo. Some historians consider this incident as the start of another war on a global scale, the World War II. To add to an already volatile situation Italian forces invaded Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia) and conquered it by May 1936. In Germany, Hitler started in a big way a programme of military build-up - in violation of the Terms of the Treaty of Versailles. In March 1936, he notified to the western powers the existence of a German Air Force (Luftwaffe). In the same year, Germany and Italy formed an alliance, called the Rome-Berlin Axis, which was joined in 1940 by Japan. In March 1938, German army moved into Austria to achieve union (Anschluss) with Germany. In 1938, Hitler sought the control of Sudetan land, a region of Western Czechoslovakia dominated by German speaking people. Britain wished to

preserve peace at all costs, by meeting Hitler's demands and following a policy of appeasement. In September 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French Premier Daladier agreed to turn over the Sudeten-land to Germany and forced Czechoslovakia to accept the agreement (which became known as the Munich Agreement). The failure of appeasement soon became clear. Hitler violated the Munich Agreement in March 1939 and seized the rest of Czechoslovakia. Similar treatment was meted out to Poland later on.

A dress-rehearsal for World War II was held after the ideological divisions of Spain resulted in a Civil War (1936-39). In Spain in 1936, a 'popular front' of republicans, socialists, anarchists and syndicalists assumed power. The army leaders and right-wing parties feared the programme of this front and rebelled under General Franco. The situation thus became ripe for other world military powers to show their powers. The divisions were quite apparent.

The Fascist and Nazi regimes provided military support to General Franco while the Soviet Union helped the Republicans. The Republican forces also received "volunteers" from many countries thought liberal democracies desisted from a direct national participation at this time.

14.3 THE WARRING NATIONS IN THE WORLD WARS

The theatre for the First World War got located in the Balkans which was then a region of competing nationalisms and ethnic conflicts. Briefly the drama of the First World War unfolded in the following manner. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28th July, 1914. Germany declared a war on Russia on 1st August and on France on 3rd August. Belgium was invaded by German forces on the same day and France was invaded on 4th August. German violation of Belgium neutrality gave the British a convenient excuse to enter the war on the side of France and Russia. British world-wide interests made the war a global conflict, drawing into it the dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the greatest British colonial possession, India, and later the United States, because of close British links with it. Austria-Hungary attacked Russia on 6th August and France and Britain declared war on Austria-Hungary on 12th August. Italy, diplomatically aligned with Austria and Germany since the Triple Alliance of 1882, declared its neutrality on 3rd August. In the following months it was avidly pursued by France and Britain. On 23rd May 1915, the Italian government succumbed to Allied temptations and declared war on Austria-Hungary in pursuit of territorial expansion.

In the Second World War, division of the world into two armed camps followed more or less same pattern as for the First World War. Only a few states such as Italy, Japan, Turkey, and Romania switched their sides either because of dissatisfaction with territorial gains in the first War or due to ideological reasons. Germany, Italy and Japan (known as the Axis Powers) were joined by Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Albania, Finland and Thailand. The Allied armed camp mainly consisted of Britain, France, Soviet Union, Belgium, Denmark, Turkey and the United States. Other major belligerents siding with the Allies included Argentina, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, South Africa, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, etc.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How did industrialization affect relations of powers? Answer in 100 words.
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- 2) How did the system of military alliances pave the way for World War? Answer in about 10 sentences.
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14.4 WARS AS THE WARS OF IDEOLOGIES

Modern politics, inaugurated by the revolutions of 18th and 19th centuries and institutionalized through elections, parties and representation, also served to divide European society and polity along ideological lines. The spectrum of politics had created three major bands in the 19th century – left, centre (liberal democratic) and right (counter-revolutionary). In the following sub-sections we discuss the formation and features of the political spectrum.

14.4.1 Ideologically Defined Armed Camps of the Two World Wars

You have seen how belligerents in both wars were almost identically grouped in two hostile armed camps. In large measure, this grouping of territorially demarcated states was based on basic, ingrained political proclivities of these states. Britain, France, America, the main allies in both wars, had well-established liberal democratic traditions. Germany, Austria, Italy, Japan, Hungary lacked such democratic traditions. Although Japan and Italy helped the Allies in the First World War, both left them during Inter-war period itself and with their dictatorial, authoritarian regimes found their natural allies (the Central Powers) during World War II. The Russian autocracy under the Romanovs supported western democracies owing to economic compulsions as 25 per cent of investments from abroad came from France (1914) and Russian banking, railway development and the Southern Russian Industrial Complex all depended on French capital. During World War II, ideological compulsions again compelled Communist Soviet Union to ally itself with western liberal democracies against the danger of extreme right-wing dictatorships despite inter-war recriminations. The Ottoman Empire supported the Central Powers during World War I. However, a democratically reformed Turkey joined the Allies in the Second World War.

However, what differentiated the liberal democratic world from the Central European Empire was not the existence of elections, voting rights and parliaments, but responsible, accountable governments. The German empire established by Bismarck after the Franco Prussian War (1870) was a revolution from above carried out by the Prussian military. The German Constitution of 1871 entrusted formal sovereignty to a Federal Council (Bundesrat) whose members were nominated by the executives of member-states. It also established a Reichstag or parliament of 400 deputies elected by a direct, secret, adult male suffrage. However, there was complete lack of parliamentary responsibility in this system as the Imperial Chancellor, appointed by the emperor, and enjoying enormous powers, was not accountable to the Reichstag. The German empire therefore emerged as a hybrid of Prussian military hegemony and imperial federation, combining modern franchise with ancient monarchical authority. The emperor retained control over the three pillars of absolutism in the dominant Prussian state as “a military despotism cloaked in parliamentary forms with a feudal ingredient, and at the same time influenced by bourgeoisie, decked out by bureaucrats, and safeguarded by the police.”

Similarly, the Habsburg monarchy of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were also dominated by medieval social institutions and military methods. Although a sham constitutional government was established in Austria-Hungary in 1861, the representative elements in parliament remained restricted and it was dominated by nominated members from the clergy and the big landowning classes. Universal adult male franchise was introduced in 1907 but the nature of state remained unchanged. Similarly, a representative parliamentary government was established under the leadership of Young Turks in 1908 and the Ottoman Empire started disintegrating. However, a reformed democratic policy in Turkey could emerge only after the fall of Sultan Muhammad VI in 1922.

War further forced every individual to take a stance. It posed the problem of identity for millions of people. Internal ideological cleavages were to be avoided to face the enemy from outside. War put the squeeze on ideological space (hegemonic space) available within a state.

It tended to homogenize citizens, within territorially organized states, at least in their attitudes towards war and national defence and in demonizing enemy states. The process of identity — resolution, however, was not a smooth and uneventful process. For instance, there were more than a hundred socialist members in German parliament, who for years had been proclaiming their loyalty to the spirit of internationalism, but only Karl Liebknecht voted against war credits in 1914. George Lansbury, the pacifist leader of British Labour Party was ousted from leadership of Party as he was opposed to re-arming of Britain in a big way.

14.4.2 Political Spectrum of Europe at the Outbreak of the War

The Left spectrum of this divide was mainly inspired by socialist ideology. In 1864, the International Working Men’s Association or the First International was born. Though it collapsed in 1876 mainly as a result of unresolved internal contradictions, it did give birth to socialist and social-democratic parties organized mainly along national lines. In 1875 the Universal German Working Men’s Association fused with another Marxian group to form the German Social Democratic Party. It went on increasing its influence despite Bismarkian ban

from 1878-90. Its share of popular vote increased from 3.2 per cent in 1872 to 34.8 per cent in 1912. Socialist Party in France was founded by Jules Guesde in 1879. There were five socialist parties in France in 1890s. The Independent Socialist Party of Jean Jaures (1893) was more prominent. Two major socialist groups merged in 1905 and the number of socialist deputies in the French Chamber of Deputies increased from 52 in 1906 to 102 in 1914. In Britain, the Fabian Society was founded to propagate socialism in 1884. Later in 1893, the Independent Labour Party was formed which wanted to achieve socialism through parliamentary action. It increased its strength in the British House of Commons from 2 members in 1900 to 12 in 1910. After 1880s, similar social-democratic parties were organized in Italy, Russia, Hungary, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, etc. In 1889, the Second Socialist international was organized as a loose federation of national socialist parties. It had a Radical left wing led by Marxists and a reformist wing which wanted compromise with the liberal democratic state and parties to improve workers' lot within existing institutions and social structure.

Similarly liberal democratic parties represented the centrist politics of promoting industrial capitalism in their respective countries. The republicans in the Third Republic of France, Whig or Liberal party in Britain, the Liberal Party and Catholic Centre party in Germany and Catholic People's Party in Italy and Kadetparty in Russia exemplified politics of the centre. Right-wing politics was typified by the French Legitimists who wanted restoration of monarchy in France, Tory or Conservatives Britain, the Agrarian League in Germany and German Workers Party (D.A.P. founded in 1903). The more inclined towards extreme rightwing were certain paramilitary forces which emerged in 20th century such the Heimwehr in Austria, Action Fran-aise in France (founded in 1899), Italian Nationalist Association (established in 1910) and ultranationalist Boulangism in France.

After war, liberal democracies re-established their control over the Central European Empires, helped by reformist, compromising socialist leaders in many cases. However, using ultra-nationalist slogans, induced by economic problems, Fascist and right-wing dictatorships soon gave a stimulus to establish a powerful right-wing armed front in countries like Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Spain and Japan. These dictatorships arose especially in countries that lacked traditions of democratic institutions. The central doctrine of these variegated dictatorships was the supremacy of state as opposed to the liberal democratic ideal that the state exists for the individual. Despite anti-capital rhetoric, these states also opposed revolutionary socialism.

During the Second World War, liberal democracies of Britain, France and USA, etc. and Communist Soviet Union allied together to wipe out right-wing dictatorships. The outcome in 1945 left two contending armed camps (Western democratic camp and Communist camp), antithetical to each other, reviling each other, but both with the same end in view, that of, global domination.

14.5 BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR

After World War II, the world was split between a Communist bloc, an anti-Communist bloc, and a small number of neutral states. In February 1945, Churchill (British Prime Minister), Roosevelt (American President) and Stalin, leader of Soviet Union met at Yalta in the Crimea. It was easy for the Allies to agree in

their objective of defeating Germany and Japan. But differences of interests, opinions and ideas surfaced when the question of future opened up. Britain and America disliked communism and feared its spread in the devastated countries of Europe. The display of Russian strength during the war also alarmed them. The Allies had agreed to free elections in the East European Countries liberated by the Red Army such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Albania. But Stalin imposed communist governments on these countries. Eastern Poland was exchanged with German Silesia by Stalin, thus moving the Russian frontier further west. Britain intervened in Greece and toppled a Communist government there. Germany was initially divided into four zones. Berlin, the capital city under Russian-controlled zone was also similarly divided. In 1948, three western zones introduced a new currency, without consulting the eastern zone, resulting in rail and road traffic blockade by Soviet Union for eight month during which the British and Americans air-lifted all supplies to Berlin. The Soviet on the one side and US, Britain and France on other side, opposed each other in every sphere. The Eastern European countries under Soviet hegemony re-fused to accept American aid under the Marshall Plan, for reconstruction of their economies. The Soviet Union made the atomic bomb in 1949 and the situation of hostility further intensified which was called the Cold War. Peace remained elusive in this open ideological war, which periodically erupted into confrontation between the great power blocs with impending threats of military action or of nuclear destruction of our planet.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The armed camps of world wars were engaged in a war of ideologies. Comment in about 50 words.

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- 2) What do you understand by the Cold War? Explain in 10 sentences.

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14.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you have seen how the industrialization of western countries threw up multiple claimants to domination of globe. In the absence of international mechanisms where by such claims can be resolved through arbitration and peaceful mechanisms, armed conflict on a global scale became imperative. We have also seen that the three-fold ideological divisions of 19th century Europe

culminated in well-defined armed camps with distinctive ideological positions. Therefore, as we have seen belligerents in the two world wars were almost identically arrayed. In a protracted armed conflict, starting in 1914, with an interval of long truce democracy and socialism wiped out the Right counter-revolutionary camp. Even after this bitter conflict, peace remained elusive as a new era of secret, ideological hostility known as the cold war commenced from 1945 itself between the western liberal democratic world and the Soviet Union-led Communist bloc.

14.7 KEY WORDS

Anschluss	: A German term for Union, used in the context of Pan-German ideology of Austria and German Union.
Appeasement	: A policy of satisfying Nazi government demands in a bid to contain its aggressive policy.
Economies of Scale	: The advantages of large-scale production accruing to a firm owing to the size of firm.
Lebensraum	: An ideological construct of Nazis who wanted a “living space” for the German Race-an euphemism for their domination.
Mobilization	: A military term used for calling up troops for fight.
National Self-determination	: Right of a nationality to choose its future.
Reparations	: Payments for war-damages.
Suffrage (also called franchise)	: Voting right granted by a state to its citizens.
Vertical integration	: An economic process whereby a firm takes over sources of its raw-materials and enterprises which buy its product.

14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-section 14.2.1 and 14.2.2
- 2) See Section 14.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Summarize Sub-section 14.4.2
- 2) See Section 14.5

SUGGESTED READINGS FOR THIS COURSE

George Rude: *Revolutionary Europe*,

E. J. Hobsbawm: *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*

William Doyle: *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*

Martyn Lyons: *Post-Revolutionary Europe, 1815-1856*

E. J. Hobsbawm: *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875*

E. J. Hobsbawm: *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*

Tom Kemp: *Industrialization in nineteenth Century Europe*

C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*

E. J. Hobsbawm: *Nation and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*

E. H. Carr: *The Russian Revolution From Lenin to Stalin, 1917-21*

Sheila Sitzpatrick: *The Russian Revolution*

A . J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War.*



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