

4.7 Turning Points of the Second World War

Europe and North Africa

Combatants

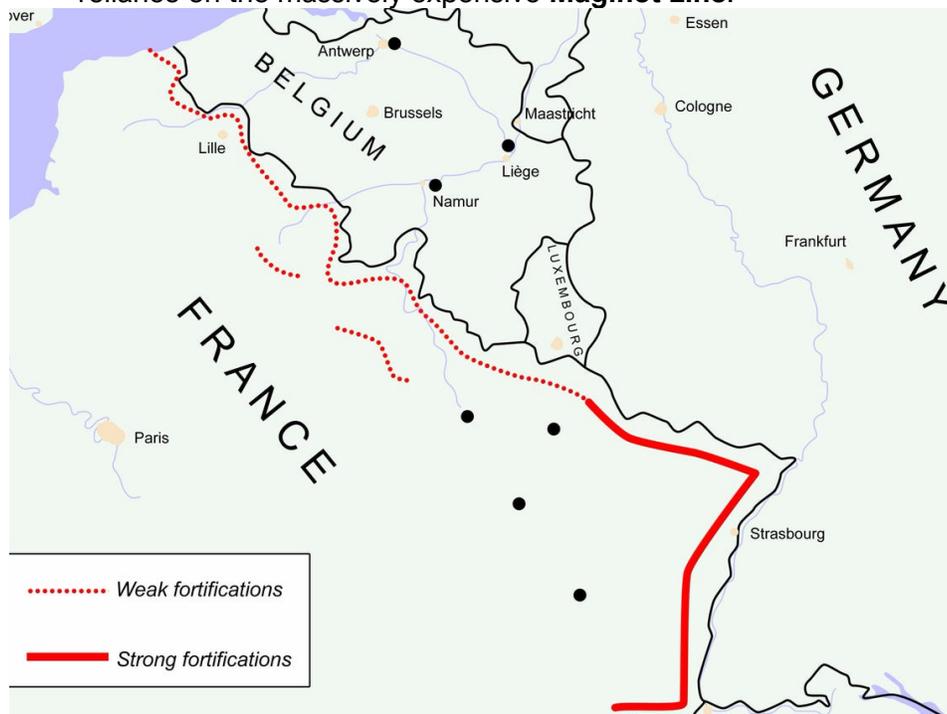
- Axis Powers
 - Germany –
 - The German general staff learned the lessons of WWI; the keys to mobile warfare would be flexibility, initiative, and active combat leadership.
 - Plans were made for expansion beyond the boundaries of the Versailles Treaty even before Hitler came to power.
 - 1935 – conscription raised the strength of the German army; army, navy and air force (prohibited by Versailles) would expand
 - However, German economy incapable of sustaining a fight over the long term without the conquest of significant productive land.
 - Italy –
 - Under Mussolini, Italy rearmed before the other European powers. However, this meant Italy's material was obsolete first and she lacked the economic resources to modernize before WWII.
 - Italy had the same economic weakness as Germany but was unable to conquer new territories.
 - These weaknesses were exacerbated by poor leadership.
 - Wartime production –
 - The German and Japanese economies and military strategy depended on quick victory.
 - None of the Axis Powers could withstand a long war of attrition with the United States or the Soviet Union.
 - Allied production facilities remained well out of reach of the Axis forces while, from 1943, Germany's industrial complex was subject to day and night bombing.
 - Japan managed to maintain war production by moving production out of large centers, making targeting it more difficult.
 - Initially, Germany's occupied territories were used to help meet the economic demands of the war. This was far from sufficient, especially after 1944 when Germany's occupied territory shrank.
 - Strategy –
 - Hitler sought **Lebensraum** – space in the east into which the German population could expand – which would be Poland.
 - The goal in taking Poland was to accomplish what the Schlieffen Plan was designed, but failed, to do in 1914 – capture France while avoiding the effects of a two-front war.
 - In Hitler's view, there was to be a cataclysmic struggle between fascism and communism at some point. His military chiefs drafted plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union while the German air force waged a desperate struggle to destroy the British RAF.
 - From 1942 on, German strategy was dominated by the search for resources, particularly oil (e.g., exploits in North Africa, and in the Caucasus Mountains), and securing her previous conquests.

- German tactics, especially early in the war, were dominated by **Blitzkrieg** (“lightning war”), which integrated precision dive-bombing with mobile *panzer* (tanks) units to isolate enemy strong points.

- Allied Powers

- France –

- The legacy of WWI deeply affected military expenditure in the interwar period.
- The 1930s, French command was defensively minded, exemplified by the reliance on the massively expensive **Maginot Line**.



- Britain –

- British policy during the interwar period was turned inward to domestic issues of poverty and standard of living, as well as bolstering the empire.
- The British army of the 1920s and 1930s was kept small.
- By May 1940, conscription had raised the number of British army divisions from 4 to 50.
- The Royal Navy was the largest in the world, but it was stretched thin to defend the empire.

- Wartime production –

- Unlike the Axis, the Allies understood they would have to sacrifice consumer production for war production.
- Half of British production went to the war effort.
- However, both Britain and the USSR depended on aid from North America – the US economy produced a staggering amount of material.

- Strategy –

- Jan. – Mar., 1941 – British, US, and Canadian military planners secretly met in Washington to discuss a common strategic approach to war (the **ABC-1 plan**):
 - Eliminate Italy as quickly as possible

- Concentrate on the defeat of Germany before the defeat of Japan
- Strategic bombing would be a key component
- Defend British and US holdings in the Pacific
- A key component of the Allied strategy would be to outproduce their enemy.
 - **Lend-Lease policy** – Set up a scheme through which the US would send aid to the Allies, without requiring immediate payment. This played a vital role in all the Allied victories, especially once the US entered the war in Dec. 1941.
- Since the entry of the US, the grand Allied strategy involved involving Germany in a two-front war.

Operations

1939	Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Sep. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Luftwaffe air raids eradicated Polish air force facilities; civilian panic from the air raids would hamper the operations of the Polish authorities and military ○ 1.5 million German soldiers crossed the frontier into Poland in 2 groups: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. north then east, driving behind Polish lines 2. main attack toward capital of Warsaw ○ Schutzstaffel (SS) units followed to rid Poland of the “enemies of Nazism” – rounded up Jews, communists, socialists, and local leaders • 3 Sep. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Britain and France declared war on Germany • 10 Sep. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa declared war on Germany • 17 Sep. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Siege of Warsaw began – the <i>Luftwaffe</i> terror bombed the city, forcing a surrender by 27 Sept.
1940	Western Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Sep. – 10 May – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Phoney War – a period with limited military action; Germany waited before launching advance in the west, while the Allies raised their defenses • Mar. – Apr. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ German attack on Norway • 10 May – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Operation Sickle Stroke – German thrust toward France began in 3 parts: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attack Belgium and the Netherlands 2. German <i>panzers</i> would break through the Ardennes forest 3. Attack the Maginot Line • 19 May –

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Netherlands surrender, prompting Allies to rush troops to the north ○ However, the bulk of the attack came through the Ardennes forest ● 4 Jun. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The British army was trapped against the coast, and French forces were in disarray ○ Operation Dynamo – a plan to rescue the 400,000 British, French and Belgian troops trapped in Dunkirk; using hundreds of civilian and military vessels ○ The RAF was able to keep the skies of the exposed beaches relatively clear of German aircraft ○ The “Miracle of Dunkirk” preserved the fighting ability of the British army. ● 17 Jun. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The French government under Marshal Petain signed the terms of surrender: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 60% of France would be a zone of German occupation ▪ 40% of France would be controlled by Petain’s puppet government with its capital at Vichy ▪ The French army would be reduced, and the navy would be turned over to Germany ▪ 1.5 million French P.O.W.s would be kept in captivity ▪ France would pay “occupation costs”
1941 – 1942	Soviet Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 22 Jun. 1941– <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Operation Barbarossa began – Nazi Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union ○ The Soviet Red Army was still reeling from Stalin’s purges in 1937-38; and were turning a blind eye to the mobilization of the German army along the frontier. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To preserve the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Stalin forbade the Red Army to mobilize in response ○ German plan was to use <i>Blitzkrieg</i> and send army groups toward Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev ● Aug. 1941 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The German advance slowed for several reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Higher than anticipated casualties ▪ The logistics of dealing with high numbers of P.O.W.s ▪ Fuel shortages ▪ Gaps between infantry and <i>panzer</i> units ▪ Russian railway lines could not be used and roads were of poor quality ▪ Exhaustion ● Nov. 1941– <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Winter halted the German advance toward Moscow ● May. 1942 –

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Both armies had rebuilt during the winter; Soviets moved their western factories to the Ural Mountains ○ The German army would drive south toward the Caucasus Mountains to secure Baku oil fields ● 23 Aug. 1942 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Battle of Stalingrad began with German attack, bombing raid; the destruction of the city left behind piles of rubble that left the streets impassable. This turned into a series of small unit actions in which the Red Army had the advantage. ○ Every citizen of Stalingrad was mobilized in the city's defense. ○ Meanwhile, the Soviets gathered a huge force north of Stalingrad; Operation Uranus encircled the Germany Sixth Army, which surrendered in Jan. 1943.
1940 – 1943	North Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sep. 1940 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Italy launched an invasion of Egypt; stopped by a British counter-attack in Dec. ● Jul. – Nov. 1942 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ El Alamein – German general Edwin Rommel's <i>Afrika Corps</i> had come to the aid of their Italian allies; now they attempted to break through British defenses in Egypt ○ British commander Montgomery used numeric superiority to fight war of attrition, force Germans to withdraw ○ German-Italian forces would be driven against US troops that had landed at Algeria and Morocco ● May 1943 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The last of the Axis forces in North Africa surrendered
1943	Sicily and Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jul. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ US and British troops landed in Sicily ● 9 Sep. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allied invasion of the Italian peninsula ○ This diverted German divisions from the eastern front and relieved some pressure on the Red Army
1944	Normandy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 6 Jun. (D-Day) – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Operation Overlord launched – the Allied invasion of German-occupied Western Europe ○ The US, British, and Canadian armies would attack five French beaches – codenamed Omaha, Utah, Gold, Sword, and Juno – supported by paratroop lines behind German lines ○ They would then establish a beachhead through which men and material would flow after the landings ○ Contact with the Free French leadership was necessary (French citizens and soldiers who had escaped occupied France and organized under the leadership of Charles de Gaulle) ○ Allied experiences varied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Utah – US troops, met limited resistance

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Omaha – US troops, heavy fighting against experienced German troops, nearly 5,000 casualties ▪ Gold – British troops, airborne drops disoriented inexperienced Germans ▪ Juno – Canadian troops, met stiff resistance, but broke through and linked up with British forces from Gold ▪ Sword – British troops, met little resistance at first but later met with counter-attack by German tank forces. This was blunted by Allied air superiority
1944	Berlin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jul. – Aug. 1943 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ From the Jan. 1943 surrender of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad, the USSR's Red Army marched west, reconquering territory occupied by the Germans. ○ The Soviet victory was completed after the Battle of Kursk, the largest tank battle in history. ○ The Red Army reached Warsaw by the end of Aug. 1944. • 2 May 1945 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The western Allies had been making strides toward Germany. ○ By spring of 1945, they pushed across the Rhine into the German heartland. ○ Berlin fell to the Red Army on May 2. • 8 May 1945 (V-E Day) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Allies claim victory in Europe with the unconditional surrender of Germany. ○ Adolf Hitler had committed suicide on April 30, during the Battle of Berlin.

Characteristics of the war at sea

- Battle of the Atlantic
 - This refers to the ongoing effort to bring supplies, food, munitions, and men across the Atlantic from North Atlantic to Britain.
 - Germany used its U-boat fleet to try to strangle Britain.
 - The Allies defeated the U-boat threat through a combination of production and technology.
 - The limitations of anti-submarine technology such as ASCID (a form of sonar) and depth charges were eventually improved.
 - By the end of 1943, the Allies were sinking U-boats twice as fast as the Germans could replace them.

Characteristics of the air war

- Battle of Britain
 - **Operation Sea Lion** was Germany's planned invasion of Britain. Hitler and commander of the *Luftwaffe* Hermann Goering believed they had the resources to control the airspace over Britain, destroy the coastal defenses, and eliminate the ability of the Royal Air Force (RAF) to operate.

- The RAF had certain advantages over the *Luftwaffe*:
 - British radar could detect incoming aircraft
 - The *Luftwaffe* had suffered greater losses in the Battle of France
 - The British Spitfire was superior to the German Messerschmitt aircraft
 - Britain could produce Hurricane aircraft in large numbers quickly
 - Salvaging damaged aircraft or recovery of pilots would be easier for Britain
 - Germany had no heavy bombers and would rely on medium-sized level flight bombers not designed for destroyed large urban centers
 - The *Luftwaffe* was limited to 15 minutes of flight over its target area
 - British Intelligence could decipher *Luftwaffe* radio transmissions
- On August 13, 1940 the *Luftwaffe* attacked RAF airfields. On September 7, the focus of the attack was shifted to London to break British morale, but this allowed the RAF to recover and rebuild. The RAF repelled a raid against the capital by September 15.
- Germany's nighttime terror bombing campaign against Britain was known as **the Blitz** (September 1940 – May 1941).
 - German goals:
 1. Crush civilian morale to force Churchill and his government to negotiate an end to the war
 2. Impede British war production
 - More than 40,000 civilians were killed during the Blitz. British propagandists turned the suffering into a rallying cry.
- Strategic bombing
 - This refers to the aerial bombing of targets of strategic importance to the enemy's war effort.
 - Area bombing – indiscriminate bombing of all the structures in an area
 - Precision bombing – designed to limit the damage, concentrated on smaller target areas
 - US B17 bombers allowed for more targeted precision bombing and were heavily armed so that they could fight deep into enemy airspace.

The Pacific

Combatants

- Axis Powers –
 - Japan –
 - Conscripted and indoctrinated swelled the size of the Japanese army.
 - By 1939, Japan was producing twice as many aircraft as the US. Wartime demand from the Allies would increase US production by 1941.
 - Japanese forces were spread thin throughout the war and concentrated in China, hampering resistance to the Allied forces moving toward the home islands.
 - Strategy –
 - Understanding the industrial might and military potential of the US, Japan developed a defensive strategy.
 - A strategic perimeter would have to be extended into the Pacific, and this would enclose the resources needed to sustain the empire.
 - This plan would require close cooperation between the Japanese army and navy.

- The second component of the US Pacific strategy was strategic bombing of Japanese urban areas with the goal of devastating the Japanese ability to produce war material.
- Aircraft carriers could carry out operations against the enemy at much greater distances than in previous naval wars.
- Any land operations undertaken by Japan to the Allies would entail amphibious landings.

Operations

1941 – 1942	Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dec. 1941 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7 was designed to debilitate the US Pacific Fleet. The US declared war on Japan the following day. ○ The purpose of Japan’s invasion of Malaya on Dec. 8 was conquest – the resources of the region were needed to fuel the Japanese war machine. ○ On Dec. 8, Japan also attacked the British colony of Hong Kong, and the islands of Wake and Guam. ○ British defense of the East Indies was insufficient as British military planners, based on racist generalizations, had given little weight to Japan’s ability to wage war. • Feb. 1942 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Battle of Singapore lasted from Feb. 8 to 15 and resulted in the surrender of British troops. Japan would occupy the region until the end of the war. • Apr. 1942 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Japan’s invasion of the Philippines had begun on Dec. 8, and American and Filipino fighters surrendered at Bataan by April 9. ○ The Philippines would not be retaken by US troops until Jan. 1945.
1942 – 1943	Midway, Solomon Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jun. 1942 – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Using the Magic program, the US decoded Japanese communications and deciphered that an attack on the US base at Midway was being planned. ○ Admiral Nimitz dispatched US carriers to surprise the Japanese fleet. Four Japanese carriers were sunk, evening the odds in the Pacific. ○ The Battle of Midway was the turning point in the Pacific. From that point on, the industrial juggernaut of the US would overwhelm the Japanese in the Pacific. • Aug. – Feb. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Guadalcanal campaign lasted 6 months, during which the Allies launched the first major land offensive against Japan.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victory at Guadalcanal paved the way for a two-pronged attack against the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul, captured by March 1944.
1945	Iwo Jima and Okinawa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feb. – Mar. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As aerial bombings of the home islands intensified, the US decided to take Iwo Jima as a base for bombers. Marines would capture Mount Suribachi, but the campaign would continue for another month, with high numbers of US casualties. • Mar. – Jul. – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The heavily fortified island of Okinawa was the next step toward the planned US invasion of Japan. Kamikaze (suicide attacks) sank over 30 Allied ships. ○ Strategically, Okinawa was significant because of its proximity to the Japanese islands. The nature of the Japanese defense, the use of kamikaze attacks, and the high rate of casualties also played a role in US talks of whether or not to use atomic bombs.

The Manhattan Project

- The only alternative to invasion of the Japanese home islands was the isolation of the islands combined with a concentrated strategic bombing campaign aimed at Japan's urban centers. However, an intensive firebombing campaign, including a raid against Tokyo in March 1945 that killed 80,000 civilians, did not bring the Japanese government any closer to surrender.
- After receiving word from Albert Einstein that there were scientists in Germany capable of developing atomic weapons, President Truman set in motion a program that would assemble the greatest minds in physics and chemistry to develop atomic bombs.
- By summer of 1945, the Manhattan Project had a prototype that would be tested in New Mexico. Truman was told of the successful test at the **Potsdam Conference**.
- Discussions had been going on for some time as to how to use the weapon:
 - Should they warn the Japanese before they used it, giving them time to consider surrender?
 - Should they summon the Japanese to a demonstration, then demand their surrender?
 - Should it be deployed as any weapon, with no warning and with maximum lethal effect?
- Seventy of the scientists that worked on the program petitioned Truman to give the Japanese the opportunity to surrender.
- Truman decided to use the weapon as he would any weapon. On August 6, 1945, a B-29 dropped the first bomb (nicknamed "Little Boy") on **Hiroshima**. 80,000 civilians died in an instant while another 50,000 succumbed to their wounds in the weeks following. Three days later, when no surrender was forthcoming, another bomb was dropped on **Nagasaki**.
- A general surrender was formalized on September 2, 1945.