

**Table 4.3** General causes of the Second World War – Germany, Italy and Japan

Element	Germany	Italy	Japan
Ideological factors	<p>German nationalism grew after 1871, was a major force before 1914 and was used by Hitler to gain support. Nationalists resented Versailles, looked to a greater Germany that would include all German-speakers, and had strong beliefs in the superiority of German culture. This was an important element in Nazism and also in racialism, which were important elements in bringing about war.</p>	<p>Italian nationalism was slower to emerge after unification, but Mussolini stressed the inheritance of the Roman Empire and played on the disappointments of the peace settlement. The taking of Fiume from Yugoslavia in 1924 was popular and many were impressed by Mussolini making Italy more of a world power. He reversed the national humiliation of 1896, when Italy had been defeated by Ethiopia, in the war of 1935–6. He revived Italian national claims to Nice in 1940.</p>	<p>Japan's internal reforms gave it the means to expand its territory considerably after 1874. Nationalists associated expansion with the greater glory of the emperor-god. There were patriotic associations which set up traditional culture as far superior to Western influences. The expansion of 1941–2 was a culmination of nationalist feeling and territorial ambition. There was a strong element of racial superiority in the way that the war against the supposedly inferior Chinese was portrayed.</p>
Economic and territorial factors	<p>Hitler's Germany depended heavily on the prosperity generated by arms spending. However, this produced inflationary pressure, shortages of materials and the need to pay for expensive imports. The solution was to go to war to acquire materials and to loot other countries to pay for arms and to maintain the standard of living of the German people.</p>	<p>Mussolini's regime faced economic pressures after 1929 but Italy's conquests – Ethiopia 1936, Albania 1939, Nice (South of France) in 1940 and Greece, 1940 – were driven not by the need for greater economic resources as much as for prestige to bolster a regime that had not delivered the economic gains promised.</p>	<p>There were strong economic motives for the conquest of Manchuria in 1931. Japan's shortage of essential military raw materials and the restrictions placed on imports of oil and metal ores by the USA were significant motives for expansion. There was a plan for a Japanese-controlled closed economic system in Southeast Asia – the 'Co-Prosperity Zone' – but in practice the resources of conquered areas were taken by Japan to sustain the war.</p>
Political factors	<p>Hitler needed foreign policy successes for his personal popularity and had a strong political vision of a Thousand Year Reich of pure-bred Aryans dominating Europe. Politically the war was portrayed in 1939 as being against the political restrictions of Versailles and from 1941 as being against the danger of communism.</p>	<p>Mussolini's strong image depended on foreign policy successes. However, much of his prestige derived from being an international statesman who helped to keep the peace – for example, at Munich. The popularity of easy successes following German victories lured him into war in 1940.</p>	<p>Plans for the political development of an independent Asia, freed from colonialism under Japanese protection, were set out, but little was done to implement them. Conquered territories were exploited and oppressed.</p>