

# THE SECOND WORLD WARS

## LECTURE 6

## PEOPLE

### SUGGESTED READINGS

- Hanson, *The Second World Wars*, 396-398, 443-445, 451-452

### OUTLINE

#### 0:00-21:40 – The Casualties and Losses

- As a result of World War II, 65 million people died. This number is so high because:
  - the world population—almost 2 billion people in 1939—was higher than it was during previous conflicts.
  - technology made global communication and travel possible, which allowed for more combatants and fronts.
  - it was a Western war that utilized Western technology and involved the most significant powers in the world.
  - the historical parity between offense and defense was lost as the offensive technology surpassed the defensive arts.
  - fascism, Nazism, and militarism created a new ideology of racial superiority that justified and encouraged killing civilians as well as combatants.
  - advanced nations faced less advanced nations on the deadliest fronts.
- In most wars, more soldiers die than civilians, and the victors suffer fewer losses. In World War II:
  - 75% of the people killed were civilians.
  - 80% of the people who died were on the winning side.

- These disturbing anomalies were primarily the result of the Japanese army killing Chinese civilians and the German army killing Russian civilians.
- The U.S. and the U.K. enjoyed the benefit of being detached and distant from the Axis powers, which helped to limit civilian casualties
- They also learned from WWI to avoid attacking Germany directly and instead rely on naval and air power to attack the periphery of the Axis powers, which prevented comparably heavy loss of troops.
- By contrast, the Soviets lost 4 million people in the first year of the German invasion, and another 3 million people in the second year.
- Other countries suffered significant losses that are often forgotten. Poland and Yugoslavia probably suffered the largest percentage of casualties in World War II.
- Italy suffered a comparatively low 500,000 deaths because they benefitted from German military support and they surrendered to American troops in the summer of 1943.
- Germany suffered 1.5 million civilian casualties due largely to American bombing campaigns and the fighting within Germany during 1945.
- Overall, 5 to 5.5 million Germans died out of a population of about 80 million people.
- The Japanese only lost about 3.5 million people, in large part because the mainland was never invaded or bombed until near the end of the war. Most of the fighting against powerful Allied armies was on small islands that prevented large concentrations of troops.

## **21:41-52:52 - The Commanders**

- Winston Churchill
  - Churchill refused to negotiate with Hitler—even when Britain was left alone in 1940. Churchill was convinced that Britain’s naval and air superiority would force a stalemate until the authoritarian Axis powers drew the United States into the war.
  - Churchill was also skilled at picking military leaders who understood how to keep pressure on the Axis powers while avoiding a second Dunkirk disaster.
- Franklin Roosevelt
  - America likely would have been unprepared for Pearl Harbor if Roosevelt had not made significant naval investments during the lean years of the Great Depression.
  - Roosevelt had to be dissuaded by Churchill and the British generals not to invade Europe as early as 1942, when the American troops would have been unprepared.
- Joseph Stalin
  - Stalin made the largest blunders of the Allied leaders, the most significant being his trust in Hitler. He also dismissed all warnings before the German invasion of Russia.
  - Stalin’s command to never surrender or retreat even against armored divisions also led to huge losses.

- However, Stalin learned from his early mistakes and was very clever in diplomacy.
- Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini
  - Hitler and Mussolini both fought in WWI as corporals, which bolstered the martial reputation of each.
  - This experience also prevented them from understanding the administrative and military strategies required of a war on this scale.
  - They also allowed their ideologies to cloud their strategic decisions.
- Hideki Tojo
  - Tojo decided to avoid fighting in Russia and instead to focus on China, which was a good strategic decision.
  - His greatest blunder was in allowing Admiral Yamamoto to attack Pearl Harbor.
- The success of the United States and United Kingdom came primarily from their meritocratic systems of advancement and their dedication to wage the war with as little damage to their own citizens as possible.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## Why was World War II so deadly?

## Was Churchill's decision not to negotiate with Germany a good strategy?

## Why did the Allied commanders prove superior to their Axis counterparts?

## NOTES

[illegible]