# World War II

### Foreign Policy Before The War

Before World War II, U.S. policy wasn't exactly "isolationism." It was rather "play-nice-and-make-friends-but-focus-mainly-on-oneself-ism." It did this by making various agreements to prevent war and arms-building and by keeping tariffs high to protect the economy.

At the **Washington Conference**in 1922, America joined other world powers to set limits on arms stockpiling. Obviously, as seen with the war two decades later…this didn't work so well. Neither did the **Kellogg-Briand Pact**signed in 1928, which said that war shouldn't be foreign policy. Again, we can applaud the nice feeling that inspired that—but, since it had no "teeth" (no enforcement mechanisms) it diddly-squat.

The U.S. also announced its **Good Neighbor Policy**with Latin America in 1934. It apologized for being such an interventionist pig in the decades before, and said it wouldn't do it again. But, of course, it did—the U.S. continued to support pro-American (and often corrupt) Latin American leaders, bullied them on economic policy, and kept its military bases there.

Meanwhile, back in Europe, things were going from bad to worse. Then from worse to dismal, and from dismal to apocalyptic. You won't need to know the details for the exam (because the exam only cares about Europe when American boots arrive on it), but here's some background. Dictators like **Benito Mussolini**and **Adolf Hitler**rapidly rose to power on **fascist**agendas, advocating racism, sexism, eugenics, and territorial expansion.

The dictators quickly began building their militaries and, in the case of Hitler, invading nearby countries like Czechoslovakia. The rest of Europe spent a lot of time saying "oh please don't do that" (a policy they called**"appeasement,**" so desperate were they to avoid another war), until Hitler invaded Poland. Then, Britain and France declared war.

Spoiler alert: it didn't go so well for them. Which is kind of an understatement. Hitler rapidly invaded and sacked France, leaving Britain all alone in the fight. Here's where America comes in. For decades, America and Britain had had friendly relations. Roosevelt , wanted to help them out—especially because he also , detested Hitler. However, the American public wasn't going for it. They wanted to take care of their own problems, and leave Europe to theirs.

Roosevelt found creative ways to edge America slowly towards involvement, and help out Britain, too. Congress had passed some strict **neutrality acts**in the mid-1930s, but Roosevelt managed to squeeze a new one through—the **Neutrality Act of 1939—**that was a little more to his liking. Also called **cash and carry,**the Neutrality Act declared that America had changed its mind about not selling arms to anyone.Now, the act announced,the U.S. would sell arms to the Allies if they could pay in "cash" and then "carry" the stuff away in their own ships. That way the U.S. would receive money to help its depression, and Germany couldn't capture one of their ships and say "HEY.Where you going' with all these guns?"

Then Germany went and bombed the heck out of Britain in the **Battle of Britain.**The whole country had "black-outs" every night so as not to attract German bombers with lights, and people hid in the London "tube" (the subway). Roosevelt was so worried (and **Prime Minister Churchill**was so insistent with his demands of "HELP, please, good American chaps.") that he addressed Congress in 1940. He managed to push through the **Lend-Lease Act**which allowed Britain to borrow American arms, ships, and other war materials. That's right—no more cash necessary: the situation was too desperate.

Plus, he arranged a secret meeting with Churchill called the **Atlantic Conference.**They discussed war aims and postwar goals, and decided that an Allied victory would bring the independence of all existing colonies andworldwide free trade. This proves that FDR was completely committed to entering the war. The American people only needed a little something to spark that fire and make them ready, too.

That came in the shape of several Japanese planes, zooming over the U.S. fleet stationed in **Pearl Harbor,**Hawaii. In 1941, they bombed the entire fleet, killing 2,400 sailors and wounding some 1,200 more. Americans all of the country screamed out their rage, and FDR immediately asked Congress to declare war on Japan. Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S.

### The Two-Front War

The Americans arrived on two fronts: the Pacific and the European. In the Pacific, U.S. battleships and submarines attacked the Japanese fleet, finally winning a decisive victory at the **Battle of Midway.**

Over in Europe, American soldiers collected en masse in Britain until their numbers swelled the cities and the floodgates were ready to burst open. On **D-Day**in 1944, a multi-national force invaded Normandy. They poured out of ships (many of them so sea-sick from the voyage that they were covered in vomit) and parachuted out of planes.

American forces liberated Belgium and France, pushing the Germans back in the **Battle of the Bulge,**and then finally invaded Germany. There they found the **concentration camps,**which they hadn't even known existed. The unspeakably appalling horrors they found there finally convinced the last, remaining sticks-in-the-mud who wondered what America was fighting for. Suddenly, this seemed to everyone like a real battle between the forces of good and evil.

With Americans and Russians wandering around the streets of Berlin (the Americans had come from the west and the Russians from the east, meeting for a nice handshake in Berlin), Hitler gave up. He committed suicide, and **V-E Day**was declared in 1945. Crowds poured into major cities, singing, dancing, hugging, and kissing. Fireworks were set off, confetti flung in the air, and even, in some places, table-clothed tables located in main squares where people had big, celebratory feasts.

However, the war wasn't over for the U.S. They were still at war with Japan—and it looked like that wouldn't end anytime soon. Americans began to think Japanese culturesimply wouldn't let them surrender—ever. They seemed to prove this with their **kamikaze pilots**—soldiers who committed suicide to ensure their bombs reached their destination. This seemed totally crazy to Americans, and they wondered whether they would need to empty the whole country of every single man before Japan was defeated.

**President Truman**(FDR had died a few months before) decided to drop the atomic bomb in **Hiroshima**and**Nagasaki,**hoping to end the war before millions more Japanese and American soldiers had to die. The bomb was like nothing anyone had ever seen before: it literally incinerated people and buildings into thin air. [This shadow](http://www.southbayriders.com/forums/attachment.php?attachmentid=311844&d=1273103706)was all that was left of a man standing by a ladder. It worked—Japan surrendered, and the war was over on September 2, 1945.