

International Studies in Peace and Conflict

Conflict in Europe 1935-45

HSC Study Day 2016

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Option B: Conflict in Europe 1935–1945

Principal focus: Students investigate **key features and issues** in the history of the conflict in Europe 1935–1945.

Key features and issues:

- **causes** of the conflict
- **aims and strategies** of the Allied and Axis powers
- **turning points** of the war
- impact of war on **civilians**
- origins, nature and impact of **the Holocaust**
- **reasons for** the Allied victory

Students learn about:

1 Growth of European tensions

- dictatorships in Germany and Italy
- the League of Nations and collapse of collective security: Abyssinia, the Spanish Civil War
- Britain, France and the policy of appeasement: an assessment
- significance of the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact

2 Course of the European war

- German advances: the fall of Poland, the Low Countries and France
- the air war and its effects: The Battle of Britain and the Blitz, the bombing of Germany
- Operation Barbarossa, the Battle of Stalingrad and the significance of the Russian campaign*
- Battle of El Alamein and the significance of the conflict in North Africa to the European War

3 Civilians at war

- social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Britain and EITHER Germany OR the Soviet Union
- Nazi racial policies: the Holocaust and the persecution of minorities

4 End of the conflict

- ‘D’ Day and the liberation of France
- Russian counter offensives 1944
- final defeat 1944–1945
- Nuremburg War Crimes trials

To what extent was the Russian campaign a turning point in the European War?

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turning points are campaigns or battles deemed to be significant because of a discernable strategic impact. They are relatively rare occurrences in total wars due to the size and complexity of the forces (military, economic and political) belligerents commit to them. Decisiveness is also rare in modern war due to limited means by which states can use force to have a directly strategic impact on an opponent. • The Russian Campaign was clearly important because <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It ended an almost uninterrupted set of German victories ○ Drew Germany into a war it wasn't economically or militarily prepared for ○ Inflicted severe losses on the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe that couldn't be replaced ○ Denied Hitler key strategic goals such as lebensraum and autarky • Yet other campaigns, such as strategic bombing and North Africa were also important because <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They restrained Germany's war economy ○ Put Germany in a poor strategic position
USSR- Barbarossa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barbarossa was Germany's most important campaign of the war up to June 1941 because it was (a) the first directly intended to achieve a major strategic objective of the Nazi regime; (b) because its outcome would determine if the USSR would survive to fight in a combined effort against Germany and (c) because it involved the largest concentration of German forces yet committed to battle. • Background- Hitler's strategic goals- <i>Lebensraum</i>, racial policies and autarky through the seizure of Soviet resources (oil and grain) • Course of campaign (brief!)- Weaknesses in planning, tactical success of the Panzer units undermined by the army's operational capability to maintain tempo • Consequences- Soviet counter attack- strengths of Zhukov's leadership- German losses • Historiography- Christian suggests the failure of Barbarossa gave the USSR the opportunity to mobilise its vast resources against Germany. Stahel argues that Barbarossa needed to bring the war to a decisive close in the East within about 12 weeks- otherwise Germany could not support a long term war in the East. Despite its tactical-level success it failed to achieve its operational (campaign) level objectives hence putting Germany in a terminal strategic position of (a) a two front war and (b) a prolonged struggle against a much more economically and militarily powerful state.
USSR- Stalingrad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stalingrad was a turning point because it saw the defeat of Hitler's only remaining option in Russia and saved Soviet industry and raw resources • Background- Hitler's only option left in the East • Reasons for the outcome of the campaign- Red Army's logistical advantages vs German weaknesses (Luftwaffe failure) • Consequences- Major blow to German operational capability in the surrender of Sixth Army; broad theatre-level success for the USSR cements its supply lines north and secures major propaganda victory • Historiography- McCauley argues that Stalingrad ensured a German victory was no longer possible.
USSR- Kursk (Operation Citadel and Soviet counter-offensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kursk a turning point because it was the final German offensive in the east- its loss would put Germany on the defensive for the rest of the war – a 'Last gamble' while Wehrmacht prepared for a defensive war • Outcome of campaign – ostensibly the Wehrmacht won a tactical victory in that it inflicted vastly greater losses on the Red Army than it sustained. It failed to achieve the planned breakthrough, however, and the losses inflicted had no strategic impact on the USSR as it had the economic capacity and population to sustain these losses. • Consequences- German losses degraded fighting power of the Wehrmacht- Citadel's defeat resulted in a Soviet counter attack that indicated strategic initiative passing to Red Army • Historiography- Overy states Kursk "tore the heart out of" the Wehrmacht and rendered it ineffective for future offensives on the Eastern Front.
Strategic bombing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the Red Army was destroying Germany's military capabilities, the British and Americans made a significant contribution by targeting Germany's economy and drawing reserves away from the battlefield. • Bombing was the only way Western Allies could attack prior to D Day. It was also strategically important for the alliance as it went some way to assuaging Stalin's demands that his Western Allies confront Germany directly in 1942-43.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course of campaign- brief overview of escalation of bombing raids and development of approaches such as precision and area bombing • Results- impact on Germany. • Historiography- Some have denied the usefulness of strategic bombing. Although Buckley recognizes it couldn't win the war alone, it did put the brakes on Germany's economic growth (1942-44) and destroyed the Luftwaffe, forcing it to fight in a defensive role. It also diverted resources to home defence, hence assisting the land war in the East.
North Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although not in Europe, the campaigns in North Africa (1940-43) severely weakened Germany's strategic position and allowed the Allies to open up a southern front • Background- Hitler not particularly interested in North Africa- need to shore up Italians • Strategically important to Britain (Suez and Oil and a 'southern front') • Outcome of the campaign – battle won through British superiority at the tactical level (quantity and quality of tanks, troops, artillery) and operationally: the use of air and sea power to interdict German supply lines and ULTRA to infiltrate German signals. • Results- Secured British strategic interests and degraded Germany's strategic position: it allowed an invasion of Italy in 1943- creating a three front war. It also denied Hitler the Middle East's oil stocks and forced the Germans to divert forces to secure southern France. • Historiography: Thompson sees North Africa important for what it later allowed the Allies to do, that is, invade Italy and the Balkans and pressure Germany from the south too.
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allied victory in the Second World War was a coalition effort. Germany was defeated by the Soviets and the Western Allies cooperating to destroy its economic and military resources over a period of five years. Hence there was no single turning point, as such. • Soviet victories in the east prolonged the war to their advantage. While Germany's reserves dwindled, the Soviets mobilised their immense population. Also, the Eastern Front campaign proved the most damaging to Germany's military forces. • Western allied victories in the bomber offensive and North Africa built upon the successes the Red Army had in 1941 and 1942 to ensure Germany was in a strategically impossible position by the end of 1943.

The Air War and its Effects: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945

'Strategic Bombing'

- Until D-Day in 1944 the only way the Western Allies could harm Germany
- This was called 'strategic bombing' - its goal was to damage Germany's economy and industry and make it difficult for it to wage war
- Bomber squadrons flew raids on Germany from bases in Britain (Britain became a giant airport for the bomber offensive)
- There were generally two approaches taken
 - **The RAF** mainly bombed by night. Bomber Command's chief, Arthur 'Bomber' Harris advocated **area bombing**. This meant his bombers targeted cities with firebombs to intentionally destroy homes and kill German civilians
 - **The USAAF (United States Army Air Force)** came to England after USA declared war in late 1941. It mainly bombed by day and pursued a policy of **precision bombing**, targeting specific industrial and military targets (factories, oil refineries railway centers etc.)

Key Aspects: (get details from the text, or online)

- Ineffectiveness of RAF's raids in 1940-41
- Arthur 'Bomber' Harris takes command of Bomber Command
- Technological improvements- Lancaster bomber, navigational and bombing aids (OBOE), 'window'
- American involvement - US 8th Air Force from 1942 on
- Casablanca directive and Operation Point Blank 1943
- Long range fighter escorts
- Destruction of the Luftwaffe in 1944-45

German Air Defences

- Luftwaffe interception squadrons (day and night)
- Radar
- Anti- Aircraft batteries (flak)

Case Study 1: Battle of the Ruhr March-June 1943

- Objective: to disrupt German steel production in the Ruhr factories.
- New technologies and tactics employed by RAF and USAAF: pathfinders, OBOE, bomber streams of up to 800 aircraft.
- Luftwaffe diverted major air defences: 1/3 of all German AA guns there by mid-year.
- German steel production fell by 200,000 tons. Despite doubling resources it only increased by 20 per cent in 1943.
- RAF loss rate 4.7% in 43 raids.

Case Study 2: The Bombing of Dresden February 1945

- Four raids: 722 RAF and 527 USAAF bombers, 784 US fighters. 3,900 tons of bombs.
- 6.5km square destroyed – 25,000 Germans killed.
- Dresden basically undefended as Flak guns and fighters diverted to fight Red Army. Six British bombers lost- three by FF. One US aircraft lost.
- Critics: Dresden was a site of cultural significance only; intended to show USSR western air strength.
- Apologists: Dresden housed 50,000 workers employed in 110 factories. It was the largest unbombed area in Germany.

The Cost

RAF Bomber Command

- 55,573 killed out of a total of 125,000 aircrew (a 44.4% death rate)
- PLUS 18 000 wounded and/or taken prisoner

460 Squadron (Australian)

- Suffered 1018 combat deaths from a normal strength of 200 airmen

The Results

- 61 German cities bombed
- 3.5 million homes destroyed
- 300 000 German civilians killed
- 800 000 injured

- German industrial production *grew* between 1942 and 1944- despite Allied bombing

Did strategic bombing contribute to the German defeat?

John Buckley, of the University of Wolverhampton put the following arguments forward in his 1998 book, *Air Power in the Age of Total War*.

Buckley acknowledges that critics of the bombing campaign usually point to two pieces of evidence to deny its effectiveness:

- a) German civilian morale remained high right to the end of the war and they continued to support the Nazi war effort and
- b) German industrial production *grew* between 1942 and 1944- some historians even argue that bombing helped increase German production by making civilians 'pull together' in defiance

Buckley however argues the bomber offensive did indeed damage Germany's war effort. He claims,

- a) German industrial output can be accounted for because
 - i. Albert Speer, Germany's minister for armaments, brilliantly reorganised the German economy for maximum efficiency in 1942
 - ii. The German war economy had a lot of "slack" in it prior to this- therefore it had great potential to grow
- b) Bombing acted as a 'brake' on these German production increases, ie- the German munitions industry would have grown even more without the bombing. He notes, for example that
 - i. Tank and aircraft production in 1944 was a third lower than what the Germans planned- evidence that bombing presented them with big problems
- c) Bombing *did* affect German morale significantly. Buckley cites a few figures
 - i. 1/3 of German civilians had no protection from air raids- six million of them left cities for protection
 - ii. In 1944 work absenteeism rates were 25 per cent
 - iii. Post war surveys had 91 per cent of German civilians claim bombing was the greatest hardship and "key factor in the collapse of their morale"

Buckley also suggests that the bombing offensive had other effects on the German war effort.

- a) The bomber offensive forced the German military to divert masses of men and resources *away* from the battlefield to defend the home front.
By 1944
 - i. 33 per cent of all artillery production and 20 per cent of ammunition production went to anti aircraft defences
 - ii. Two million Germans were employed in aerial defence (airmen, flak gunners, radar operators, air raid wardens etc.)

- b) The bomber offensive destroyed the Luftwaffe by
 - i. Seriously disrupting aircraft and fuel production. The production of aviation fuel fell from 180,000 tons to 20,000 tons between March and November 1944.
 - ii. By drawing the German pilots up into battles they were consistently outnumbered in. After long range American fighter escorts began in late 1943 the Luftwaffe began suffering critical losses. When the Allied landed in Normandy (D-Day) in 1944, they had complete air superiority- the Luftwaffe couldn't do anything about it.

In conclusion, Buckley states

“The debate as to what the offensive actually achieved will go on, but the weight of modern research and opinion appears to back the view that considerable damage was done to the German war economy, hindering output in a variety of ways and contributing to the Allied victory. However, it is also the case the hope that air power alone would bring about the defeat of Germany was unattainable. Air power worked only when integrated into an overall strategy for the prosecution of the war.”

(Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War*, p. 166)

Richard Overy in *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945* (2013) approaches the question of strategic bombing's effectiveness differently.

Overy evaluates strategic bombing against the three objectives it had.

1. *Destruction of an enemy state's economy*

Overy identifies three strategic bombing campaigns in which this was the principle goal: German bombing of Britain in 1940-41 (the Blitz), German bombing of Soviet industry in 1941-43 and Allied bombing of Germany (1939-45).

'The three air offensives against the war economy achieved much less than had been expected and much less than the limited intelligence had suggested'. [Overy, p. 616] Overy argues that the Luftwaffe's campaign against Britain in 1940-41 caused a 5 per cent reduction in War Economy output. Germany lost 11 per cent in 1944 - but in both cases these losses were against rising production output. German bombing in USSR 'hardly dented' Soviet war production.

2. Destruction of civilian morale

Despite unprecedented casualties exceeding 600,000 dead and mass dehousing, none of the societies subject to bombing collapsed.

He argues this was due to (1) bombing increased reliance of civilians on authorities; (2) it forced civilians into uniformed service in civil defence; (3) a long term expectation of the demands of total war and (4) the effect of bombing on assisting the propaganda, demonisation of the enemy.

3. Specific political ends

Bombing was most successful in achieving political ends - but even here its impact was negligible. The Allies used bombing as a substitute to launch an invasion of France in 1942 to placate Stalin. Overy argues this did not satisfy Stalin however. Overy concludes that, ironically, the most valuable impact of bombing was not strategic (as intended) but operational: it tied up personnel and resources on the home front and, in the Allied bombing offensive, allowed for the destruction of the Luftwaffe, which gave the armies advancing on Germany air superiority.

Syllabus Section 3: Civilians at War

- **Social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Britain and EITHER Germany OR the Soviet Union**

You are going to complete this part of the course by researching and composing a response to the following essay question

2012: (B) Assess the social and economic effects of the war on civilians in Britain and EITHER Germany OR the Soviet Union.

You must examine the impact of the war on British society. You may choose to focus on EITHER Nazi Germany OR the USSR.

You should take research notes on some type of organised scaffold such as this:

	Britain	Nazi Germany OR USSR
Onset of total war - when, how, to what extent		
Rationing and shortages of consumer goods		
Economic organisation/ management		
Civilian controls		
Civilian morale		
The role of women		
Exposure of civilians to enemy action		
Role of key individuals		
Extent of internal resistance		

Sources to which you have access include:

- Ken Webb *Conflict in Europe 1935-1945*
- HTA Study Guide (.pdf of the Conflict in Europe chapter)
- *History Today* articles in the 'Additional Readings' folder, especially
 - Richard Overy 'An Economy Geared to War'
 - Rowena Hamal, 'British Civilian Morale'
 - Matthew Stibe 'Women and the Nazi State'
 - 'Gnnady Bordugov 'War and peace: Stalin's regime and Russian nationalism'

The World at War (documentaries- on the V-Library server to download)

- Episode 11. Red Star: The Soviet Union (1941-43)
- Episode 16: Inside the Reich: Germany (1940-44)

Books in the Library, especially

- Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War*
- David Christan, *Power & Privilege* (for USSR)
- Chris Corin and Terry Fiehn *Russia Under Tsarism and Communism* (your National Study text book- it has a chapter on the Soviet home front in WW2)
- Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain 1939-1945*

You will have five periods of class time to complete the research for this essay. It will then need to be completed for homework.

Nazi Racial Policy and the Holocaust: Essay Response

From the syllabus:

Key Features and issues:

- origins, nature and impact of the Holocaust

3. Civilians at War

- Nazi racial policies: the Holocaust and the persecution of minorities

2010 HSC Essay Question

(b) Assess the impact of Nazi racial policies on civilians during the European war.

Sample introduction

Despite the focus of popular histories and television documentaries on the period of the 'Final Solution' (1943-45) and the extermination camps such as Auschwitz in particular, the impact that Nazi racial policy had on civilians was complex and varied. Two factors determined the way in which civilians experienced Nazi racial policy. Firstly, the implementation of Nazi racial ideology changed over time. Although historians debate the extent to which this was a centrally planned phenomenon it is clear that as time went on the impact on civilians became more violent and systematically conducted. Furthermore, the Nazis imposed their policies differently in different regions. Jews and minorities in occupied Western Europe did not experience persecution and violence as early as, or to the extent, that their counterparts in Eastern European communities did.

Suggested paragraph outline:

1. To assess the impact that Nazi racial policy had on civilians during the war it is necessary to first outline the features and objectives of Nazi racial policy.

- Traditions of anti-Semitism in Europe
- Social Darwinism and Eugenics
- *Volksgemeinschaft*
- Role of Jews as scapegoats for 1918, Bolshevism and for German troubles in 1939 (cite Hitler's January 1939 speech?)

2. Jews and minorities in Germany 1935-45

- Early examples of anti-Semitic legislation: 1935 Nuremberg Laws
- German homosexuals
- Kristallnacht
- Deportation and forced labour of German Jews in wartime

3. Jews and minorities in Eastern Europe.

- Establishment of ghettos
- Establishment of camps
- Resettlement
- 'The Final Solution'

4. Jews and minorities in Western Europe

- Comparisons with previous paragraph

5. Jews, Slavs and minorities in the Soviet Union.

- Intensity of conflict on Eastern Front ('war of annihilation' as Hitler ordered his troops before Barbarossa) rooted in Nazi ideas about Slavic peoples and their right to *lebensraum*
- *Einsatzgruppen* (SS 'Task Groups')
- Treatment of POWs
- Forced labour

6. The role of Nazi racial ideology in encouraging resistance and non-compliance

- Warsaw Ghetto uprising
- Partisan forces in the USSR

Conclusions

- Overall impact- number dead, effect on European demography
- But within these overall totals Nazi racial policies affected different communities in various ways and to different extents

The Nuremberg War Crimes Trials – Preparing for the Examination

Reading 1

Michael Biddiss 'Victor's Justice? The Nuremberg Tribunal', *History Today*, May (1995), 40-46.

1. Outline the planning that went in to the trial of Nazi war criminals by Allied leaders, 1943-45. In your response refer to

- Tehran Conference 1943
- Soviet and US enthusiasm for judicial prosecution/ British resistance
- The London Agreement

2. What were the four charges applied to the defendants at Nuremberg?

3. In what respect was the charge 'Crimes Against Humanity' legally novel?

4. What problems, from a legal perspective, did the prosecution face over the charge of 'conspiracy against peace, humanity and the norms of war' and 'crimes against peace'?

5. In Bidiss' view had the International Military Tribunal achieved its objectives?

6. What, suggests Biddiss, have been the failures, in the longer term, of the Nuremberg Trials?

Reading 2

Jan Lemnitzer, 'The Conversation', *Nuremberg war crimes trials 70 years on: a complex legacy*, 20 November 2015, <https://theconversation.com/nuremberg-war-crimes-trials-70-years-on-a-complex-legacy-50503>

1. How have the Nuremberg trials been 'widely celebrated'?
2. What are some of the hypocrisies that critics of Nuremberg might cite to criticise the integrity of the trials?
3. What significance does Lemnitzer credit the Nuremberg trials with?

Writing Exercise – essay on the Nuremberg trials

Example 1: Using Nuremberg in an essay on Nazi racial policy

Assess the impact of Nazi racial policy on European civilians

Include a paragraph (at the end of the essay?) considering whether or not European civilians got justice at Nuremberg. In this paragraph you might acknowledge that while a number of leading Nazis were punished, the vast majority went unpunished as a result of the Allies desire to quickly de-Nazify and re-build Germany as a bulwark against Soviet Communism. Furthermore, the trials were undermined by hypocrisies that saw comparable Allied actions (area bombing, Soviet atrocities against Poles in 1939) unacknowledged.

Example 2: An essay focused on Nuremberg

Assess the significance of the Nuremberg war crimes trials.

Major Point 1 - The trial brought to justice some leading Nazis (examples) who had been instrumental in heinous acts against European civilians by charging them with four crimes and handing out some heavy sentences.

Major Point 2 - The trials were undermined by hypocrisy and charges of their being a 'victor's justice'

Major Point 3- The trials were also limited in scope due to the Cold War imperative to rebuild and de-Nazify Germany. The high proportion of Wehrmacht officers involved in atrocities on the Eastern Front went unpunished, for example.

Major Point 4- Nonetheless, Nuremberg established a precedent for modern, international law including the Genocide Convention, Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Geneva Convention and, in 1998, the ICC.

Conclusion: The IMT had symbolic significance but it was limited in its pursuit of justice by the political pressures that limited its scope and the refusal of the allies to apply the same standards of warfighting to themselves. The Cold War limited international legal cooperation until the 1990s, when the IMT's example was revived in the ICC.

Historiography

WW2History.com

www.ww2history.com

Interviews with leading scholars in the field such as Robert Citino, Richard Evans, Richard Overy, Ian Kershaw and Max Hastings.

Andrew Roberts

US Army War College lecture 'Why Hitler Lost the War: German Strategic Mistakes in WWII'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5agLW7fTzBc&list=PLZ1Ga3lb1AR6BIUARB_wpqnn5_smg1oat

David Stahel

Muskegon Community College Lecture: Operation Barbarossa-Russia be dammed!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxsdfcgfSS8>

Stahel summarises the thesis from his study of Barbarossa and demonstrates how, despite its initially stunning tactical successes, the Wehrmacht failed badly during its 1941 invasion of the USSR.

Robert Citino

US Army Heritage and Education Centre Lecture- The Wehrmacht in the battles of 1942

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNDhswF1GKk>

Citino talks about the Wehrmacht in the campaigns in 1942 in North Africa and the USSR. His thesis is that the battles of 1942 represented a change in the nature of the war from one involving quick decisive battles to a materielschlact (struggle of materials), which the German military was not capable of fighting.

James Holland

'Blitzkrieg: exploding the myth', *Wartime*, Issue 77, Summer 2017, 10-18.

Holland provides a concise and accessible overview of German, British and French strategy. He demonstrates how Hitler's strategy went badly awry in 1940, putting the Reich in a very difficult position.