

Causes and Effects of 20th-Century Wars

IB SL Study Guide

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How to Use This Guide

- **Paper 2 World History Topic 11** covers three broad themes: the causes of wars, the practices (conduct) of wars, and the effects and results of wars
- **Paper 2** is a 90-minute exam in which you write **two essays**, each worth **15 marks** — drawn from different World History topics or both from Topic 11
- This topic is **identical for SL and HL students** — both sit the same Paper 2 questions. HL students also sit Paper 3 (regional option), but that is separate
- The single most important rule: questions almost always ask you to refer to **examples from more than one region**. Two Western European wars (e.g. WWI and WWII) are acceptable as contrasts, but pairing WWI with the Chinese Civil War demonstrates greater geographical range and often scores better
- **Exam Alerts** flag the traps that cost marks in essays
- **IB Tips** highlight what examiners reward in extended responses
- **Worked Examples** provide model essay outlines for common question types

Aligned to IB History SL/HL World History Topic 11 — current syllabus

Videos on this page: Overview — Causes of 20th-Century Wars · World War I Causes · World War II Causes · Practices of War · Effects and Results

► **Watch: Overview — Causes and Effects of 20th-Century Wars**

VIDEO

Section 1: Theme 1 — Causes of Wars

1.1 The Framework: Long-Term, Short-Term, and Immediate Causes

The IB syllabus requires you to analyse causes across three time horizons. Examiners expect you to distinguish between these categories and to explain how they interacted.

Category	Timeframe	Function
Long-term causes	Decades before the war	Create the structural conditions; make war possible
Short-term causes	Months to a few years before	Generate specific tensions; make war likely
Immediate causes	Days to weeks before	Trigger the outbreak; the “spark”

⚠ EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Students frequently list causes without explaining how they relate to each other. The examiner wants to see you argue whether long-term or short-term causes were more important — not simply list all of them. A strong essay will argue a clear hierarchy of causes and defend it with evidence.

The IB also identifies four **types** of causes that cut across the time categories:

- **Economic** — resource competition, trade rivalry, economic imperialism, industrialisation creating military-industrial competition
- **Ideological** — nationalism, militarism, imperialism, fascism, communism, pan-Slavism
- **Political** — alliance systems, failures of diplomacy, domestic political pressures, leadership miscalculation
- **Territorial** — competition for land, colonies, strategic positions, border disputes

MEMORISE THIS

Causes framework — LSIE:

- Long-term structural conditions (decades)
- Short-term specific tensions (months/years)
- Immediate trigger (days/weeks)
- Economic / Ideological / Political / Territorial types cutting across all three

1.2 Causes of World War I (1914–1918)

Long-Term Causes

Militarism:

European great powers had engaged in a sustained arms race since the 1870s. Germany's naval expansion (the Tirpitz Plan, from 1898) directly threatened British naval supremacy, producing the Anglo-German naval rivalry. By 1914 Germany had the second-largest navy in the world. Military spending across Europe doubled between 1870 and 1914. General staffs developed rigid war plans (Germany's Schlieffen Plan, France's Plan XVII) that required immediate mobilisation at the first sign of conflict — leaving almost no room for diplomatic delay once the crisis began.

Alliance Systems:

Europe was divided into two armed camps:

Alliance	Members	Original purpose
Triple Alliance (1882)	Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy	Bismarck's defensive system against France and Russia
Triple Entente (1907)	Britain, France, Russia	Balance Germany's growing power

The alliance system meant that a local conflict (Austria-Hungary vs. Serbia) could rapidly pull in all major powers. What might have remained a regional Balkan dispute became a continental — then world — war within six weeks of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand.

Imperialism:

Competition for colonies generated repeated international crises: the First Moroccan Crisis (1905), the Second Moroccan Crisis (1911), and the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). Each crisis was resolved diplomatically, but each left underlying tensions unresolved and military plans more advanced. Imperial competition intensified economic rivalries and fed nationalist sentiment in all major powers.

Nationalism:

Pan-Slavism threatened the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire by inspiring Serbian ambitions to unite the south Slavic peoples. Pan-German nationalism fed the desire for German dominance in Central Europe. Within Germany, domestic political pressures from nationalists made diplomatic compromise politically costly for the German government.

MEMORISE THIS

Long-term causes of WWI — MAIN:

- Militarism (arms race, rigid war plans)
- Alliance systems (Triple Alliance vs. Triple Entente)
- Imperialism (colonial rivalry, Moroccan crises)
- Nationalism (pan-Slavism, pan-German nationalism, domestic pressure)

Short-Term Causes

The Balkans — “powder keg of Europe”:

Austria-Hungary’s annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 humiliated Russia and inflamed Serbian nationalism. The Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 expanded Serbia’s territory significantly, alarming Austria-Hungary. By 1914, Austria-Hungary had concluded that Serbia must be crushed before it became powerful enough to threaten the empire’s cohesion. This produced the willingness to use the Sarajevo assassination as a pretext for war rather than a reason for diplomacy.

The July Crisis:

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (June 28, 1914) triggered a chain of ultimatums, mobilisations, and declarations of war that lasted 37 days. Key decision points:

Date	Event
Jun 28, 1914	Franz Ferdinand assassinated in Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip (Black Hand connection)
Jul 5–6	Germany issues the “blank cheque” — unconditional support for Austria-Hungary
Jul 23	Austria-Hungary delivers ultimatum to Serbia (deliberately unacceptable terms)
Jul 28	Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia
Jul 30	Russia begins general mobilisation
Aug 1	Germany declares war on Russia; France mobilises
Aug 3	Germany declares war on France; Schlieffen Plan activated
Aug 4	Germany invades Belgium; Britain declares war on Germany

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: The “blank cheque” (Germany’s unconditional support to Austria-Hungary on July 5–6) is a key short-term cause that many students overlook. Without German backing, Austria-Hungary would likely not have risked war against Serbia, knowing Russia would intervene. Germany’s decision to support Austria-Hungary unconditionally converted a bilateral dispute into a continental war. This is central to the Fischer controversy — the debate over Germany’s responsibility.

Historiographical Debate on WWI Causes

MEMORISE THIS

Key historians and their arguments:

Historian	Argument
Fritz Fischer (1961)	Germany deliberately planned the war as part of a bid for European hegemony — the “war guilt” clause was justified
A.J.P. Taylor (1954)	All great powers shared responsibility; the war resulted from miscalculation and the rigidity of railway mobilisation timetables
Christopher Clark (2012)	All powers were “sleepwalkers” — the war was not planned but blundered into through mutual misperception
John Keegan (1998)	Military culture and the “war plan” mentality made escalation almost automatic once mobilisation began

IB TIP

IB Tip: Examiners reward historiographical awareness in Paper 2 essays. You do not need to cite every historian — one or two clearly deployed arguments (e.g. Fischer’s thesis vs. Clark’s “sleepwalkers”) demonstrate the analytical depth that pushes essays from Band 3 to Band 4–5.

1.3 Causes of World War II (1939–1945)

Long-Term Causes

The Treaty of Versailles (1919) and its consequences:

The peace settlement produced resentments that Hitler could exploit. Germany lost 13% of its territory, 10% of its population, all overseas colonies, and its entire merchant fleet. Article 231 (the “war guilt” clause) assigned sole responsibility for the war to Germany and its allies, justifying reparations payments eventually set at 132 billion gold marks. Military restrictions left Germany with an army of only 100,000 men. The settlement was widely perceived as a “Carthaginian peace” — vindictive rather than constructive.

Critically, the settlement satisfied no major power: France believed it was too lenient; Germany believed it was humiliating; Britain privately felt guilty about its harshness; the USA rejected it entirely by withdrawing from the League of Nations and Versailles.

The Great Depression:

The global economic collapse from 1929 destroyed democratic governments across Europe. In Germany, unemployment reached 6.1 million by January 1933; democratic parties discredited themselves through coalition paralysis. The Depression produced the political conditions in which Hitler could win mass electoral support and be appointed Chancellor (January 30, 1933). Without the Depression, it is very unlikely that the Nazi Party would have achieved sufficient electoral strength to pressure Hindenburg into the chancellorship appointment.

The Failure of Collective Security:

The League of Nations failed to enforce collective security in Manchuria (1931), Abyssinia (1935–1936), and the Rhineland (1936). Each failure taught Hitler — and other aggressors — that the international system lacked the will to enforce its rules. The policy of **appeasement** adopted by Britain and France reflected genuine fears of another war, but its effect was to validate aggression and encourage further demands.

Short-Term Causes

Hitler’s Ideology and Foreign Policy Programme:

Hitler’s goals were stated clearly in *Mein Kampf* (1925) and repeated consistently in speeches:

1. Revision of the Treaty of Versailles
2. Anschluss (union with Austria)
3. Lebensraum — eastward territorial expansion to create living space for the German people

4. Destruction of the Soviet Union and ideological war against “Judeo-Bolshevism”

The progression from the Rhineland remilitarisation (1936) to the Anschluss (March 1938) to the annexation of the Sudetenland (September 1938, Munich Agreement) to the invasion of Poland (September 1939) followed this ideological logic precisely.

The Failure of Appeasement:

The Munich Agreement (September 29, 1938) gave Hitler the Sudetenland in exchange for a promise that it was his “last territorial demand.” Neville Chamberlain returned to Britain announcing “peace for our time.” Six months later, Germany occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia (March 1939) — breaking the Munich commitment and destroying the credibility of appeasement. Only then did Britain and France issue a guarantee to Poland.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact (August 23, 1939):

Hitler secured his eastern flank by signing a non-aggression pact with Stalin. The pact’s secret protocol divided Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence. It made the invasion of Poland possible without the risk of a two-front war that had destroyed Germany in WWI. When Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, Britain and France declared war on September 3 — beginning World War II.

MEMORISE THIS

Causes of WWII — Versailles to War:

Versailles (1919) → Great Depression (1929) → Hitler in power (1933) → appeasement fails step by step (1936–1938) → Nazi-Soviet Pact (Aug 1939) → invasion of Poland (Sep 1939) → WWII begins

1.4 Causes of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)

The Spanish Civil War is an excellent supporting case study because its causes combine domestic political polarisation, economic inequality, military conspiracy, and foreign intervention into a single conflict.

Long-term causes:

- Deep structural inequalities: large landowners (latifundistas) dominated the south; the Catholic Church owned vast wealth; industrial workers in Catalonia and the Basque Country organised militantly
- A weak parliamentary republic (the Second Republic, proclaimed April 1931) struggled to govern a deeply divided society
- Regional tensions: Catalonia and the Basque Country demanded autonomy; conservative centralists opposed it

- Failed land reform: the Republic's attempts to redistribute agricultural land alienated landowners without satisfying landless labourers

Short-term causes:

- The February 1936 election produced a narrow Popular Front victory (leftist coalition of republicans, socialists, and communists). The right refused to accept the result
- Political violence escalated sharply throughout spring 1936: assassinations of left and right-wing figures, church burnings, land seizures
- Military conspirators (including General Francisco Franco) planned a coup as early as April 1936

Immediate cause:

- The military uprising of July 17–18, 1936 began in Spanish Morocco and spread to garrisons across Spain
- The coup's failure to win immediate control of Madrid and Barcelona converted a military pronunciamiento into a prolonged civil war

Foreign intervention as a decisive factor:

The civil war became an international conflict. Germany and Italy provided crucial military support to Franco (Condor Legion, Italian ground troops, arms); the USSR supplied the Republic with arms, advisers, and political influence through the Communist Party; the International Brigades brought approximately 35,000 foreign volunteers to fight for the Republic; Britain and France adopted a policy of “non-intervention” that effectively helped Franco by preventing the Republic from receiving Western arms.

IB TIP

IB Tip: The Spanish Civil War's causes can be analysed across all four IB categories simultaneously — economic (land inequality), ideological (fascism vs. communism/democracy), political (republic's instability), and territorial (regional autonomy). This makes it an ideal essay case study because you can demonstrate analytical range within a single conflict.

1.5 Causes of the Chinese Civil War (1927–1949)

The Chinese Civil War between the Nationalist Party (KMT/Guomindang, led by Chiang Kai-shek) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, led by Mao Zedong) provides the key Asian case study for Topic 11.

Long-term causes:

- The collapse of imperial China (1912) left a power vacuum exploited by regional warlords; no stable national government existed

- The “Century of Humiliation” — foreign exploitation of China through unequal treaties, the concession system, and the Twenty-One Demands (1915) — produced intense nationalism
- Deep rural poverty: approximately 4% of the population owned 50% of agricultural land; most peasants lived as tenant farmers paying ruinous rents

Short-term causes:

- The KMT-CCP United Front (1924–1927) broke down violently when Chiang Kai-shek launched the **Shanghai Massacre** (April 12, 1927), killing thousands of communist activists. This converted an uneasy political alliance into open civil war
- The Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931) and the full-scale Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) forced the two sides into a Second United Front — but their underlying competition never ceased

Why the CCP won (1945–1949):

- Mao’s strategy of building a rural peasant base (rather than relying on the urban proletariat as Soviet doctrine suggested) proved decisive in a predominantly agricultural society
- The Long March (1934–1935) — a 9,000-kilometre tactical retreat — created a legendary military leadership core and embedded the CCP’s presence in northwest China
- KMT corruption and economic mismanagement (hyperinflation reached 1,000% in 1948) destroyed its popular support
- CCP land reform policies won genuine peasant loyalty by redistributing land from landlords to poor farmers
- The People’s Liberation Army’s military campaigns from 1947 quickly overran KMT forces; Chiang fled to Taiwan in 1949

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: The Chinese Civil War must not be confused with the Sino-Japanese War. They overlapped in time (1937–1945), but they are separate conflicts. In a Topic 11 essay using China as a case study, be precise: the Civil War resumed in earnest after Japan’s surrender in August 1945 and ended with the CCP’s proclamation of the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949.

Section 2: Theme 2 — Practices of War

2.1 Types of War and Technology

The IB syllabus distinguishes between different types of war and examines how technology transformed warfare in the 20th century.

Types of war present in 20th-century conflicts:

Type	Definition	Example
Total war	Entire society and economy mobilised for the war effort; distinction between combatants and civilians eroded	WWI, WWII
Civil war	Armed conflict within a single state between rival political or social factions	Spanish Civil War, Chinese Civil War
Guerrilla war	Irregular warfare by small mobile groups against a larger conventional force	Chinese Civil War (CCP against KMT), Spanish Republican resistance
War of attrition	Strategy of wearing down the enemy through sustained casualties and resource exhaustion rather than decisive battles	WWI Western Front

World War I: The First Modern Total War

WWI introduced or massively expanded multiple technologies that transformed how wars were fought:

Technology:

Technology	Effect
Machine gun	Made massed infantry charges catastrophically costly; contributed to trench stalemate
Artillery	Accounted for approximately 58% of all WWI casualties; required industrial-scale shell production
Poison gas	Chlorine (first used at Ypres, April 1915), then phosgene and mustard gas; caused 1.2 million casualties; deeply demoralised troops
Tanks	Introduced at the Somme (September 1916); overcome trench deadlock by 1918 (Battle of Amiens, August 1918)
Aircraft	Reconnaissance, then fighter and bomber roles; strategic bombing introduced
Submarine warfare	Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare sank millions of tonnes of Allied shipping; brought the USA into the war (1917)

The Western Front and trench warfare:

The Schlieffen Plan's failure at the Marne (September 1914) produced a continuous front of trenches stretching from the English Channel to Switzerland — approximately 700 kilometres. The combination of machine guns, artillery, and barbed wire made offensive operations almost impossibly costly. The Battle of the Somme (July–November 1916): the British army suffered 57,470 casualties on the first day alone (July 1); total Allied casualties approximately 620,000; German casualties approximately 450,000; total territorial gain approximately 10 kilometres.

MEMORISE THIS

Key WWI casualty figures:

- Total military dead: approximately 10 million
- Total civilian dead (including disease and famine): approximately 7 million
- Battle of the Somme total casualties: approximately 1.1 million (both sides)
- Battle of Verdun (1916): approximately 700,000 casualties — near-equal losses for France and Germany

World War II: Mobile Warfare, Air Power, and Genocide

WWII reversed many of WWI's tactical features. The combination of tanks, aircraft, motorised infantry, and radio communication (Blitzkrieg — “lightning war”) restored mobility to warfare.

Blitzkrieg:

Germany's invasion of Poland (September 1939) and France (May 1940) demonstrated the effectiveness of combined-arms warfare: concentrated armour punched through defensive lines, bypassed strong points, and destroyed the enemy's communications and command before a coherent defence could be organised. France — considered militarily powerful — fell in six weeks (May–June 1940).

Air power:

Strategic bombing became a major instrument of war. The RAF's Bomber Command and the US Army Air Forces conducted sustained strategic bombing of German cities and industry (1942–1945). The firebombing of Dresden (February 1945) killed an estimated 22,700 people in two nights. The US atomic bombings of Hiroshima (August 6, 1945) and Nagasaki (August 9, 1945) killed an estimated 110,000–210,000 people, effectively ending the Pacific war.

The Holocaust as an extreme practice of war:

The systematic murder of approximately 6 million Jews — along with Roma, disabled people, political opponents, and Soviet prisoners of war — was carried out under the cover of war. The Nazi genocide demonstrates that the practice of 20th-century wars extended far beyond the military front to include the deliberate mass murder of civilian populations defined as enemies.

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Do not treat the Holocaust as separate from the war — the IB syllabus places it under “practices of war.” The connection between the military campaign (especially Barbarossa, the invasion of the USSR, June 1941) and the intensification of the genocide (the Wannsee Conference, January 1942) shows that war provided both the cover and the logistical infrastructure for industrial-scale murder.

2.2 The Role of Civilians

The distinction between combatant and civilian, central to international law since the 19th century, was eroded progressively across 20th-century conflicts.

Total mobilisation:

In both world wars, civilian populations were essential to the war effort. Women entered industrial employment on a massive scale (over 1 million women working in British munitions factories by 1917; US female employment in war industries doubled 1941–1944). Rationing systems, propaganda ministries, and conscription systems integrated civilian life into the war machine.

Civilian casualties:

WWI killed approximately 7 million civilians (primarily through disease, famine, and the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires). WWII killed an estimated 38–55 million civilians — more than the military dead (approximately 22 million soldiers). The deliberate targeting of civilian populations through strategic bombing, the Holocaust, and the Japanese occupation of China (including the Nanjing Massacre, 1937) made civilian death a central feature, not a byproduct, of the conflict.

The Spanish Civil War — civilian targeting:

The bombing of Guernica (April 26, 1937) by the German Condor Legion and Italian Aviazione Legionaria was the first sustained aerial bombardment of a civilian town. It killed an estimated 150–1,600 civilians (estimates vary widely) and became a symbol — immortalised in Picasso's painting — of the new willingness to use air power against non-combatants.

The Chinese Civil War — civilian suffering:

The KMT government's desperate economic measures (printing money to fund the war) produced hyperinflation that wiped out the savings of the urban middle class. CCP land reform in liberated areas, while winning peasant support, was accompanied by the violent elimination of landlords. Civilian suffering was inseparable from the conflict's political dimension.

2.3 Resistance Movements

Resistance to occupation was a significant practice of 20th-century wars, particularly in WWII.

In occupied Europe:

- French Resistance (the “Maquis”): carried out sabotage, intelligence gathering, and the concealment of Allied airmen; the Normandy invasion (June 1944) depended partly on Resistance disruption of German communications

- Polish resistance: the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) was the largest European underground army; the Warsaw Uprising (August–October 1944) saw 250,000 civilian deaths when the SS suppressed the rebellion
- Yugoslav Partisans: Tito’s communist-led Partisans tied down approximately 35 German and Italian divisions — a significant diversion of Axis resources

Resistance in China:

Both the KMT and the CCP developed extensive guerrilla resistance to Japanese occupation. Mao’s writings on guerrilla warfare theory (notably “On Guerrilla Warfare,” 1937) provided a systematic framework — gaining popular support, establishing base areas, and conducting hit-and-run operations — that influenced resistance movements globally.

IB TIP

IB Tip: Resistance movements are often underweighted in student essays on the practices of war. They demonstrate that warfare was not only a contest between organised armies but also a political and social phenomenon in which civilian actors played a decisive role. An essay on “the role of civilians in 20th-century wars” that includes resistance movements alongside industrial mobilisation will score significantly higher than one that focuses only on the home front.

Section 3: Theme 3 — Effects and Results of Wars

3.1 Framework: Categories of Effects

The IB syllabus organises the effects of wars into five categories. Examiners expect essays to address at least two or three of these to demonstrate analytical range.

Category	Key questions
Peace treaties and settlements	Did the peace create lasting stability? Were the terms just?
Political effects	How did the war change governments, borders, and political systems?
Economic effects	Who paid for the war, and how? What were the long-term economic consequences?
Social effects	How did the war change gender roles, class structures, and social norms?
Demographic effects	How many died? What were the population consequences — displacement, migration, ethnic changes?

3.2 Effects of World War I

The Peace Settlements (1919–1923)

The Paris Peace Conference produced five separate treaties:

Treaty	Defeated power	Key terms
Versailles (Jun 1919)	Germany	Lost 13% territory, 10% population, all colonies; reparations (132bn gold marks); 100,000-man army; Article 231 war guilt clause
Saint-Germain (Sep 1919)	Austria	Broke up Austria-Hungary; created Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia; Anschluss with Germany forbidden
Trianon (Jun 1920)	Hungary	Hungary lost 72% of its pre-war territory; 3.3 million ethnic Hungarians left in neighbouring states
Neuilly (Nov 1919)	Bulgaria	Lost territory to Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia
Sevres (Aug 1920) / Lausanne (1923)	Ottoman Empire	Dismembered; Turkish War of Independence reversed some terms; final settlement created modern Turkey

⚠ EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Examiners frequently ask whether the peace settlements of WWI caused WWII. The argument that Versailles “caused” WWII (the “too harsh” thesis) is compelling but one-sided. Counter-arguments: (1) Germany received harsher terms at Brest-Litovsk when it won in the East in 1918 — suggesting German grievance was selective; (2) the settlement’s failure lay partly in non-enforcement — Britain and France abandoned reparations collection, the League was weakened from birth by US absence. A strong essay acknowledges both “too harsh” and “too weakly enforced” as valid positions.

Political Effects

- **Collapse of empires:** Four empires — the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman — ceased to exist. New states emerged: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania
- **Rise of communism:** The Bolshevik Revolution (October 1917) created the world’s first communist state. The fear of communist revolution spread across Europe, contributing to the conditions that produced fascism in Italy (1922) and Germany (1933)
- **Weakening of democracy:** The League of Nations, intended to maintain peace, was fatally weakened by the US Senate’s refusal to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. The democratic governments of Weimar Germany, Liberal Italy, and the Spanish Republic all eventually collapsed under the pressures generated by WWI’s aftermath
- **Mandates system:** The British and French empires expanded through the mandate system — the former colonies of Germany and the Ottoman Empire in Africa and the Middle East were assigned as League of Nations mandates to be administered by the victors. This planted seeds of later conflicts (Palestine, Iraq, Syria)

Economic Effects

- **War debt:** Britain owed the USA \$4.7 billion; France \$3.9 billion; total Allied war debt approximately \$22 billion
- **German reparations:** The Dawes Plan (1924) and Young Plan (1929) restructured German reparations payments, creating a circular dependency: US banks lent money to Germany → Germany paid reparations to France and Britain → France and Britain repaid war debts to the USA. The Great Depression destroyed this system in 1929
- **Inflation:** Germany's hyperinflation (1923) wiped out middle-class savings, generating lasting resentment that Hitler could exploit
- **Structural damage:** France and Belgium suffered the greatest physical destruction — the Western Front had crossed some of Europe's most industrialised regions

Social Effects

- **Women's suffrage:** Women who had worked in industry and nursing during the war received the vote in Britain (1918, limited), Germany (1919), USA (1920), and elsewhere. The war accelerated — though did not cause — women's political enfranchisement
- **Changing class relations:** The shared experience of the trenches challenged deference to traditional elites; officers and men could no longer be kept in separate social worlds when sharing the same mud
- **Shell shock and trauma:** The war produced the first large-scale recognition of psychological casualties (then called "shell shock," now understood as post-traumatic stress disorder). Over 80,000 British cases were officially diagnosed; actual numbers were far higher
- **Colonial consequences:** Non-European soldiers from India, West Africa, Indochina, and the Arab world served in European armies. Their service created expectations of political reform that colonial powers would spend the next three decades resisting — contributing to independence movements

Demographic Effects

- Total military dead: approximately 10 million
- Total civilian dead: approximately 7 million
- Influenza pandemic (1918–1919): killed an estimated 50–100 million people worldwide — far more than the war itself
- Refugee populations: the collapse of empires produced large-scale population displacement, particularly among Armenian survivors of the genocide, Greeks expelled from Anatolia, and Jews fleeing pogroms in the former Russian Empire

MEMORISE THIS

Key WWI effect numbers:

- 10 million military dead
- 7 million civilian dead
- 50–100 million dead from the 1918 influenza pandemic
- 4 empires collapsed (German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Ottoman)
- New states created: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

3.3 Effects of World War II

The Peace Settlements: No Single Treaty

Unlike WWI, WWII produced no single comprehensive peace conference. The absence of a German peace treaty until the Two-Plus-Four Agreement (1990) reflected the Cold War's immediate onset. Key settlements:

Europe:

- **Potsdam Conference (July–August 1945):** Germany divided into four occupation zones (American, British, French, Soviet); German borders shifted west (Oder-Neisse line); 12–14 million ethnic Germans expelled from Eastern Europe; German military disbanded
- **No Japanese peace treaty until 1951 (San Francisco Treaty):** Japan renounced all overseas territories; US occupation oversaw democratisation and constitutional reform; Japanese rearmament was forbidden under Article 9 of the 1947 constitution
- **Creation of the United Nations (October 1945):** Replaced the failed League of Nations; the Security Council gave the five permanent members (USA, USSR, UK, France, China) veto power — a realistic recognition that collective security required great power cooperation

Political Effects

- **German division:** Germany was divided into West Germany (Federal Republic, 1949) and East Germany (German Democratic Republic, 1949) — reflecting the Cold War division of Europe along the Iron Curtain
- **Soviet expansion:** The USSR established satellite states across Eastern Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, East Germany) — creating the Eastern Bloc
- **Decolonisation:** The war fatally weakened European colonial empires. Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium had all either been defeated or severely weakened; the moral credibility of colonial rule collapsed in the aftermath of a war fought (officially) for freedom and democracy. India gained independence in 1947; the French empire began its long dissolution
- **The Cold War:** The wartime alliance between the USA and USSR collapsed almost immediately. The Truman Doctrine (1947) committed the USA to containing Soviet expansion; the Marshall Plan (1948) rebuilt Western European

economies to resist communism; the Berlin Blockade (1948–1949) and NATO (1949) formalised the division of Europe

Economic Effects

- **US economic dominance:** The USA was the only major power whose homeland was undamaged. US GDP grew during the war; by 1945 the USA produced approximately 50% of world industrial output. The Bretton Woods system (1944) established the US dollar as the world's reserve currency
- **European devastation:** Total destruction in Germany, Poland, the USSR, and much of Eastern Europe. Soviet GDP fell by 25% during the war; approximately 1,700 Soviet towns and 70,000 villages were destroyed; 25 million Soviet citizens were left homeless
- **Marshall Plan:** The US committed 13*billion* (*approximately* 140 billion in current dollars) to rebuilding Western Europe, 1948–1952. Western European economic recovery was rapid; the contrast with Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe contributed to the Cold War's ideological competition
- **Japanese economic transformation:** US-directed reconstruction of Japan created the conditions for the Japanese “economic miracle” — 10% annual GDP growth rates in the 1950s–1970s

Social Effects

- **Women's roles:** Women's wartime industrial and military roles were partially reversed after 1945 — the “baby boom” and suburban domesticity reasserted traditional gender norms in the USA and Western Europe — but the precedent of female industrial and professional capability had been established and could not be fully suppressed
- **Holocaust memory:** The Nuremberg Trials (1945–1946) established the principle of individual criminal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Genocide Convention (1948) were direct responses to the Holocaust. Holocaust memory became a central feature of 20th-century European identity
- **Veteran experience:** Returning veterans in the USA, Britain, and elsewhere expected social rewards for service. The GI Bill in the USA (1944) subsidised university education, home ownership, and business loans for veterans — accelerating middle-class expansion

Demographic Effects

- Total dead: estimated 70–85 million (the deadliest conflict in human history)
- Military dead: approximately 22 million
- Civilian dead: approximately 38–55 million (including 6 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, approximately 7 million Soviet civilians, approximately 15–20 million Chinese)

- Displaced persons: approximately 60 million Europeans displaced by the end of the war
- The Holocaust: 6 million Jews — approximately two-thirds of European Jewry — murdered; Roma, disabled people, and others also targeted
- Hiroshima and Nagasaki: approximately 110,000–210,000 dead at the time; long-term radiation casualties added tens of thousands more

MEMORISE THIS

Key WWII effect numbers:

- 70–85 million total dead (deadliest war in history)
- 6 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust
- 27 million Soviet Union dead (military and civilian)
- 60 million Europeans displaced
- Marshall Plan: *13billion* (140 billion equivalent) for Western European recovery
- Nuremberg Trials: established individual criminal responsibility for war crimes

3.4 Effects of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)

Political effects:

- Franco's victory established a right-wing authoritarian dictatorship that lasted until 1975 — making Spain the longest-surviving fascist-era regime in Europe
- The Republic's defeat discredited the Popular Front strategy of communist-socialist-liberal cooperation and contributed to the breakdown of European antifascist unity
- The International Brigades' experience radicalised a generation of leftists and writers (George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*; Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*)

International effects:

- Germany and Italy demonstrated the effectiveness of mechanised warfare and strategic bombing — lessons applied in WWII (Blitzkrieg, aerial bombardment)
- The Spanish Civil War was a “dress rehearsal” for WWII: the same ideological fault lines (fascism vs. democracy/communism), the same great powers, many of the same weapons systems
- Soviet intervention bought arms influence at the cost of alienating Western governments and giving the right-wing narrative that the Republic was a communist puppet

Demographic effects:

- Approximately 500,000 dead (military and civilian)
- Approximately 500,000 Spanish Republicans fled into exile in France after Franco's final offensive (January–March 1939)

- Tens of thousands imprisoned, executed, or subjected to forced labour under Franco's postwar repression

3.5 Effects of the Chinese Civil War (1927–1949)

Political effects:

- The People's Republic of China was proclaimed on October 1, 1949. China's political direction for the next 70+ years was set: a one-party communist state under the CCP
- The KMT established the Republic of China on Taiwan — creating the cross-strait division that remains unresolved today
- China entered the Korean War in October 1950, demonstrating that it would actively defend its borders and regional interests — transforming the Cold War in Asia

Economic and social effects:

- Land reform redistributed land from landlords to peasants across the mainland — the greatest redistribution of property in human history in terms of the number of people involved
- The CCP's campaigns against "class enemies" (landlords, capitalists, "rightists") killed an estimated 1–2 million people in the years immediately after 1949
- The consolidation of CCP power set the conditions for the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) — Mao's disastrous industrialisation campaign that caused famine deaths estimated at 15–55 million

Demographic effects:

- The civil war itself (1927–1949) killed an estimated 8 million people; the overlapping Sino-Japanese War added millions more
- Approximately 1.5 million KMT soldiers and civilians fled to Taiwan
- The CCP's victory ended centuries of landlord dominance in the Chinese countryside — transforming the social structure of the world's most populous country

Section 4: Comparative Analysis

4.1 Comparing Causes Across Wars

MEMORISE THIS

Comparative Causes Table:

Cause type	WWI	WWII	Spanish Civil War	Chinese Civil War
Economic	Arms race costs; colonial rivalry	Great Depression; Versailles reparations	Rural poverty; land inequality	Peasant poverty; warlord extortion; hyperinflation
Ideological	Nationalism, militarism, imperialism	Fascism vs. communism vs. democracy	Fascism vs. Popular Front	Communism vs. KMT nationalism
Political	Alliance system failure; July Crisis miscalculation	Appeasement; failure of collective security	Republic's instability; military conspiracy	KMT corruption; CCP peasant strategy
Territorial	Colonial expansion; Balkan nationalism	Lebensraum; revision of Versailles	Regional autonomy demands	Land distribution; border disputes

4.2 Comparing Effects Across Wars

MEMORISE THIS

Comparative Effects Table:

Effect type	WWI	WWII	Spanish Civil War	Chinese Civil War
Peace settlement	Versailles system; new states; mandates	Division of Germany; UN; Cold War begins	No treaty — Franco rules by force	PRC proclaimed; Taiwan divided
Political	Empires collapse; democracy weakened; communism emerges	Cold War; decolonisation; superpower bipolar world	Dictatorship until 1975; exile of Republic	CCP one-party state; Korean War involvement
Economic	War debt; reparations cycle; hyperinflation	Marshall Plan; US hegemony; Bretton Woods	Economic stagnation under Franco	Land reform; later Great Leap Forward disaster
Social	Women's suffrage; shell shock; class change	Holocaust memory; Nuremberg principles; GI Bill	Cultural suppression; exile community	Land redistribution; anti-landlord campaigns
Demographic	17 million dead; 4 empires; flu pandemic	70–85 million dead; Holocaust; 60 million displaced	500,000 dead; 500,000 exiles	8 million+ dead; 1.5 million to Taiwan

Section 5: Essay Skills for Topic 11

5.1 Structuring a Causes Essay

IB TIP

IB Tip: For causes essays, the examiner is testing whether you can argue about causes — not simply list them. The key analytical move is to argue which type of cause was **most important** and why. Did long-term structural factors make the war inevitable? Or did short-term decisions and miscalculations determine whether the war happened at all?

A strong thesis for a causes essay will:

1. Directly address the specific claim in the question (agree, partially agree, or disagree)
2. Identify the two or more cases you will use (from different regions if the question requires it)
3. Signal your analytical position — which type of cause you consider most significant and why

Weak thesis: “There were many causes of WWI including militarism, alliances, imperialism, and nationalism.”

Strong thesis: “While the long-term structural causes — the alliance system, arms race, and great-power imperial rivalry — created the conditions in which a general European war was possible, the specific decisions taken during the July Crisis of 1914, particularly Germany’s ‘blank cheque’ and Austria-Hungary’s deliberate use of an unacceptable ultimatum, were the decisive factors that converted a regional assassination into a world war.”

5.2 Structuring an Effects Essay

A strong effects essay will:

1. Distinguish between short-term and long-term effects (immediate aftermath vs. consequences that unfolded over decades)
2. Address multiple categories of effects (political, economic, social, demographic) rather than treating all effects as equal
3. Evaluate which effects were most significant and why — not all effects are equally important

The “unintended consequences” argument:

Many of the most significant effects of 20th-century wars were not foreseen by the parties who started them. Germany did not expect that WWI would produce the Bolshevik Revolution; Britain and France did not expect that WWII would accelerate the decolonisation of their empires; Spain’s military conspirators did not expect a

three-year civil war. Identifying unintended consequences shows examiner-level analytical sophistication.

5.3 Cross-Region Pairings

EXAM ALERT

Exam Alert: Topic 11 questions often specify “refer to examples from more than one region.” Europe counts as one region. Pairing WWI (Europe) with the Chinese Civil War (Asia) satisfies the requirement and demonstrates broader knowledge. Pairing WWI (Europe) with WWII (global, but primarily European focus) is technically acceptable but narrower in scope.

Recommended pairings:

Pairing	Regions covered	Rationale
WWI + Chinese Civil War	Europe + Asia	Contrasts total interstate war vs. civil war; different cause types dominate
WWII + Spanish Civil War	Global + Europe	Both involve ideological war (fascism vs. democracy/communism); different scales
WWII + Chinese Civil War	Global + Asia	Causes overlap (Japanese aggression); effects contrast (Marshall Plan vs. PRC)
WWI + Spanish Civil War	Europe + Europe	Acceptable but geographically narrow; use only if essay focuses on cause-type analysis

Section 6: Practice Questions

6.1 Paper 2 Style Questions — Full List

The following questions are modelled directly on past and specimen IB History Paper 2 questions for Topic 11. Practise these under timed conditions (40 minutes each).

Causes questions:

1. “Long-term causes were more important than short-term causes in bringing about 20th-century wars.” Discuss with reference to two wars.
2. To what extent were economic factors responsible for the outbreak of one 20th-century war?
3. Compare and contrast the causes of two 20th-century wars from different regions.
4. “The failures of diplomacy were the main cause of 20th-century wars.” To what extent do you agree? Refer to two wars in your answer.
5. Evaluate the role of ideology in causing two 20th-century wars.

Practices questions:

6. Examine the role of technology in changing the nature of warfare in one 20th-century war.
7. "Civilians suffered more than soldiers in 20th-century wars." To what extent do you agree? Refer to two wars.
8. Compare and contrast the role of civilians in two 20th-century wars.
9. To what extent was the use of air power decisive in one 20th-century war?
10. Evaluate the significance of resistance movements in two 20th-century wars.

Effects questions:

11. "Peace settlements after 20th-century wars created more problems than they solved." Discuss with reference to two peace settlements.
12. Compare and contrast the political effects of two 20th-century wars.
13. To what extent did 20th-century wars lead to significant social change? Refer to two wars.
14. Examine the demographic consequences of one 20th-century war.
15. "The economic effects of 20th-century wars were felt most severely by the defeated powers." To what extent do you agree? Refer to two wars.

6.2 Model Answer Outlines

WORKED EXAMPLE

Question 1: “Long-term causes were more important than short-term causes in bringing about 20th-century wars.” Discuss with reference to two wars.

Command term: Discuss — argue multiple perspectives; reach a conclusion

Thesis (intro): Long-term causes created the structural conditions in which 20th-century wars were possible — without the arms race, alliance systems, and imperial rivalry, the assassination at Sarajevo could not have triggered a world war. However, the conversion of structural tension into actual conflict depended critically on specific short-term decisions made by political and military leaders who chose escalation over de-escalation. In both WWI and WWII, long-term causes were necessary but not sufficient; short-term failures of diplomacy and deliberate strategic choices were the immediate determinants of war.

Case studies: World War I (Europe) and the Chinese Civil War (Asia)

Paragraph 1 — Long-term causes as structural preconditions (WWI):

- The alliance system meant that a local conflict could automatically expand: the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia activated the Franco-Russian alliance, which activated Germany’s war plan against France, which activated the Belgian neutrality guarantee and Britain’s declaration of war
- The arms race (especially the Anglo-German naval rivalry) had generated mutual hostility and suspicion over decades — the military establishments of all powers had contingency plans that assumed war was likely
- Nationalist pressures in Germany and Austria-Hungary made diplomatic compromise politically costly: any leader who backed down risked being seen as weak before a nationalist public
- Point: the structural environment made war more likely and made diplomatic resolution harder — but it did not make war inevitable

Paragraph 2 — Long-term causes as structural preconditions (Chinese Civil War):

- Rural poverty (4% owning 50% of land) had produced deep class antagonism that made the CCP’s land reform message politically powerful decades before the final phase of the civil war
- The “Century of Humiliation” and the collapse of imperial government left a power vacuum and nationalist resentment that both KMT and CCP sought to exploit
- The warlord era (1916–1928) normalised armed competition for state power and demonstrated that political disputes would be settled militarily
- Point: the long-term social and political conditions made violent conflict for state control almost structurally inevitable once a major challenge to KMT

authority emerged

Paragraph 3 — Limits of long-term explanation (WWI):

- The same long-term conditions had existed throughout the decade before 1914 without producing world war — the Moroccan Crises (1905, 1911) and the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) were all resolved diplomatically
- The specific decisions of the July Crisis — Germany’s blank cheque to Austria-Hungary, Austria-Hungary’s deliberate use of an unacceptable ultimatum, Russia’s decision to begin general mobilisation — were not determined by the long-term structural environment; they reflected political choices made by specific individuals under specific pressures
- Fischer’s thesis that Germany deliberately provoked war in 1914 suggests that short-term political calculations (the desire to break the encirclement of the alliance system while Germany was still militarily superior) drove the July escalation
- Point: the fact that the same long-term conditions had not produced war earlier suggests that short-term decisions were the immediate cause

Paragraph 4 — Limits of long-term explanation (Chinese Civil War):

- The KMT-CCP split was not structurally predetermined: the First United Front (1924–1927) represented a genuine, if uneasy, collaboration
- Chiang Kai-shek’s decision to launch the Shanghai Massacre (April 12, 1927) — a specific tactical choice to eliminate the CCP before it could challenge KMT authority — was the short-term trigger that converted political competition into civil war
- The CCP’s survival (notably through the Long March, 1934–1935) and eventual victory depended on short-term military decisions and political strategies, not structural forces alone

Conclusion:

Long-term causes were indispensable in both cases: without structural tensions, the short-term triggers would have had no tinder to ignite. However, the argument that long-term causes were “more important” overlooks the fact that long-term structural conditions had existed for years without producing war — in both WWI and the Chinese Civil War, it required specific short-term decisions (the blank cheque; the Shanghai Massacre) to convert structural tension into actual conflict. The most accurate assessment is that long-term causes determined the environment in which war was possible, while short-term causes determined when and whether it actually occurred. Neither category alone is sufficient for a complete causal explanation.

Examiner’s note: This answer would score in Band 4–5. It uses two case studies from different regions (Europe and Asia), addresses the command term directly (multiple perspectives, clear conclusion), employs specific evidence (blank cheque, Shanghai

Massacre, percentages of land ownership), and maintains analytical focus on the causal hierarchy throughout.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Question 11: “Peace settlements after 20th-century wars created more problems than they solved.” Discuss with reference to two peace settlements.

Command term: Discuss — argue multiple perspectives; reach a conclusion

Thesis (intro): The peace settlements following WWI — particularly the Treaty of Versailles — created significant new problems: German resentment, unsustainable reparations, and an unstable new state system that contributed directly to the conditions for WWII. The post-WWII settlement, by contrast, was more pragmatic and in the Western sphere produced a stable foundation for decades of prosperity, though it simultaneously created the division of Germany and Europe that defined the Cold War. Peace settlements therefore did not uniformly create more problems than they solved — the outcome depended on the coherence of the settlement, the willingness of great powers to enforce it, and whether it addressed or merely papered over underlying conflicts.

Case studies: Treaty of Versailles (1919) and the post-WWII settlement (Potsdam, 1945, and the broader Cold War order)

Paragraph 1 — Versailles: problems created:

- The “war guilt” clause (Article 231) was experienced by Germans across the political spectrum as a humiliation; it provided Hitler with a permanent propaganda weapon
- The reparations figure (132 billion gold marks) was economically unsustainable — the Dawes Plan (1924) and Young Plan (1929) required continuous American lending to maintain the system, which collapsed with the Depression in 1929
- New states created under the principle of self-determination were ethnically mixed and economically unviable: Czechoslovakia contained 3.5 million ethnic Germans (Sudeten Germans); the Polish Corridor separated East Prussia from Germany; the Danzig question was left unresolved
- The USA’s withdrawal from Versailles (Senate rejection, November 1919) left the League without its most powerful potential enforcer from birth

Paragraph 2 — Versailles: problems solved:

- The settlement did end the war and prevent immediate renewed conflict
- New states (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia) satisfied the legitimate national aspirations of millions of people who had lived under imperial rule
- Germany was not destroyed — it retained its territory, population, and industrial base; by 1929 it was the world’s second-largest industrial economy
- The League of Nations, despite its weaknesses, mediated several territorial disputes successfully in the 1920s (the Åland Islands, Upper Silesia)

Paragraph 3 — Post-WWII settlement: problems solved:

- The Nuremberg Principles established individual criminal accountability for war crimes — a new legal framework that has shaped international law ever since
- The Marshall Plan (\$13 billion) and US occupation policies successfully rebuilt West Germany and Western Europe; by 1955 West German GDP had recovered to pre-war levels
- The United Nations, with its Security Council veto system, created a more realistic framework for great-power cooperation than the League's unanimity requirement
- The settlement's division of Germany, though deeply unsatisfactory, provided a stable framework within which Europe remained at peace for the entire Cold War period

Paragraph 4 — Post-WWII settlement: problems created:

- The division of Germany and Europe created the Cold War confrontation — a new form of global conflict that lasted 45 years and produced proxy wars in Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere
- The absence of a formal peace treaty with the USSR left the European settlement legally ambiguous until 1990
- The decolonisation process, accelerated but not managed by the post-WWII settlement, produced decades of conflicts in Asia (India-Pakistan, Indochina, Indonesia) and Africa
- The atomic bombing of Japan and the onset of nuclear competition between the USA and USSR created the permanent risk of existential war

Conclusion:

The Treaty of Versailles largely supports the claim: it created new problems (German resentment, unstable new states, unsustainable reparations) that outweighed the order it imposed, particularly because the enforcement mechanisms were too weak to maintain even its reasonable provisions. The post-WWII settlement is more ambiguous: in the Western sphere it created a durable and relatively prosperous order that would have been difficult to predict in 1945; the problems it created (Cold War, nuclear confrontation) were of a different character — the price of great-power competition rather than failures of the settlement itself. The generalisation that peace settlements create more problems than they solve is therefore partially valid for the specific case of Versailles but does not apply uniformly across all 20th-century peace settlements.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Question 7: “Civilians suffered more than soldiers in 20th-century wars.” To what extent do you agree? Refer to two wars.

Command term: To what extent — partially agree; weigh evidence; qualified conclusion

Thesis (intro): In WWI, soldiers unambiguously suffered more than civilians in quantitative terms: military deaths (10 million) dwarfed direct civilian casualties, and the trauma of trench warfare was concentrated in the military. By WWII, however, the thesis becomes strongly supported: approximately 38–55 million civilians were killed, outnumbering military dead (approximately 22 million) by a significant margin, and the Holocaust, strategic bombing, and Japanese occupation policies deliberately targeted civilian populations. The relationship between civilian and military suffering shifted dramatically between these two conflicts, reflecting the evolution of total war.

Case studies: World War I (Europe) and World War II (global)

WWI — evidence against the claim (soldiers suffered more):

- 10 million military dead vs. approximately 7 million civilian dead (direct causes)
- Battle of the Somme: 57,470 British casualties on July 1, 1916 alone — no comparable single-day civilian event
- Shell shock/PTSD: over 80,000 officially diagnosed British cases; the psychological burden of industrialised killing fell almost entirely on combatants
- Conditions in the trenches — constant artillery bombardment, gas attacks, vermin, trench foot, the psychological strain of anticipating “going over the top” — represented a form of suffering without civilian parallel

WWI — evidence for the claim (civilians also suffered severely):

- The 1918 influenza pandemic killed 50–100 million people worldwide — dwarfing all military casualties combined — and was partly spread by troop movements
- The Allied naval blockade of Germany (1914–1919) contributed to approximately 750,000 German civilian deaths from malnutrition
- Armenian Genocide (1915–1916): approximately 600,000–1.5 million Armenians killed by Ottoman authorities
- Populations of occupied Belgium and northern France lived under harsh German military administration

WWII — evidence strongly supporting the claim:

- Civilian dead (38–55 million) significantly exceeded military dead (approximately 22 million)

- The Holocaust: 6 million Jews murdered — entirely civilian victims; the genocide was deliberately conducted as a war aim
- Strategic bombing killed hundreds of thousands of civilians: approximately 300,000–600,000 German civilians; approximately 330,000 Japanese civilians (including Hiroshima and Nagasaki)
- The Soviet civilian experience: 25 million homeless; 1,700 towns destroyed; approximately 13–14 million Soviet civilian dead from Nazi occupation policies
- The Nanjing Massacre (1937): 100,000–300,000 Chinese civilians killed by Japanese forces in six weeks

Conclusion:

The claim accurately describes WWII but significantly overstates the case for WWI. In WWI, soldiers constituted the primary category of victims in quantitative terms; civilian suffering, though real and severe, was generally secondary to combatant casualties. In WWII, the deliberate targeting of civilian populations through the Holocaust, strategic bombing, and Japanese and German occupation policies produced civilian death tolls that dramatically exceeded military casualties. The shift from WWI to WWII therefore represents a fundamental change in the nature of 20th-century warfare — from a war that prioritised destroying enemy armies to a war in which entire civilian populations were defined as targets. The claim is therefore a valid generalisation for WWII specifically, but should not be applied uncritically to all 20th-century wars.

Section 7: Key Timelines

World War I — Master Chronology

MEMORISE THIS

Date	Event
Jun 28, 1914	Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated in Sarajevo
Jul 5–6, 1914	Germany issues blank cheque to Austria-Hungary
Jul 23, 1914	Austria-Hungary delivers ultimatum to Serbia
Jul 28, 1914	Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia
Aug 4, 1914	Germany invades Belgium; Britain declares war on Germany
Sep 1914	Battle of the Marne — Schlieffen Plan fails; trench warfare begins
Apr 1915	First use of poison gas (chlorine) by Germany at Ypres
Feb–Dec 1916	Battle of Verdun — approximately 700,000 casualties
Jul–Nov 1916	Battle of the Somme — approximately 1.1 million casualties
Feb 1917	Germany resumes unrestricted submarine warfare
Apr 1917	USA enters WWI
Oct–Nov 1917	Bolshevik Revolution in Russia
Mar 1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk — Russia exits WWI
Aug 1918	Hundred Days Offensive — Allied breakthrough
Nov 11, 1918	Armistice — WWI ends
Jun 28, 1919	Treaty of Versailles signed

World War II — Master Chronology

MEMORISE THIS

Date	Event
Sep 1, 1939	Germany invades Poland; WWII begins
Sep 3, 1939	Britain and France declare war on Germany
May–Jun 1940	Fall of France (Blitzkrieg); Dunkirk evacuation
Jul–Sep 1940	Battle of Britain — RAF defeats Luftwaffe
Jun 22, 1941	Operation Barbarossa — Germany invades USSR
Dec 7, 1941	Attack on Pearl Harbor; USA enters WWII
Jan 1942	Wannsee Conference — Holocaust industrialised
Nov 1942–Feb 1943	Battle of Stalingrad — turning point on Eastern Front
Jun 6, 1944	D-Day — Allied landings in Normandy
Feb 1945	Yalta Conference — post-war order agreed
May 8, 1945	VE Day — Germany surrenders
Aug 6, 1945	Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima
Aug 9, 1945	Atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki
Sep 2, 1945	VJ Day — Japan surrenders; WWII ends
Oct 24, 1945	United Nations formally established
Nov 1945–Oct 1946	Nuremberg Trials

Spanish Civil War — Master Chronology

MEMORISE THIS

Date	Event
Feb 1936	Popular Front wins Spanish elections
Jul 17–18, 1936	Military uprising in Spanish Morocco and mainland Spain
Aug 1936	Germany and Italy begin military aid to Franco; Non-Intervention Committee formed
Sep 1936	First Soviet arms arrive in Spain; International Brigades begin to form
Nov 1936	Nationalist forces reach Madrid; siege of Madrid begins
Apr 26, 1937	Bombing of Guernica by Condor Legion
Apr 1937	Picasso begins Guernica painting
Jan–Mar 1939	Nationalist final offensive; fall of Catalonia; Republican collapse
Apr 1, 1939	Franco declares end of civil war
May 1975	Franco dies; Spain transitions to democracy

Chinese Civil War — Master Chronology

MEMORISE THIS	
Date	Event
1924	First KMT-CCP United Front formed
Apr 12, 1927	Shanghai Massacre — Chiang Kai-shek suppresses CCP; civil war begins
1934–1935	The Long March — CCP retreats 9,000 km to northwest China
1937	Second KMT-CCP United Front formed against Japan
Aug 1945	Japan surrenders; civil war resumes in earnest
1947	CCP launches major military offensives; PLA defeats KMT in series of campaigns
Jan 1949	Beijing falls to PLA
Oct 1, 1949	People's Republic of China proclaimed; Mao Zedong becomes leader
Dec 1949	Chiang Kai-shek and KMT government retreat to Taiwan

►Watch: World War I — Causes and Outbreak

VIDEO

►Watch: World War II — Causes and Road to War

VIDEO

►Watch: Practices of War — Technology and Civilians

VIDEO

►Watch: Effects and Results — Peace Settlements and the Post-War World

VIDEO

Section 8: Key Historians and Historiography

MEMORISE THIS

Historians to know for Topic 11:

Historian	Subject	Key argument
Fritz Fischer	WWI causes	Germany deliberately planned and provoked WWI as part of a bid for European hegemony
A.J.P. Taylor	WWI and WWII causes	Shared responsibility for WWI; Hitler was an opportunist, not a long-term planner
Christopher Clark	WWI causes	All powers were “sleepwalkers” — the war was blundered into through mutual misperception
John Keegan	WWI practices	Military culture and industrialised killing transformed warfare; the war was an unprecedented catastrophe with no commensurate gain
Ian Kershaw	WWII causes	Hitler had ideological goals (Mein Kampf was a genuine programme) but was also an opportunist who exploited circumstances
Antony Beevor	WWII practices	Detailed military-social history; emphasises the brutal reality of combat and the targeting of civilians
Sheila Fitzpatrick	Soviet/Russian history	Soviet citizens developed strategies of accommodation alongside genuine engagement with Soviet projects
Hugh Thomas	Spanish Civil War	Classic narrative history; emphasises the international dimensions and foreign intervention as decisive
Frank Dikotter	Chinese Civil War	Mao’s victory was achieved through brutal campaigns; the CCP’s land reform involved mass violence

IB TIP

IB Tip: You do not need to memorise all these historians for the exam. For Paper 2, being able to name one or two historians and accurately summarise their argument in one sentence will demonstrate the historiographical awareness that separates Band 4 from Band 3 answers. The most useful pairs for Topic 11 are: Fischer vs. Clark (on WWI causes) and intentionalist vs. structuralist (on WWII causes and Hitler’s intentions).