



# The Road to World War II

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## Ending the War/ Beginning Another.

- We are trekking the road to WW II today. So, I will start using the term First World War for the Great War (1914-18).
- We will begin with some of the residual problems from WWI and see how they connect to World War II.

## Ending the War/ Beginning Another.

- Last week, I quoted historian Hobsbawm making an argument during the economic meltdown. He said,

“But for it, there would certainly have been no Hitler. There almost certainly have been no Roosevelt. It is extremely unlikely that the Soviet system would have been regarded as a serious economic rival and alternative to world capitalism,” (Hobsbawm, 86).

## Ending the War/ Beginning Another.

- I suggest we preface statements like this with appropriate qualifiers like “In retrospect, knowing what happened...,” we can make such claims.
- In reality, during the interwar years, humanity faced an unpredictable future at each turn of the past. Only now We can say that A, B, or C fit into the chronology of the Second World War, having a direct or indirect relationship to it.

# Ending the War/ Beginning Another.

- What we know in the moment, in 1914 or 1920, or about the years before indicates a massive transformation of the world since the Maritime Revolution, and an exponential increase in human knowledge about geography with a new continent added to the world map in 1492. This world has moved away from an Indo-Pacific Ocean, Mediterranean, and Southern Europe-based universe. The Industrial Revolution, the American, French, Haitian, and Russian Revolutions, and the unceasing expansion of the European empires have changed the world beyond recognition.

## Ending the War/ Beginning Another.

- Within Europe, the Spanish Empire has seen its rise and fall.
- The Holy Roman Empire had ceded to the Austro-Hungarian and German Empires. In turn, the First World War ended the Ottoman, Romanov, Austro-Hungarian, and German Empires.
- The economic and industrial prowess of an increasingly globalized world moved from a battered Europe to an ascending United States despite the transitory setback of the Great Depression.

## Ending the War/ Beginning Another.

- The Treaty of Versailles has redrawn the maps of Europe and the Middle East. The Allied Powers created the League of Nations to ensure that humankind did not suffer from another war.
- The killing on the war fronts of the West has ceased but political and economic convulsions constantly trouble the world. ]

# Ending the War/ Beginning Another.

- For a growing number of nation-states, new or old, governance and economic management are new experiences. Empires had been the dominant mode of governance for the world which began to disappear by the end of the First World War. Not completely, though. West European Imperialism secured net gains as its formal and informal realms expanded after the War even though the new additions were termed the League of Nations' Mandates.



## Ending the War/ Beginning Another.

- Empires are interesting constructs. Despite being distant and ethnolinguistically discriminatory by default, they are large, socioeconomic, and cultural, common markets offering space for the mutual exchange of talent, products, and services. Versailles demarcated borders for nation-states but the emergence of common markets takes time. Europe began to build them in 1952 with the Steel and Coal Communities, a process that the European Union continues to refine and strengthen.

## Ending the War/ Beginning Another.

- For the newly created independent nation-states, economy, and governance both were complex questions. The economy suffered from a global recession and the rising tide of demands and domestic issues complicated governance.

# The Rise of Authoritarianism: WWII?

- Newly independent nation-states of the former Hapsburg Empire experienced a wave of authoritarianism. In 1919, Admiral Miklos Horthy (1868- 1957) overthrew the newly formed regime led by the communist Bela Kun (1885-1937) in Hungary.

# The Rise of Authoritarianism: WWII?

- Other rightwing authoritarian regimes followed in Poland, 1926, and Yugoslavia, 1929.
- These dictatorships could rely on the old imperial structures, like the military, conservative forces, the bureaucracy inherited from the imperial era, the Church, and wealthy elites.

# The Rise of Authoritarianism: WWII?

- Czechoslovakian parliamentary system survived the longest because it had inherited the the former empire's advanced industrial economy.
- Amid political and economic turmoil, authoritarian leaders like Horthy promised order and advocated nationalism. Use of terror to silence opponents and oppress Jews and other minority groups was common to them.

# The Rise of Fascism: WWII?

- Amid a rising tide of authoritarianism in Europe, Fascism took hold first in Italy and then in Germany.
- Identifying and recognizing Fascism at its seminal stages has since been imperative.
- Some of the signposts are a series of negative characteristics in an extreme Rightwing charismatic leader: anti-democratic, anti-individualistic, and anti-communist.

# The Rise of Fascism: WWII?

- A Fascist might also denounce the principles of the French Revolution.
- Fascists rejected Liberal Democratic forms of government complaining that the liberal state was dissolving into a mass of small particles of parties, associations, groups, and syndicates and as such were binding it in chains.
- They evoked nationalism and military prowess.

# The Rise of Fascism 1922—Italy: WWII?

- Italy fell to a fascist leader, first. Italy shared German resentment against Versailles because, despite switching sides, the Treaty did not reward it enough. The Allies denied Italian ambition for former German colonies, land in Asia Minor, in Dalmatia, and Albania in return for Italy's contribution to the war effort. Italy's weak economy staggered under a huge national debt amid skyrocketing inflation. Multitudes of war veterans were jobless.



# The Rise of Fascism 1922—Italy: WWII?

- The Italian economic turmoil found expression in social unrest.
- In the summer of 1919, farm workers threatened property owners by joining unions called red leagues; veterans and poor families began seizing idle lands; banditry in the South grew out of control and strikes plagued the cities.
- During the winter of 1920 to 1921, workers seized control of several factories. Leftwing gained strength within industrial and rural unions.

# The Rise of Fascism—Italy: WWII?

- Italy's newly elected government failed to find solutions to the burgeoning problems. A strange combination of disgruntled public, factory owners, and landlords all searched for vigorous leadership and a dependable government.
- Benito Mussolini stepped into this void and during a popular movement, March to Rome, 1922 staged a coup d'état.

# The Rise of Fascism—Italy: WWII?

- The fascist dictatorship of Mussolini's government initiated, nonetheless, new railroads, highways, building projects, and educational reforms.
- Mussolini's plans were not always successful. His agricultural policies generally failed to improve per capita output; workers especially women suffered declining income as he cut their wages by decree and banned them from several professions. If they did not take up their maternal duties, the Fascist government pushed them toward low-paying jobs.

## The Rise of Fascism—Italy: WWII?

- Mussolini leveraged control over film, radio, biographies, newspapers, and schools to amass a huge following. They admired him unconditionally, and repeated his reassuring phrase, “Mussolini is always right.” Some artists and intellectuals supported at least his image of dynamic leadership.

# The Rise of Fascism—Italy: WWII?

- Mussolini also won a reputation abroad as someone who could make the trains run on time, gain peace with the Catholic Church, and stand up to communist threats.
- Mussolini envisioned making Italy a Roman Empire and turning the Mediterranean into an Italian lake, again. Germany, a competing state to Italy's north had a similar plan and the means to realize it.

# The Rise of Fascism—Germany: WWII?

- Adolf Hitler (1889- 1945) had a sudden rise to power. In 1928, the fascist Nazis (National Socialists) won less than three percent of the vote in national elections. By 1933, Hitler had maneuvered to end democracy all through legal means.
- Hitler lost his father in 1905, failed to get into the art academy, growing up gathering nationalistic, anti-Semitic, and racist ideas circulating in Vienna. During the First World War, the German army decorated him thrice.

# The Rise of Fascism—Germany: WWII?

- Many Germans found reason to overlook Hitler's repressive measures and support him in his efforts to revive their prostrate nation, rebuilding, and rearming. Nazi government allocations fueled economic recovery. Rearmament was his cherished objective. Superhighways, hospitals, sports stadiums, and apartment houses sprang up all over Germany.
- Rearmament plants created jobs for millions to make Germany self-sufficient in case of another war.

## The Rise of Fascism—Germany: WWII?

Hitler located reasons for Germany's defeat in Jews and Marxists and found his thoughts echoed in several right-wing groups that offered extreme solutions to Germany's problems. Jews became targets of discriminatory laws and state actions.

Some examples:



# The Rise of Fascism—Germany: WWII?

1933: Hitler excluded Jews from higher education and public employment

1935: Nuremberg Laws rescinded German citizenship for Jews and forbade marriage or sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews.

1938, November 9-10, the Kristallnacht rampaged Jewish properties and killed and imprisoned many.

# The Rise of Fascism—Germany: WWII

- The Nazis supported the development of synthetics for the manufacture of such items as rubber and petroleum that Germany would otherwise have to import.
- The Nazis left business organizations and the capitalist economy alone but forced big businesses to toe the governmental policies. In turn, the Nazis suppressed the independent labor unions and replaced them with the Nazi labor front.

## Civil War in Spain: WWII?

- In 1936, a civil war broke out in Spain. Five years earlier, Spain had become a Democratic Republic for the first time but when the Popular Front made up of radical socialists and communists won the election in 1936 a group of generals led by the conservative Francisco Franco (1892-1975) launched an armed rebellion against the new government.

# Civil War in Spain: WWII?

- Franco's nationalist rebels enjoyed the support of the fascist Phalange Party, the army, the Church, and most of the wealthy elites. Backed by popular loyalists, the Popular Front government resisted. A prolonged Spanish civil war soon became an international battlefield.
- Hitler and Mussolini aided the cause of fascism, providing and testing new weapons and troops. In 1937 Germans in their new airplanes attacked the small Spanish town of Guernica, the subject matter of Pablo Picasso's (1881-1973) 25-foot-long mural in black and white.

# Civil War in Spain: WWII?

- Western democracies, hoping to maintain good relations with Italy and Germany, committed to a policy of neutrality. Some 40,000 idealistic volunteers traveled to Spain from abroad and fought as individuals in the loyalist cause. Only the Soviet Union until 1938 and Mexico assisted the loyalists.
- In 1939, Franco's rebels won. The authoritarian Franco ruled Spain until his death in 1975.

## Treaty of Versailles: WWII?

- The Allied and Associated powers had established the League of Nations to prevent another war. To begin with, it had serious gaps in its membership. The United States did not join.
- Germany joined in 1926.
- USSR joined in 1934.

## Treaty of Versailles: WWII?

- Serious violators of the Covenant left “in protest,” Japan in 1933, Germany in 1935, and Italy in 1937.
- USSR, after it annexed Polish territories, became the only member to be expelled from the League in 1939.

# US out of the League: WWII?

Although the US did not join the League, it took substantial steps to promote world peace during the 1921-22 nine-nation Washington Naval Conference.

The Conference had several achievements to its credit:



## US out of the League: WWII?

- The US, UK, Japan, France, and Italy signed a Five-Power Treaty to maintain a set ratio of warship tonnage on a 5:5:4 formula, allowing the US and UK 500,000 tons, Japan 300,000, France and Italy 175,000 tons.
- The Treaty required huge scrapping of warships: the US 583,000 tons, Britain, 583,000 tons, and Japan 450,000 tons.
- Japan renounced the Treaty in 1934.

US out of the League: WWII?

During the same conference, in the Four-Power Treaty, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Japan agreed to consult with each other in the event of a future crisis in East Asia..

## US out of the League: WWII?

Another, the Nine-Power Treaty, promised that each of the signatories—the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, and China—would respect the territorial integrity of China.

The treaty recognized Japanese dominance in Manchuria but otherwise affirmed the importance of equal opportunity for all nations doing business in the country.

## US out of the League: WWII?

The United States also joined France in 1928 to conclude the Kellogg-Briand Pact stipulating “renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy,” so that “the peaceful and friendly relations now existing between their peoples may be perpetuated.” It promoted changes in relations “only by pacific means,” and denied the benefits of the pact to any violating (aggressor) state.

## US out of the League: WWII?

Eventually, sixty-two signatories, thus united “the civilized nations of the world in a common renunciation of war as an instrument of their national policy.”

Germany, Italy, and Japan were amongst the 62 signatories.

In 1933, President Roosevelt recognized the USSR, ending sixteen years of diplomatic hiatus.

# Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact: WWII?

- Isolated or excluded for too long from international affairs and having observed the French and British weak response to German aggression, Stalin stunned the world by signing a non-aggression pact with Hitler on August 23, 1939.
- In retrospect, we know that it meant the Soviet Union's neutrality while Germany carved up Poland. Hitler gave Stalin a free hand to Poland's territories in Eastern Europe including eastern Poland that Russia had lost during World War One.

# Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact: WWII?

- Aggressive behavior unified the perpetrators. Italy and Germany forged a friendship alliance in 1936, the Rome-Berlin axis.
- In 1937, Italy left the League of Nations.

# Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact: WWII?

- In 1939 the Italian-German alliance solidified into a military pact.
- To show unity with Hitler, Mussolini promptly adopted anti-Semitic racial laws.
- Pursuing his military ambitions, Mussolini invaded Albania in 1939.



# The League of Nations Tested: WWII?

- The Allied Powers had no political resolve to empower the League of Nations to block rearmament and oppose aggression.
- The first major challenge for the League came from the Pacific. It began in March 1931 when Japan decided to eliminate the Chinese obstacle to its ambitions for economic and political dominance in East Asia.

# The League of Nations Tested: WWII?

- The Japanese army invaded Manchuria, in northern China, and began a drive for conquest with roaring support from the cheering crowds in Japan amid a heightened sense of nationalistic militarism.
- The League of Nations condemned Japan but took no action. Japan left the League in 1933. The same year, Hitler announced Germany's forthcoming withdrawal.

## The League of Nations Tested: WWII?

- China, besides wrestling with the aftereffects of Western interventions, remained entangled in a bloody civil war between China's dominant Nationalist Party under Chiang Kai Shak (1887-1975) and the growing Chinese Communist Party led by Mao Zedong (1893- 1976).

# The League of Nations Tested: WWII?

- In 1937, Japanese troops invaded China proper. Within six months, the Japanese imperial army captured Nanjing, the capital city of China's Nationalist government. The victorious army indulged in a six-week free reign of the city, mass killing in mass, raising heaps of dead bodies, slaughtering thousands of prisoners, killing civilians, and raping women. They had executed up to 300,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians and raped thousands of women.

# The League of Nations Tested: WWII?

- Shaken by the Japanese atrocities, the rival Chinese forces finally allied against the Japanese. The Soviet Union provided military assistance, but city after city in China fell to Japanese bombs.
- Japan was determined to create a new order in East Asia under its domination. To secure its position, it formed an alliance with the aggressive, authoritarian states of Italy and Germany. The world would know them as Axis Powers.

# The League of Nations Tested—WWII? Ethiopian Case

- Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935.
- Responding to the victim's appeal, the League of Nations condemned Italy, but the allied powers deployed no resources provided in the Covenant to reverse the aggression.

## Treaty of Versailles: WWII?

- Germany was the principal target of the Allied Powers' concerns and anger. They had assumed the culpability of the German nation and penalized it in totality, seeking the weakening of her economy and retarding its possible industrial recovery while simultaneously expecting payments of reparations on the schedule.

# Treaty of Versailles: WWII?

- The United States made efforts to rationalize the reparation scheme through the Dawes Plan in 1924 and the Young Plan in 1928.
- The Young Plan renegotiated the total due to 121 billion gold marks (down from 132 billion gold marks in 1921) or \$ 29 billion (33 in 1921) payable over 58 years through the newly established Bank for International Settlements.
- Both these plans had a positive impact until the Great Depression of 1929.



# Treaty of Versailles/ Reparations: WWII?

- Signs of German resistance to the shaky and punitive reparation scheme became apparent in 1923 soon after it had become operational.
- German governance had an unstable beginning. Its post-war, nascent, Weimar Republic faced aborted challenges from the Communists and the Rightwing and amid rising inflation defaulted on the huge war reparations in January 1923. The French and Belgian troops responded by occupying the Ruhr Valley, Germany's richest industrial area. The Germans struck back with passive resistance. The occupying forces failed to collect any reparations, but paralyzed Germany's economy leaving no scope to tame wild inflation.

# Treaty of Versailles—German Response: WWII?

- Beginning in 1923, we can also see the resentment over reparations spilling over to ethno-religious issues. In a 1923 Speech, Adolf Hitler ranted against the “rogues and swindlers,” who defrauded the German nation with worthless, “million scraps of paper,” He added, “ “And when the people in its horror sees that one can starve though one may have milliards of marks, then it will perforce make up its mind and say, “We will bow down no longer before an institution which is founded on the delusory majority principle, we want a dictatorship. Already the Jew has a premonition of things to come... He is saying to himself: if there must be a dictatorship, then it shall be a dictatorship of Cohen or Levi.”

# Road to the War—Was it?

- Nazi Germany regained the economic and military strength to make it a great power.
- In 1933, Hitler announced and in 1935, left the League of Nations and the Geneva Disarmament Conference. The Allies took no steps to ensure compliance with Germany's Treaty obligations.
- In 1936, Hitler initiated a secret four-year plan to prepare Germany for war.
- By 1939, the Nazis had increased armaments expenditures 30-fold.

## Road to the War—Was it?

Hitler tested the Western resolve in many ways.

- In March 1936, Hitler ordered his armed forces into the Rhineland, violating the Treaty of Versailles provision that the West Bank of the Rhine River would be a Demilitarized Zone. France and Britain flustered and consented through inaction.
- In 1938, the Nazis incorporated Austria. Without any opposition, they annexed the 6.5 million Austrians to the German Reich.

## Road to the War—Was it?

- Also, in 1938, Hitler claimed the Sudetenland with 3.5 million German-speaking people lumped with Czechoslovakia.
- Though Czechoslovakia resisted, the participants of the Munich Conference of 1938, leaders of France, Germany, Italy, and Britain, approved the annexation of Sudetenland.

## Road to the War—Was it?

- The capitalist democracies viewed Russia/USSR since 1921, as a communist threat, more frightening than the extreme right-wing politics of Italian fascism and German Nazism.
- On the other hand, the Allies reached out to Adolf Hitler. Chamberlain assessed that the Munich Conference had achieved peace. The British newspapers proclaimed him a hero. The illusion survived for less than a year.

## Was it?

- British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940) returned home jubilant, after the Munich. He claimed that the Munich Conference agreement had saved Czechoslovakia from destruction and Europe from Armageddon.
- Hitler disappointed him. In March 1939, he invaded Czechoslovakia and landed troops in Poland in September.

## The (Two-Way) War Begins

- Hitler addressed the German Reichstag on September 1, 1939, justifying the German invasion of Poland.
- Hitler correlated the German aggression to the outcome of the Great War of 1914 to 1918.



## The (Two-Way) War Begins

- Hitler made clear his intent to reverse the results of World War One, saying, “I have once again put on the uniform which was always so sacred and dear to me. I shall not lay it aside until after the victory, or I shall not live to see the end.”
- He kept his word.

# The War

- Chamberlain recognized the German aggression after the September 1, 1939, German invasion of Poland. Britain and France declared war against Germany on September 3, 1939.
- The Second World War with its indiscriminate bombing, programmed genocide, and the use of the atomic bomb, spread all over the globe, between the late 1930s and 1945, taking some seventy-five million lives and leaving a holocaust and use of the first atomic bomb among its tragic legacies.

## Conclusion

- The pursuit of interests defines state decisions. They make those choices considering the factors as they perceive them.
- The League of Nations was the first international effort to design a framework within which states would willingly run a countercheck on their understanding of national interests and their consequences on others.
- Consensus among the allied powers was the driving force of the League. They found it cumbersome, Japan and Italy leading, and the mechanism collapsed. We will wage another war and then make another effort in 1945 to stop its recurrence improving upon the Covenant.

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Questions/Comments

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