

20th-Century Global Conflicts

AP European History

Contextualizing 20th-Century Global Conflicts

Unit 8 covers c. 1914 to the present as a story of conflict, and four key concepts frame it:

- **Total war and political instability** in the first half of the century gave way to a **polarised state order** during the Cold War.
- The stresses of **economic collapse and total war** produced **internal conflicts** within European states and **conflicting conceptions of the relationship between the individual and the state** 个人与国家的关系.
- Diverse intellectual and cultural movements **questioned the existence of objective knowledge** and the authority that had rested on it.
- **Demographic change, economic growth, total war, and competing definitions of freedom and justice** altered the experience of everyday life.

World War I

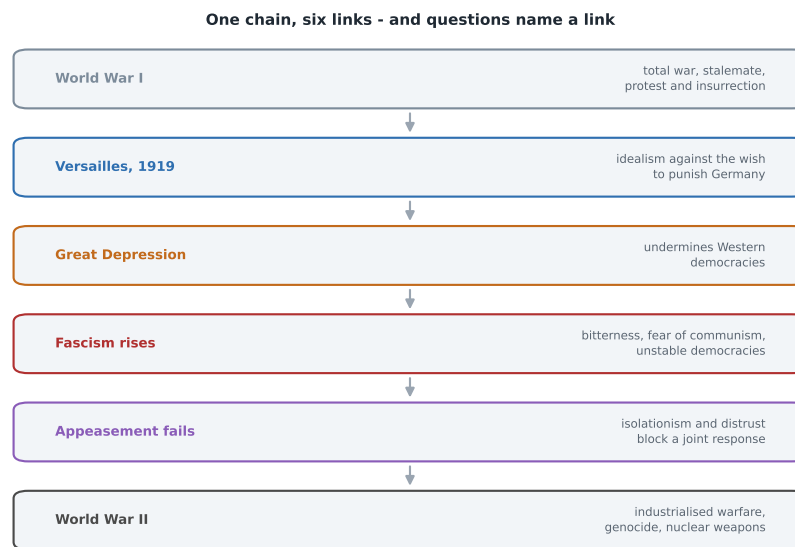
The war was **caused by a complex interaction of long- and short-term factors** and produced immense losses and disruption. The CED's specific claims:

- **New technologies confounded traditional military strategies**, leading to **trench warfare** 堑壕战 and massive troop losses.
- The effects of **military stalemate, national mobilisation, and total war** led to **protest and insurrection** 抗议与起义 in the belligerent nations - the war turned inward on the societies fighting it.
- The war **spread quickly to non-European theatres**, becoming a **global conflict**.
- The relationship of Europe to the world **shifted significantly** with that globalisation, and with the emergence of new powers.

The Russian Revolution and Its Effects

The **Russian Revolution** 俄国革命 created a regime based on **Marxist-Leninist theory** 马克思列宁主义 - the first state to be founded explicitly on that programme, which is what makes it a turning point rather than a national event.

Versailles Conference and Peace Settlement



Questions ask about one link; the strongest answers show where it sits in the chain

The **conflicting goals of the peace negotiators in Paris** pitted **diplomatic idealism** against the **desire to punish Germany** 理想主义与惩罚德国的意愿, and the resulting settlement satisfied neither aim fully.

The **League of Nations** 国际联盟 distributed former German and Ottoman possessions to France and Great Britain through the **mandate system** 委任统治, which extended imperial control under a new name - a point worth making because it connects the settlement to decolonisation later in the course.

Global Economic Crisis

The **Great Depression** 大萧条, caused by weaknesses in international trade and in monetary theory and practice, **undermined Western European democracies** 削弱西欧民主国家 and fostered **radical political responses** across Europe.

This is the pivot of the unit. The Depression is what turned interwar bitterness into a political opportunity for movements that had existed since before 1914 but had not previously been able to win power.

Fascism and Totalitarianism

The ideology of **fascism** 法西斯主义, with roots in the pre-war era, **gained popularity in an environment of postwar bitterness, the rise of communism, uncertain transitions to democracy, and economic instability**. That four-part environment is the CED's own answer to "why then", and it is better than any single cause.

On the Soviet side, after Lenin's death **Stalin 斯大林** undertook a **centralised programme of rapid economic modernisation**, often with severe repression. The CED states the cost explicitly: modernisation came at a **high price**, including the **liquidation of the kulaks 富农** and a **catastrophic famine 饥荒**.

The comparison the unit invites is structural rather than ideological: both regimes claimed total authority over the relationship between individual and state, which is the second key concept doing its work.

Europe During the Interwar Period

The failure to prevent a second war has named causes:

- **French and British fears of another war, American isolationism 美国孤立主义**, and **deep distrust between Western democratic, capitalist nations and the Soviet communist regime** prevented an effective response.
- **Fascism, extreme nationalism, racist ideologies, and the failure of appeasement 绥靖政策的失败** resulted in the Second World War.

World War II

- Germany's **Blitzkrieg 闪电战** warfare in Europe, combined with Japan's attacks in Asia and the Pacific, brought the Axis powers early victories.
- **American and British industrial, scientific, and technological power**, cooperative military efforts under strong leadership, and the **Soviet Union's vast manpower and resources** eventually defeated the Axis.
- **Military technologies made possible industrialised warfare, genocide, nuclear proliferation 核扩散**, and the risk of global nuclear war.

The Holocaust

Fuelled by **racism and anti-Semitism 种族主义与反犹主义**, Nazi Germany - with the cooperation of some other Axis powers and collaborators - **used industrial technology and bureaucratic structures to carry out the systematic murder of European Jewish people** and other targeted groups.

The CED's framing is precise and should be reproduced: what distinguishes this from earlier mass violence is the use of the **modern state's own instruments** - industry, bureaucracy, transport, record-keeping - as the means. That is why this topic belongs with the technology and total-war themes rather than standing apart from them.

The demographic consequence is stated directly: the Second World War **decimated a generation of Russian and German men, virtually destroyed European Jewry**, and killed millions of others.

20th-Century Cultural and Intellectual Developments

- The **belief in progress** characteristic of much nineteenth-century thought **began to break down before World War I** and collapsed after it.
- When the war began, Europeans were **generally confident in the ability of science and technology** to address human needs; the war and then the Depression **undermined that confidence**.
- The **challenge to the certainties of the Newtonian universe** in physics **opened the door to uncertainty** in other fields.
- The war created a **"lost generation"** 迷惘的一代 and fostered **disillusionment and cynicism** 幻灭与犬儒.
- During both wars, **women became increasingly involved** in military and political mobilisation and in economic production.

Continuity and Change in an Age of Global Conflict

The unit's reasoning skill is **continuity and change**.

Worked example (a real AP exam question). AP European History short-answer questions here ask, for example, to *"Explain one way in which the peace settlement of 1919 contributed to political instability in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s."* A full-mark answer traces a mechanism: *"The settlement combined punitive terms against Germany with an appeal to national self-determination it could not deliver consistently. That left a German republic burdened with reparations and blamed for accepting them, which gave nationalist and fascist movements a grievance they could use, and which the economic collapse of 1929 turned into mass support."* Notice that the answer runs the chain forward to the point the question asks about.

Exam tips

- Learn the **chain**: war, settlement, economic collapse, radical movements, failed appeasement, war again. Most questions ask about one link.
- The CED gives fascism a **four-part environment** - postwar bitterness, fear of communism, unstable democracies, economic instability. Use all four.
- The **Depression is the pivot**. Movements that existed before 1929 could not win power until it happened.
- On the Holocaust, the examinable point is the use of the **modern state's own instruments**. State it precisely.
- The **mandate system** is imperial control renamed. Saying so links the settlement to decolonisation.
- The collapse of confidence in **progress and objectivity** connects the political and cultural halves of the unit. Examiners reward that connection.