

Overview of Unit 13: The Second World War

Chapter 21

World War II, like World War I and so many other great historical events, was a combination of

1. long-developing trends (deep seeds) and immediate sparks
2. It was also the result of a culmination of many economic, political, cultural, geographic, and diplomatic trends coming out of WW I:
 - a. Nationalism
 - b. Suspicion, fear, paranoia
 - c. Schizophrenic episodes
 - d. Humiliation
 - e. Different versions of how to make the war “worth it”
 - f. Keep in mind the relationship: *why* you fight determines *how* you fight which determines how you want it to end and what you hope to achieve. Each nation gets into the war for their own reasons, thus each nation has different expectations of what makes the war “worth it.” Thus...
3. The post-war era characterized as the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union will then set the stage for the 21st Century.

Bottom line: an unclear and unsatisfactory ending to the First World War set the stage for the second. Ironically, a very clear ending to the Second World War set the immediate stage for the Cold War.

- WWI: unclear battlefield results led to a “clear-cut” settlement (or so they believed) although that settlement was very problematic:
 - The “losers” did not accept the settlement
 - The “winners” did nothing to enforce the settlement
 - Very few post-war discussions took place during the war
- WWII: clear-cut battlefield results led to a very “unclear” settlement that pit the US and Soviets (former allies)

against each other for supremacy within the new world order:

- **The “winners” did not have the same agendas**
- **Many post-war discussions actually took place during the war so that the mistakes of WWI wouldn't be repeated.**
- **However, this approach also had problems**
 - **If the western democracies pushed their agenda, it might upset the fragile alliance with the Soviets**
 - **If the western democracies didn't push their political agenda it might present the Soviets with an opportunity to gain control over massive areas of Europe**
- **Both the Soviets and the US will have very different interpretations regarding the “agreements” during these wartime conferences, especially at Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (July 1945)**
- **Always keep in mind the relationship between military and political issues. What happened on the battlefield very much influenced the political discussion at the conferences. The political discussions at the conferences very much influenced the battlefield activities.**