

Unit 7: Global Conflict, c. 1900–Present

Unit 7 covers the collapse of land empires, the causes and conduct of the two world wars, the interwar economy, unresolved imperial tensions, and mass atrocities after 1900. CED topics 7.1 through 7.8.

AP World History

Global Conflict

About 12 minutes to read

How to use this guide

Read the topics in order the first time. Empires fall, new states rise, and the tensions those new states inherit lead to war. The wars then reshape economies and colonial relationships, which sets up the next conflict. Exam questions usually ask you to connect one stage of that sequence to the next.

After the first read, use the trap boxes and the tables to review the distinctions that exam questions test most often. Finish with the practice questions, then complete the recall check on the last page out loud and note any items you cannot explain yet.

What ties this unit together. Every topic in Unit 7 is about power shifting hands. Land empires collapse, colonies are mobilized for total war, the interwar economy forces governments to intervene, and imperial states fight to keep control they can no longer fully hold. If you can explain how each event changed who held power, you can answer most questions in this unit.

7.1 Shifting Power After 1900

At the start of the twentieth century, older land-based empires came apart. The **Ottoman Empire**, the long-standing power of the Middle East, collapsed under internal and external pressures, ending centuries of Ottoman rule and redrawing the region. In China, the **Qing dynasty**, the last imperial dynasty, fell under a combination of internal and external factors and ended more than two thousand years of dynastic rule. In Russia, the fall of the tsarist empire led to a **communist revolution** that created the Soviet Union, one of the century's most consequential challenges to the existing political and social order. Mexico's revolution grew out of a political crisis and joined the same pattern of states challenging the old order.

The larger pattern is the **collapse of land-based empires**. By the end of the century, both land-based and maritime empires had given way to new states, and the West's uncontested domination of the global political order was over.

Trap. Collapse did not mean the same outcome everywhere. A revolution that topples an empire can produce a communist state, a republic, or a military government. Questions test whether you know what actually replaced each empire, not a general rule about what replaces empires.

7.2 Causes of World War I

World War I was the 1914–1918 global conflict, the first truly worldwide war, fought mainly in Europe but drawing in colonies and powers around the globe. Its causes were structural, building over decades.

CAUSE	HOW IT PUSHED TOWARD WAR
Imperialist expansion	European powers competed to acquire colonies and extend influence, which sharpened rivalries before 1914.
Competition for resources	Industrialized states fought over raw materials and markets, feeding the imperial competition.
Alliance system	Binding military treaties, such as the Triple Entente and its rival bloc, linked the great powers. The network was flawed, and it turned regional tensions into a global conflict.
Intense nationalism	Extreme national pride, combined with ethnic tensions, pushed states toward war and turned territorial disputes global.
Territorial and regional conflicts	Disputes in the Balkans and in colonial borderlands, combined with the alliances and nationalism, escalated into war.

Trap. The alliance system was designed to keep peace by making war too costly. It failed because binding treaties meant one regional crisis pulled in everyone. When a question asks why alliances caused the war, the answer is the escalation mechanism, not that alliances were built for aggression.

7.3 Conducting World War I

World War I was fought as **total war**. That term has a precise meaning. It was the first war in which governments mobilized their entire societies and economies, not just their armies, to wage war. Factories, farms, labor, and public opinion were all organized for the fight.

Three features defined how the war was fought. **Wartime propaganda** used political messaging, art, and media to shape public opinion and win support. These campaigns were essential to sustaining a long and costly conflict. Warring governments also carried out **mobilization of colonial populations**, recruiting soldiers and laborers not only at home but in their colonies, which spread the war's demands and costs around the world. And **new military technology** changed the battlefield. Machine guns, poison gas, tanks, submarines, and aircraft raised wartime casualties to new levels.

Trap. Total war describes how a war is fought, not how big it is. A large war fought only by professional armies is not total war. The test is whether governments mobilized their whole societies and economies.

7.4 Economy in the Interwar Period

The **Great Depression** began in 1929. It was a severe worldwide economic crisis that spread from the United States across the globe. It pushed governments everywhere toward **government intervention in the economy**, through spending, regulation, and planning rather than leaving the economy to markets alone.

That intervention took different ideological forms. The Soviet Union used **Five Year Plans**, centralized plans that put the national economy under government control, implemented with repressive policies and negative repercussions for the population. In the United States, the **New Deal**, President Franklin Roosevelt's program of federal programs and reforms, is the course's lead example of a government taking a more active economic role. Fascist states used a **fascist corporatist economy**, in which the state organized the economy through corporations of employers and workers under government control.

RESPONSE	WHO	CHARACTER
Five Year Plans	Soviet Union	Centralized planning with repressive policies
New Deal	United States	Federal programs and reforms within a democracy
Fascist corporatist economy	Fascist states	State-organized corporations of employers and workers

Trap. All three are examples of the same trend, government intervention after the Depression. Questions ask you to match the form to the system. The New Deal is the democratic example. Do not confuse it with the centralized Soviet plans or the fascist corporatist model.

7.5 Unresolved Tensions After World War I

The war did not settle the colonial question. Between the wars, Western and Japanese **imperial states maintained colonial control**, and in some cases gained additional territories through conquest or treaty settlement. Against that, **anti-imperial resistance after WWI** grew. Movements in colonized regions resisted continued imperial rule. The **Indian National Congress** led the movement for Indian independence from British rule and became the main vehicle of anti-imperial resistance in India. In West Africa, resistance to French rule took the form of strikes and congresses.

The **League of Nations mandate system** placed former German and Ottoman territories under mandates administered by Britain, France, Japan, South Africa, Belgium, Australia, and New Zealand. It was meant to prepare territories for self-rule, but in practice it extended imperial control. Japan's **Manchukuo and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere** show the same pattern from the other direction. Japan set up a puppet state in Manchuria and claimed it was liberating Asia from Western imperialism. The claim was a cover for Japanese conquest and control.

Trap. The mandate system and the Co-Prosperity Sphere both used the language of liberation and self-rule. In practice, both extended imperial control. When a question describes one of these arrangements, look at who actually administered the territory, not at the stated purpose.

7.6 Causes of World War II

The causes of World War II grew out of the failures of the peace and the rise of new regimes. **Fascism** was an extreme nationalist, authoritarian ideology that glorified the nation, demanded obedience to a strong leader, and rejected democracy and communism. Its rise was a central cause of the war.

Totalitarian regimes went further, with a single party or leader controlling nearly all aspects of public and private life and repressing basic freedoms. Fascist and totalitarian states used aggressive militarism to expand their power.

Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler is singled out as especially responsible. Its aggressive militarism, seizing neighboring lands and persecuting minorities, helped cause the war. The **unsustainable peace settlement after WWI**, the Treaty of Versailles, imposed harsh terms on Germany that proved unsustainable. Resentment of the settlement helped fascists rise to power. **Aggressive militarism**, the buildup of military force and its use to threaten or seize other nations, was a general cause, with Nazi Germany's version stressed as especially responsible. And **continued imperialist aspirations** mattered too. Imperial ambitions did not end after World War I. Powers such as Japan and Italy still sought empires.

Trap. Fascism and totalitarianism overlap but are not the same term. Fascism is the ideology. Totalitarianism describes the scope of control, how much of life the state dominates. A question testing the distinction will describe one or the other precisely, so match the definition, not the general mood.

7.7 Conducting World War II

World War II was also fought as total war, but with a sharper ideological edge. Governments used **ideological mobilization for war**. Ideologies, including fascism and communism, were used to mobilize all of a state's resources for war. In totalitarian states those ideologies also justified repression.

Totalitarian repression of daily life meant wartime mobilization went beyond the battlefield.

Governments repressed basic freedoms and dominated many aspects of daily life during the conflict and beyond.

New weapons and tactics raised the cost. The **atomic bomb**, the nuclear weapon developed by the United States and dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, ended World War II. It showed how new military technology increased wartime casualties on an unprecedented scale. **Fire-bombing**, the tactic of using incendiary bombs to burn entire cities, did the same. Along with the atomic bomb, it showed how the tactics of total war multiplied wartime casualties, especially among civilians.

Trap. Ideological mobilization had two jobs in totalitarian states. It organized resources for war and it justified repressing freedoms at home. A question that mentions only the battlefield half is testing whether you remember the domestic half too.

7.8 Mass Atrocities After 1900

Mass atrocities are widespread, systematic acts of violence against civilian populations after 1900. The course links them to the rise of **extremist groups in power**. Radical movements, such as the Nazis, seized state power and used it to attempt the destruction of specific populations. Their rise was the key cause of mass atrocities after 1900.

Genocide is the deliberate attempted destruction of a specific population or ethnic group. After 1900, extremist regimes carried out multiple such crimes. The **Holocaust**, the Nazi killing of the Jews during World War II, the systematic state-sponsored murder of six million Jews and millions of others, is the course's central example of the attempted destruction of a specific population. The **Armenian genocide**, the killing of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during and after World War I, is another example of genocide and ethnic violence. The **Khmer Rouge**, the Cambodian communist regime of the late 1970s, carried out mass killings of its own population. The **Rwandan genocide**, the 1994 mass killing of Tutsi in Rwanda from April to July, is one of the course's examples of genocide and ethnic violence. **Ethnic violence**, violence targeting people because of their ethnicity, is treated alongside genocide as a consequence of extremism in power.

Trap. Genocide is a narrower term than mass atrocity. Genocide means the deliberate attempted destruction of a specific population or ethnic group. Mass atrocities is the broader category. Every genocide in this unit is a mass atrocity, but not every mass atrocity meets the definition of genocide.

Confusions That Cost Points

PAIR	DIFFERENCE THAT EARNS THE POINT
Alliance system vs. nationalism	Alliances escalated the war through treaties. Nationalism supplied the motive. One is the mechanism, the other is the fuel.
Total war vs. large war	Total war means the whole society and economy were mobilized. Size alone does not make a war total.
Five Year Plans vs. New Deal	Soviet centralized planning with repression versus democratic federal programs and reforms. Same trend, opposite systems.
Mandate system vs. independence	Mandates were administered by imperial powers and extended control. Independence movements like the Indian National Congress opposed that control.
Fascism vs. totalitarianism	Fascism is the ideology. Totalitarianism is the scope of state control over daily life.
Aggressive militarism vs. imperialist aspirations	Militarism is the military buildup and its use. Imperialist aspirations are the goal of acquiring empire. Japan and Italy show the two working together.
Fire-bombing vs. atomic bomb	Both multiplied civilian casualties in total war. The atomic bomb was the nuclear weapon dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Fire-bombing used incendiary bombs on cities.
Genocide vs. mass atrocities	Genocide is the attempted destruction of a specific population. Mass atrocities is the wider category of systematic violence against civilians.

Trap. The mandate system and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere are the unit's two great impostors. Both dressed imperial control in the language of liberation. When a source uses words like self-rule or liberation, check who held the territory.

Practice Questions

Original questions written for this guide in the style of the AP exam. Answers and explanations are on the next page, so complete the questions before checking them.

- 1.** Before 1914, European powers signed binding military treaties that linked them to one another. When a regional crisis broke out in the Balkans, these treaties pulled one power after another into war. This best illustrates which cause of World War I?

 - A. Intense nationalism
 - B. Competition for resources
 - C. The alliance system
 - D. Imperialist expansion
- 2.** During World War I, a government recruits soldiers and laborers in its African colonies, runs factories around the clock for munitions, and uses posters and films to keep the public committed to the war. This is best described as

 - A. limited war
 - B. total war
 - C. guerrilla war
 - D. a war of attrition
- 3.** After 1929, the United States government launches federal programs and reforms to fight a severe economic crisis. This is the course's lead example of

 - A. a fascist corporatist economy
 - B. centralized Five Year Plans
 - C. government intervention in the economy
 - D. a return to laissez-faire policy
- 4.** After World War I, former German and Ottoman territories are placed under League of Nations mandates administered by Britain, France, and Japan. The stated purpose is to prepare the territories for self-rule. This arrangement best shows that

 - A. imperial states maintained colonial control between the wars
 - B. the League of Nations ended all imperialism
 - C. anti-imperial resistance had succeeded everywhere
 - D. Japan opposed the mandate system

- 5.** A historian argues that the Treaty of Versailles helped cause World War II. The strongest support for this argument is that the settlement
- A. imposed harsh terms on Germany that proved unsustainable, and resentment helped fascists rise to power
 - B. was too generous to Germany and encouraged further aggression
 - C. created the League of Nations, which then started the war
 - D. ended all imperialist aspirations in Europe
- 6.** In the 1930s, Japan establishes a puppet state in Manchuria and declares a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, claiming to liberate Asia from Western imperialism. This claim is best understood as
- A. a genuine anti-imperial movement supported by China
 - B. a cover for Japanese conquest and control
 - C. an application of the League of Nations mandate system
 - D. a response to the Great Depression in Japan
- 7.** The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 and the fire-bombing of cities during World War II are both used in this course to show that
- A. total war tactics multiplied wartime casualties, especially among civilians
 - B. only nuclear weapons caused civilian deaths in the war
 - C. ideological mobilization ended before 1945
 - D. totalitarian states avoided targeting civilians
- 8.** The course's central example of the attempted destruction of a specific population is
- A. the fire-bombing of cities
 - B. the Holocaust
 - C. the Great Depression
 - D. the Manchukuo puppet state

Answer Key

- 1. C.** The question describes treaties pulling powers into war, which is the alliance system's escalation mechanism. A is the motive of national pride, not the treaty mechanism. B and D are about colonies and resources, which are different causes.
- 2. B.** Recruiting colonial labor, running the whole economy for munitions, and propaganda to sustain public support are exactly total war, the mobilization of entire societies and economies. A is the opposite. C describes irregular fighters, which is not what the scenario shows. D describes a grinding strategy, not the scope of mobilization.
- 3. C.** The New Deal is the course's lead example of a government taking a more active role in economic life. A is the fascist model, not the American one. B is the Soviet model with centralized planning. D reverses the direction. The government was intervening more, not less.
- 4. A.** The mandates were administered by imperial powers, so the system extended imperial control in practice despite the self-rule language. B is the trap. The language promised preparation for self-rule, but administration by Britain and France meant continued control. C overclaims. Resistance grew but did not succeed everywhere. D is wrong. Japan administered mandates too.
- 5. A.** The settlement imposed harsh terms on Germany that proved unsustainable, and resentment helped fascists rise. B reverses the direction. The terms were harsh, not generous. C confuses the League, which was created by the settlement, with a cause of the war. D is wrong. Imperialist aspirations continued, as in Japan and Italy.
- 6. B.** The Co-Prosperity Sphere was a cover for Japanese conquest and control, with Manchukuo as a puppet state. A takes the liberation claim at face value, which is the trap. C is wrong. This was Japanese conquest, not a League mandate. D may be background context, but it does not explain what the claim was.
- 7. A.** Both are course examples of how total war tactics multiplied wartime casualties, especially among civilians. B is too narrow. Fire-bombing caused civilian deaths without nuclear weapons. C is wrong. Ideological mobilization continued through the war. D is backwards. Totalitarian states targeted civilians.
- 8. B.** The Holocaust, the Nazi killing of the Jews, is the course's central example of the attempted destruction of a specific population. A is a total war tactic, not an attempted destruction of a specific population. C is an economic crisis, not an atrocity. D is a puppet state used as cover for conquest, not the central genocide example.

When you check your answers, note which distinction each miss came from. Make a flashcard for that distinction and drill it spaced out over the next few days instead of rereading the whole section. If you missed one of these questions, the same distinction is worth practicing again in Rycal, where the Global Conflict deck has flashcards for it and more practice questions use the same kinds of traps.

One-Page Recall Check

Say each answer out loud before you look back, and mark the ones you cannot finish. Anything you cannot say out loud yet belongs in your flashcard deck. In Rycal, add those items to the Global Conflict deck and let spaced review bring them back over the next few days.

- Name the three empires or dynasties that collapsed in 7.1 and say what replaced the Russian one.
- Explain the difference between a cause of World War I and the alliance system's escalation mechanism.
- Define total war in one sentence, then give two features of how World War I was fought that fit the definition.
- Explain why wartime propaganda was essential, not optional, in a total war.
- Name the three ideological flavors of government economic intervention after 1929 and match each to its state.
- Explain why the New Deal is the democratic example and not the Soviet or fascist one.
- Describe what the League of Nations mandate system was supposed to do and what it actually did.
- Give two examples of anti-imperial resistance between the wars and say who led each (or what form each took).
- Explain the difference between fascism as an ideology and totalitarianism as a scope of control.
- Explain why the Treaty of Versailles is described as unsustainable and how that helped cause World War II.
- Name the two total-war tactics from 7.7 and explain what each showed about civilian casualties.
- Define genocide in the course's terms, then explain why it is narrower than mass atrocities.
- List the four genocide or atrocity examples in 7.8 and say what makes each one fit the unit.
- Explain why the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is called a cover rather than a liberation.

Where to go next. Turn every missed item above into flashcards and drill them spaced out over several days rather than in one sitting. In Rycal, open the Global Conflict deck under AP World History. The deck covers the terms in this guide, and its practice questions target the same traps named here. If you have a test date, add it in the Test Planner. You can also start your next review with a Brain Dump, then check what you missed against this guide.

Key terms for this unit

Collapse of land-based empires, Ottoman Empire collapse, Russian communist revolution, Qing dynasty collapse, Mexican Revolution, Empires giving way to new states, World War I, Imperialist expansion (cause of WWI), Competition for resources (cause of WWI), Alliance system, Intense nationalism (cause of WWI), Territorial and regional conflicts (cause of WWI), Total war, Wartime propaganda, Mobilization of colonial populations, New military technology (WWI), Great Depression, Government intervention in the economy, Five Year Plans, New Deal, Fascist corporatist economy, Imperial states maintaining colonial control, Anti-imperial resistance after WWI, League of Nations mandate system, Indian National Congress, Manchukuo / Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Fascism, Totalitarian regimes, Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler, Unsustainable peace settlement after WWI, Aggressive militarism, Continued imperialist aspirations, Ideological mobilization for war, Totalitarian repression of daily life, Atomic bomb, Fire-bombing, Mass atrocities, Holocaust, Genocide, Ethnic violence, Extremist groups in power, Armenian genocide, Khmer Rouge (Cambodia, late 1970s), Rwandan genocide.