

Unit 6: Accelerating Global Change and Realignments (c. 1900 to the Present)

World Conflicts and Their Effects

The 20th century began with Europeans occupying empires around the globe and confident that things would stay that way. In 1900, the United States and Japan were rising powers, while Russia and China were crumbling from within. Two World Wars and a global "Cold War" later, European hegemony had declined dramatically and China's power was rapidly on the rise. What a difference a century can make. In between those historical bookends, European colonies around the world gained independence and Russia became the first of many communist nations. After World War II, the USSR and the U.S. led their allies through decades of global tensions. At the beginning of the 21st century, Cold War worries had faded, but new challenges to political, social and economic stability emerged.

Global conflicts shook world stability

World historians often look at the two world wars as one event with a pause in the middle. Other major wars in history had similar patterns. For example, the Crusades and the Hundred Years War took long "times out" before re-starting hostilities.

Test Tip: The AP European History and AP US History exams go into greater depth regarding the World Wars, while the AP World History exam focuses more on their global causes and consequences.

A. World War I (1914-1918)

When it ended in 1918, the survivors prayed World War I would indeed be the "war to end all wars" as they called it. No war involving Europe had ever caused so much widespread destruction of lives, property, and empires. The creation of a global League of Nations at the war's end, designed to keep the peace, gave many people hope that governments and individuals had learned their lesson and would find ways to avoid future wars. Their hopes were short-lived.

1. Causes of World War I

i. Imperialism. By the end of the 19th century, the colonial powers of Europe had competed for decades over land in African and Asia. By the beginning of the 20th century, wrangling continued over ever-diminishing amounts of unclaimed territories, leading to increased competitions and suspicions among European nations.

ii. Nationalism. Tensions rose inside empires like Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia from ethnic groups that wanted to break off and form their own nations. In addition, leaders of the newly unified nations like Germany and Italy naturally had great pride in their countries and expressed it through imperialist expansion and weapons build-up.

iii. Arms Race. The Industrial Revolution mass-produced weapons that could kill at faster rates, and from longer distances, than ever before. For example, the French developed a machine gun that could shoot 300 bullets a minute and the Germans built a cannon that could fire projectiles over 50 miles. National pride among the "Great Powers" of Europe started an unofficial competition between governments to see who could produce the best weapons.

iv. Alliance system. Rather than risking going it alone in armed conflict, the Great Powers formed two competing military alliances in the early 20th century: Russia, England, and France formed the *Triple Entente* and Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary formed the *Triple Alliance*. Geographically, the Entente was positioned on Germany's eastern and western borders, leading that nation's leaders to develop "first strike" plans in both directions. .

v. All these factors led to heightened tensions in Europe by 1914. The event that sparked World War I was a seemingly inconsequential assassination of the future emperor of Austria-Hungary in Bosnia, a province that was teeming with nationalist independence fervor. A chain of reactions to the assassination led to a realignment of the pre-war alliances into two slightly different groups: the Allies, initially England, France, Russia, and Italy and the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire.

vi. The Central Powers had short-term advantages at the start of World War I:

- They were connected geographically; the Allies were separated
- The German army was the best trained and equipped in the world going into the war
- The German industrial system was better suited for conversion to wartime production than the Allies

vii. The Allies had long-term advantages at the start of World War I:

- The Allies had more men of military age than the Central Powers
- The Allies had more factories but converting them to war production took time
- The Allies had a stronger navy and was better able to enforce a blockade of Central Powers ports.

2. Features of World War I

- i. No one expected a long war. Germany attacked France and Russia simultaneously, expecting a quick victory that would establish them as the unquestioned power in Europe. When that did not occur, the two sides hunkered down into defensive positions in France (the Western Front) and Russia (the Eastern Front) by the end of 1914. By 1915, fighting spread to the Ottoman Empire and the European colonies in Africa.
- ii. The new weapons of World War I—the machine gun, poison gas, the airplane and the submarine to name a few—led to changes in tactics and philosophies about the rules of war. The machine gun's rapid killing power forced combatants on all sides into defensive trenches, but despite the enormous losses, military leaders repeatedly sent long lines of men charging across "No Man's Land", the open fields between the two sides of trenches. The result was four years of shocking numbers of deaths and injuries. For example, in the Battle of the Somme in France, 20,000 British soldiers died the first day, and 60,000 died before the first man reached the German trenches. After four months of continuous battle, about 1.5 million men from both sides were killed, wounded, missing or captured. An unintended consequence of this kind of slaughter was a lowering of the value of humanity in war. Thus, civilians came to be considered legitimate targets in "total war"—where the full economic and political power of nations was engaged in military victory. Submarines torpedoed enemy civilian ships—like the British steamship *Lusitania*—and cannons indiscriminately fired huge artillery shells into cities far away.
- iii. One effect of European global colonization was the use of soldiers recruited from Africa and Asia to fight in the war. India, for example, committed one million troops to aid the British forces. Military campaigns ensued in the colonies, especially in Africa, where for example, German soldiers and their African recruits battled British and French soldiers and their African recruits. Australian soldiers joined their British counterparts at the failed Allied assault on Gallipoli, in the Ottoman Empire. The British also convinced Arabs to unite with them against the Ottomans in Southwest Asia, promising Arab independence from the Ottomans as a reward.
- iv. In 1917, the United States entered World War I on the Allies' side "to make the world safe for democracy", an idealistic pledge made by U.S. president Woodrow Wilson. By late 1918, the addition of U.S. soldiers pushed the Central Powers to the breaking point, and an armistice was signed. An armistice is an agreement that all sides will lay down their arms and leave the battlefield without declaring a winner—or loser. Wilson hoped for "peace without victory", believing that punishing Germany after the war would lead to resentment and another war. After the fighting stopped though, England and France declared themselves the winners and Germany the loser. Not good.
- v. The U.S. president Wilson proposed the *Fourteen Point* plan, designed to stop future wars through a checklist of international agreements. The key component was an international organization—the League of Nations—that was set up to settle differences between member nations before they erupted into armed conflict. Funny thing is, the U.S. Congress refused to join the very League that Wilson created. A consequence was the League was crippled from the outset.

3. Consequences of World War I

- i. Approximately 20 million soldiers and civilians died in the war, which was fought in Europe, Southwest Asia, and Africa. The political, social, and economic impact of the loss of so many people shaped many Europeans' attitudes about war for the next two decades. For example, in the 1930s a large number of citizens and politicians in England and France favored *appeasement*, giving in to an aggressor nation rather than challenging it and risking war.
- ii. The Treaty of Versailles approved the League of Nations, but yielding to pressures from angry citizens back home, England and France's leaders also dictated terms to the Central Powers, and focused on punishing Germany. So much for "peace without victory". Germany was required to take full blame for starting the war, drastically reduce its military forces, and pay billions in war reparations (think of it as "I'm sorry" money) to England and France.

Many German people developed a strong sense of resentment toward the Allied nations, especially after their economy imploded in the 1920s due to harsh reparation demands from the English and French. German currency, the Mark, plummeted from a rate of 4 to the dollar in 1914 to over a *trillion* to the dollar by late 1923. The Allies required Germany to ditch its constitutional monarchy and set up a republic—known as the Weimar Republic. But the government was too frail and fragmented to deal effectively with the unprecedented economic crisis. These events caused many Germans to seek radical alternatives to the Weimar Republic and to seek revenge against England and France.

- iii. Several international treaties between the World Wars sought to limit the expansion of military might, and thus reduce the chance of war. The Five Power Treaty, the London Conference of 1930, the Geneva Conventions and the Kellogg-Briand Pact were the most famous. Perhaps *infamous* best describes the latter treaty, for it outlawed war. (Please stop laughing.) The first two treaties limited the number of battleships each nation could have. Japan rejected the limits because they were allotted fewer ships than the U.S. and England. The Geneva Conventions set rules for war, particularly the treatment of prisoners of war.

iv. Many of the African and Middle Eastern colonies controlled by Germany and the Ottoman Empire were reassigned by the League of Nations to France and England, who established a *mandate system* of rule over them. Under this system, France and England were to guide the Middle Eastern colonies of Syria and Lebanon (France), Palestine and Jordan (England) and Iraq (England) until the League decided the colonies were ready for independence. The reality of the situation was that these areas were simply added to the British and French colonial collection. African mandates formally under German control were South-west Africa and Tanganyika. These moves prompted more nationalist feelings in the colonies among peoples in the Middle East and Africa, and also in Southeast Asia.

v. The Russian, Austrian, Ottoman, and German empires fell during or just after World War I. Austria's once-huge empire was divided into several nations, including Yugoslavia, Hungary and a smaller Austria. You just read about the fate of the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces. The democratic nation of Turkey was established by nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal, who went by the title "Ataturk".

vi. Two Allied nations, the United States and Japan, emerged from the war with their industrial capacity and colonial possessions intact, unlike most of Europe, and were poised to rise to the top of the world's economic ladder.

vii. Conducting the war amidst rising internal problems proved too much for the Russian Czar's government. In 1917 the Czar resigned and was replaced by a provisional democracy. But it quickly fell to a communist uprising. Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin negotiated an early withdrawal from the war with the German government and fighting on the eastern front ended. Details of the rise of the world's first communist regime will be covered later in this chapter. As payback for quitting the war early, (and because they feared the new communist government) the other Allied powers pretended Russia had never been on their side and refused to give them a seat at Versailles.

viii. Arming their colonial subjects to support the war effort may not have been in Europe's best interest because at war's end nationalist leaders in African and Asian colonies now had military training and equipment. Adding to their inclinations toward independence, many elites had learned about European ideals such as self-rule while attending European schools before the war. Another encouragement for leaders of colonial independence movements was found in a key feature of the Fourteen Points Plan—a call for "self-determination" for nationalist groups. This Wilsonian concept was specifically intended for groups in Europe but none of the colonial subjects in Africa or Asia worried about that detail.

ix. World War I ended with many issues unresolved: What will be the future of European imperialism around the world? Can—or should—Western nations slow the spread of military technology to the colonies? How will Europe handle colonial nationalist movements? In addition, new issues that didn't exist before the war included what to do about a newly- communist Russian nation and how to recover from the economic, political, and social damages wrought by World War I.

B. World War II (1939—1945)

Primarily a continuation of unresolved issues from World War I, World War II outdid its predecessor in duration, global scope, use of military technology, and death.

1. Causes of World War II

i. The Treaty of Versailles required Germany to accept full guilt for the war, reduce its military forces, hand over its colonies and pay billions in war reparations to England and France. As you have read, Germany was rocked by overwhelming economic collapse. These humiliations left many Germans seeking vengeance. One man in particular, Adolf Hitler, tapped into these emotions and exploited them as a means of gaining power.

ii. The Great Depression shook the foundations of the global economy starting in late 1929; however, Western European nations had suffered all through the decade after the war. The United States was the chief financier of England, France and Germany's debts in the 1920s, and when those nations struggled to repay their loans, U.S. banks began to falter, setting off chain reactions that damaged global financial markets. Another cause of the Great Depression was overproduction of goods in the U.S.—especially farm products. More produce meant lower prices to farmers; lower prices meant farmers defaulted on bank loans, banks closed and money supplies dried up.

iii. The result in the industrialized nations was that in the 1930s they all reorganized their governments to be more active in financial matters, including government programs of social security, unemployment compensation, bank regulation and many others. Italy, Germany and Japan were the most prominent nations that radically changed their governmental and financial systems to *fascism* to address their economic crises. Russia—known as the Soviet Union after 1922, was isolated from the global economy. Europe and the United States wanted nothing to do with the new communist government.

iv. Italy introduced *fascism* in the 1920s as political and social means to address its post-WWI economic woes. Under fascism, the government attempted to control the economy—like in communism—but it allowed private ownership of businesses and other property as in capitalism. One catch—all decisions ultimately come from a single dictator with enormous power, and dissent was

severely punished. Anyone considered “outside” the accepted fascist model faced unemployment, jail or death. Before the international meltdown of the Great Depression, Italy’s fascist system—led by Benito Mussolini—appeared to be on an upswing in the 1920s, thus fascism appealed to many people around the world. Germany, Spain and then Japan followed Italy’s political model.

v. Nazism in Germany was Adolf Hitler’s version of fascism. The National Socialist (abbreviated “Nazi”) German Workers Party was a fringe group in the early 1920s, at a time when the Weimar Republic was floundering. It claimed opposition to both democracy on one hand and communism on the other and promoted past and future German glories. After a failed coup in 1923 landed Hitler in jail, he decided to undermine the Weimar government from within the system. Impassioned speeches about German glory gained Hitler popular support and the Nazis rose in power in the Weimar legislature. Careful cultivation of sympathetic government and business leaders helped his cause. Intimidation and assassination of opponents reduced the numbers of voices against him. Using propaganda, lies and murder, the Nazis and Hitler were in absolute control of Germany by 1934.

Test Tip: The AP World History exam doesn’t concern itself with details about Hitler’ life beyond those found here.

vi. Fascism requires conquest to obtain cheap labor and raw materials—and to unite its people against enemies, real or invented. In other words, except for Spain, the fascist nations of the 20th century attacked their neighbors. Italy invaded North Africa and Ethiopia in the 1930s, Germany invaded Czechoslovakia and Austria about the same time.

vii. Japan began attacking its neighbors even before it officially turned to fascism. Some historians argue that World War II really started in 1931—eight years before the official date—when Japan invaded Manchuria, enslaved or killed its peoples and occupied their coal mines and factories. Not satisfied with that conquest alone, Japan invaded China in 1937.

viii. The well-intentioned but weak League of Nations did little to stop aggression by Italy, Germany and Japan in the 1930s. European leaders hoped that fascists would be satisfied after limited conquests and seek no more territories. This policy of *appeasement* only seemed to encourage the attackers who showed no respect for the League of Nations’ pleas for peace. The appeasement policy of the 1930s had long-term effects: after World War II, one of the biggest lessons the US and USSR took from the pre-war era was to reject appeasement in favor of “peace through strength” during the confrontational Cold War.

2. Features of World War II

i. Like World War I, there were two sets of alliances in World War II: the Allies and the Axis Powers. The Allies grew in number as they were attacked by Axis nations. Germany, Italy, and Japan formed the Axis starting in the late 1930s. England, France, Poland and most of Western Europe formed the Allies by 1940. A year later, the USSR and the United States joined the Allies.

ii. Unlike World War I, which featured trench warfare and little movement of forces, World War II began with fast-moving fronts. This occurred because technology improved the machines that were introduced in World War I. Tanks and airplanes moved much faster by the 1930s and defensive trenches were impractical. Germany introduced *blitzkrieg*, “lightning war”, which involved bombing from airplanes and swift advances by tanks and support vehicles. Only then did foot soldiers enter the battle...if there were still people left to fight back. This method of fighting stunned early victims of Nazi aggression.

iii. In the European theater, the war started in 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. England had appeased the German fascist dictator Hitler in his conquest of central Europe, but finally drew a line at Poland. After war was declared, Germany swiftly conquered most of Western Europe, including France by 1940. Russia and Germany had announced a peace treaty in 1939, so England faced Nazi aggression alone. Two significant events in 1941 turned the tide against Nazi Germany: Hitler’s surprise invasion of Russia went poorly and the U.S. entered the war against the Axis Powers after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Unlike in World War I, Russia stayed with the Allies to the end of the war, despite suffering more than 25 million deaths.

iv. The first Allied offensive against the Axis powers was in North Africa. From there, the Allies invaded Italy but were still fighting there when the war in Europe ended. The turning point of the war in Europe was the Allied invasion of Normandy, France in 1944. Steadily pushed back to their homeland on both eastern and western fronts, the Germans surrendered in May, 1945.

v. World War II’s battlefields were on a greater global scale than World War I. Campaigns throughout the Pacific were added to those in Europe and Africa. Japan’s attack on China from 1937 to 1945 was particularly brutal, causing approximately 20 million deaths. In addition, in 1941 Japan attacked much of Southeast Asia and islands throughout the Pacific, including Hawaii’s Pearl Harbor in 1941. The U.S. entered the Pacific war and, with Britain as its main ally, slowly pushed the Japanese empire’s perimeter back toward their homeland. Significant battles occurred in the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia) and in island chains in the central and south Pacific. Starting in 1945, U.S. planes repeatedly firebombed Japanese cities in an effort to force unconditional surrender from the government. In August 1945, the U.S. dropped two atomic bombs, first on Hiroshima and then Nagasaki, and the war abruptly stopped.

3. Consequences of World War II

i. The United Nations replaced the League of Nations after World War II. Two key differences: the UN's headquarters was in the United States, not Europe—a sign of America's post-war influence—and, unlike the League, the United Nations Security Council had military authority that could be used to stop aggression by nations. U.N. forces were employed in combat in the Korean War (1950-53) and the Persian Gulf War (1990-91).

ii. The use of atomic power was a major controversy rising out of World War II. Military and government supporters of its use on Japan claimed its overwhelming destruction saved lives that would have been lost in a conventional attack on Japan's homeland. Critics questioned the morality of its use at all, and raised concerns about the specter of a world armed with nuclear weapons.

iii. Western Europe's reign as the world's strongest economic and political force ended with World War II. Two devastating wars crippled Europe, while the U.S. emerged as the only major power whose economy and society was relatively unscathed. One by one, aided by the United Nations, Europe's colonies in Africa and Asia gained independence starting soon after the war, including the Dutch East Indies, Indochina, India, and Ghana.

iv. The Holocaust. The worst degree of fascist treatment of "outsiders" was Hitler's "final solution" against Jews and other groups that did not fit into his perverted vision for Germany. 6 of the 10 million people killed in the Holocaust were Jews from Central and Eastern Europe. After the war, the U.S. and Britain steered U.N. support for the establishment of a democratic Jewish homeland in Palestine: Israel.

v. The Cold War. Almost immediately after World War II, global tensions arose between the victorious Allies, with the USSR leading one side and the U.S. leading the other.

C. The Cold War (c. 1946—c.1989)

If anything could be labeled "World War III," the conflict that best meets that description was the Cold War. The capitalist U.S. and its allies in the West competed with the communist USSR and its allies for global superiority. What made it a "cold" war was that the main antagonists did not fight each other directly on a battlefield. However, everything else involved in a "hot" war was in play: threats of destruction, gathering of military allies, arms build-ups, spy networks, and propaganda campaigns. Even the exploration of space and Olympic competitions were part of the Cold War. The addition of nuclear weapons in this era made the outcome of any such war extremely hazardous to the entire world.

1. Causes of the Cold War

i. The Yalta Conference. Near the end of the World War II, the "Big Three" Allies of the US, Britain and the USSR met on the Crimean peninsula to re-draw the maps of Europe and Asia for the post-war world. Germany and its capital, Berlin, were divided into Western and Soviet regions. The USSR took control of most of Eastern Europe, after promising the US and Britain they would allow self-determination. When that pledge failed to materialize, and Soviet forces began to occupy Eastern Europe, the West became highly suspicious of Soviet intentions. For its part, leaders in the USSR feared a US-led invasion through Germany or Japan.

ii. The Yalta Conference also divided Korea into communist north and capitalist south nations. Japan was put into the U.S. sphere of influence. The U.S. replaced Japan's government with a democratic constitutional monarchy and placed military bases there.

iii. The USSR gained nuclear weapons a few years after the end of World War II. This event stirred great concern among the Western allies, but the Soviet Union claimed the weapons were for self-defense purposes.

2. Features of the Cold War

i. Led by the U.S., NATO and its allies enacted a diplomatic and military policy of *containment* to keep the Soviets from spreading communism beyond Eastern Europe. World events challenged this policy around the globe for 45 years.

ii. The Berlin Airlift. In 1946, the USSR attempted to cut off Western access to Berlin, which was in Soviet-controlled East Germany. For a year, the U.S. and Britain flew supplies into the Western sector of Berlin. The Soviets realized the futility of their blockade and lifted it. This event increased Cold War tensions between the two sides. In 1961, communist East Germany built a wall dividing the pro-West sector of Berlin from its communist half. The Berlin Wall lasted until 1989 when anti-communist East Berliners rose up and began tearing it down on live TV. See below.

iii. The Marshall Plan. As part of the U.S. "containment" doctrine to limit the expansion of communism, and to help its Western European allies recover from the war, the U.S. sent billions of dollars in economic and construction aid to West Germany, England,

France, and other Western European nations. Japan also received massive amounts of reconstruction assistance. The Marshall Plan was lauded as a “brilliant success” that re-built factories and roads. By the early 1950s, Western Europe and Japan had booming economies. The USSR attempted a similar aid package for Eastern Europe called Comecon but its efforts were less successful.

iv. NATO vs. the Warsaw Pact. In 1949, the U.S. formed an alliance with Western European nations called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO. It was designed to contain (there’s that word again) Soviet aggression in Europe. Canada and Turkey were also included. The USSR responded with a military alliance of its own, the Warsaw Pact, which most Eastern European nations were compelled to join. For decades, most experts assumed World War III would be fought in Central Europe—probably over East or West Germany—between these two sides. Almost no forecasters in the 1960s and 1970s expected the USSR to disintegrate by the early 1990s.

v. Led by Mao Ze Dong, communists took control of China in 1949. The 20th century Chinese Revolutions and China’s Cold War relationship with the USSR and the West are discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

vi. The Korean War. In 1950, communist North Korea invaded pro-West South Korea and for the first time the United Nations sent soldiers from member nations to push out the aggressor. The U.S. led the UN forces in this war, which included a surprise massive surge from communist Chinese soldiers into Korea. After three years of constant fighting, the adversaries negotiated new boundaries of the two Koreas near their previous borders. The U.S. and its military allies announced a global plan of “containment” designed to keep communism from spreading beyond its 1950 borders.

vii. The Vietnam War. Just after World War II, a war for independence in French colonial Indochina became a Cold War battle for that region, and was divided in the early 1950s into four nations, including pro-communist North Vietnam—led by Ho Chi Min—and pro-West South Vietnam. Much like in Korea, North Vietnam soon invaded South Vietnam to unify the country under communist rule. Vietnam became the focus of U.S. containment policy, and the government committed its military to fighting a limited war until running out of resolve. In 1975, the communists of North Vietnam defeated and absorbed South Vietnam, creating a unified socialist nation. Hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese migrated to France, Australia and the U.S. over the next two decades to escape the communist system.

viii. In Latin America, Cold War tensions were at their peak during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Cuba became a communist nation in 1959; in the early 1960s the USSR secretly placed missiles with nuclear capability there. The U.S. discovered the missiles and brought the issue to the United Nations. On the brink of a nuclear war, cooler heads prevailed and the crisis eased. A direct line of communication was created to link the White House and Soviet offices in Moscow, and the USSR removed the controversial missiles. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, guerilla wars in Latin America between pro- and anti-communist forces involved U.S. and Soviet military “advisors”.

ix. Other “brush wars” between pro-West and pro-Soviet bloc interests erupted in Africa and Central Asia during the Cold War.

3. Consequences of the Cold War

i. Cost. The Cold War involved expenditures of many billions of dollars on both sides, especially by the main antagonists the U.S. and USSR. Proponents argue that the money spent was much less than what would have been appropriated if there had been a “hot” war between the rivals, not to mention the cost in human lives.

ii. Nuclear legacy. The enormous destructive nature of nuclear bombs may well have been the deciding factor as to why the Cold War did not turn “hot.” The major rivals may have avoided using nuclear weapons, but after the Cold War, many nations developed or tried to build their own nuclear arsenal. Few of them responded to calls from the U.S., the former USSR or the UN to curtail their nuclear programs. India, Pakistan, Israel and Iran are some examples.

Test Tip: The features and consequences of the Cold War have appeared on every AP World History exam.

D. The Post-Cold War World, c. 1989 to the Present

1. Decline of communism. Under the leadership of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and pushed along by a military build-up by U.S. President Ronald Reagan, by the mid-1980s, the USSR softened its strict communist philosophies and military aggression. These events gave rise to anti-Soviet and pro-democracy movements in Eastern Europe, whose success was symbolized by the uncontested tearing down of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Faced with a failing economy, loss of international prestige, nationalist revolts from within the Soviet Union, and an attempt by members of his own government to overthrow him, Gorbachev announced the break-up of the USSR in 1991 and a Russian Federation was established. The thirteen non-Russian members of the USSR split off to form their own governments.

2. The decline of communism and its authoritarian methods affected Latin America in that most military dictatorships were replaced by democratic governments starting in the 1980s. Argentina and Chile are two examples.

3. Not all political movements were in the direction of democratic rule after the Cold War. In the Middle East, dictatorships and kingdoms remained in some nations, for example, in Saudi Arabia and Iran. In China, a pro-democracy movement led by students in 1989 was brutally crushed by the government in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, even as the communist regime there was permitting limited capitalism.

II. Decolonization

Europe was weakened after two world wars. A major sign of Europe's decline as a world power was successful colonial independence movements after World War II. Some colonies gained independence peacefully, but others gained independence with violent revolutions. By the mid-1970s, almost all former European colonies returned to local control. Decolonization is one of the major themes of the 20th century.

A. Asia

1. The first major colony to gain independence after World War II was also the largest. Mohandas Gandhi led non-violent resistance to the British raj for decades, supported by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Their efforts were successful in 1947, but Gandhi's dream of a united, independent India was not fulfilled. Muslim-majority areas, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, formed separate nations in what was known as the Partition of India.

2. The Dutch East Indies and Indochina represent two colonies that rebelled violently for independence. The Netherlands granted independence to the new nation of Indonesia in 1965. As you read above, France granted independence after Indochina split into four nations: Laos, Cambodia, and North and South Vietnam.

3. Hong Kong did not gain independence, but the British peacefully transferred sovereignty of Hong Kong—which it had held since the Opium Wars—to communist China in 1997 on the promise that the island would remain a capitalist haven.

B. Africa

1. North African nations tended to gain independence from European control earlier than sub-Saharan nations. In the 1950s, the United Nations supported the peaceful independence of Libya and Tunisia. The most significant rebellion in North Africa occurred in Algeria, where French soldiers battled nationalist rebels until France granted independence in 1962.

2. Ghana was the first sub-Saharan colony to gain independence, peacefully, in 1957. However, Angolan rebels aided by the USSR, China, and Cuba, fought against Portuguese rule until becoming independent in 1975. Most other African colonies gained freedom through peaceful means and with support from the UN.

C. Latin America

In Latin America, Europe's few colonies gained independence in the post-war era as well. The Bahamas and the Guiana colonies are two examples.

D. Outcomes of decolonization were mixed

1. Some former colonies had economic success and political stability after decolonization—India, Singapore, and Indonesia are three examples. However, many colonies struggled, facing civil wars, crumbling infrastructures, and continued economic hardships. Malawi and Zaire are but two examples in Africa alone. A continuity over the centuries has been Africa's lack of industrial production. It remained an exporter primarily of natural resources like oil, gold, and other minerals.

2. South Africa wasn't a colony per se. It became an independent country in 1910, but retained strong political and economic ties to Britain. South Africa is a frequent subject on the AP World History exam because it had a long-standing policy of white minority rule: *apartheid*. Whites of Dutch, German, and British descent had full political rights but the majority black and mixed-race population had none for most of the 20th century. The government yielded to increasing international pressure and transitioned to constitutional rights for all citizens, regardless of color in the 1990s.

III. The rise and decline of authoritarian governments, c. 1900—to the present

In the early 21st century, there are plenty of authoritarian governments around the world, but the high point of communist and fascist dictatorships was during the 20th century. Proposed by Marx in England in 1848, communism did not take hold as a government until the early 20th century. Russia was first to adopt communism and many other nations—most significantly China—adopted it after World War II. Fascism's heyday ended with World War II, but it remained in some nations.

A. Communism in Russia

1. During World War I, the Russian czar abdicated in favor of a provisional republic, but the new government was unable to fix Russia's many economic and social problems and it chose to continue the Czar's unpopular participation in World War I.
2. The Bolshevik wing of the Communist party, led by Vladimir Lenin, ousted the provisional government from the capital and engaged in a bloody civil war against various groups, known as the "Whites" who opposed the communist "Reds".
3. The communists won and established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, but Lenin died shortly afterward, in 1924. Joseph Stalin emerged as the next leader, and remained in power for almost 30 years. Until World War II, the USSR was shunned by the majority of the world community.
4. Stalin implemented a series of "Five Year Plans" of government-directed economic and industrial growth starting in the late 1920s. Under the Five Year Plans and their production goals, factories were built all over the USSR and massive public works programs like dam construction were implemented. Stalin focused on heavy industry like steel and concrete production.
5. Stalin was a ruthless ruler who "purged" millions of his enemies, real and imagined. For example, an estimated 14 million farmers and their families who resisted Stalin's plan to force them to work on collective farms were killed by execution or government-imposed starvation in the 1930s. Gulags—prison "re-education camps" sprang up throughout the Soviet Union, especially in Siberia. Little was known about these policies in the West, so after Germany attacked Russia in 1941, Britain was eager to include them as an Allied power. Stalin relished his new role on the world stage, meeting with American and British leaders to plan the war.
6. After World War II the USSR emerged as a global power and began an aggressive campaign to spread communist influence. Rebellions against Soviet control in East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in the three decades after World War II were met with brutal reprisals. See "Cold War" above.
7. By the late 20th century, signs of strain appeared in the Soviet system. The USSR's military rivaled that of the United States, but its command economy proved inadequate at supplying consumer goods, compared to capitalist societies. The economic pressures caused by global military interventions, notably in Afghanistan starting in 1979, overburdened the Soviet system. In the early 1980s, U.S. President Ronald Reagan dramatically increased his nation's military spending, gambling that the Soviet leaders would choose to do the same and ignore growing discontent from their citizens who hoped for improved goods and services at home. Reagan guessed correctly.
8. In the mid-1980s the Soviet Politburo—the policy-making council of the USSR—chose a leader who pledged to reform—but not end—the communist system: Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev introduced limited capitalism (*perestroika*) and loosened restrictions on criticism of the government (*glasnost*). He hoped these measures, if doled out in a controlled fashion, would restore both the USSR's crumbling economy and people's faith in the communist system. It did neither. The world watched in amazement as former Soviet-controlled nations in Eastern Europe—led by Poland's *Solidarity* movement—peacefully broke with communism in the late 1980s.
9. In 1991 a military coup against Gorbachev failed, but soon after he announced the dissolution of the USSR, and the Cold War ended. Russia then became—on paper at least—a capitalist-based democracy, but its future path remained murky.

B. Revolutions in China led to communist rule

1. The Qing dynasty was overthrown in 1911 and was not replaced by a new imperial dynasty. This event marked the end of thousands of years of dynastic rule in China.
2. The new government was the Republic of China, promoted by Sun Yat-sen (*Sun Yi Xian*), a Western-educated member of the Chinese elite. Sun struggled to create a stable, unified China and sought aid from the West, but the only major nation to respond was the newly-formed Soviet Union. This support from communist sources had enormous long-term implications.
3. Sun died in 1925 and was replaced by Chiang Kai-Shek (*Jiang Jieshi*). Unlike Sun, Chiang vigorously opposed cooperation with communists. Regions in China fell into civil war between communists and "Nationalists" supporting the Republic. A major reason why many peasants supported the communists was their perception that the republic was both corrupt and inept.
4. When Japan invaded China in 1937, the communists and Nationalists united to fight their common enemy. When the U.S. entered World War II, China was added to the Allies and Chiang met with American and British leaders to plan war strategy.

5. At the end of World War II, China's civil war re-started and, in 1949, the communists, led by Mao Ze Dong, were victorious. The Nationalist government and millions of its supporters, backed by Western powers, fled to Taiwan and ruled from there.

6. Mao's government officially granted full legal and voting rights to women, which was a radical change from China's past. Many women served in high government positions. Unlike Lenin, who favored communist revolution by industrial workers in cities, Mao's main support came from agrarian peasants.

Test Tip: The AP World History exam has been known to ask about differences between Leninist and Maoist approaches to communist revolutions.

7. As you read above, China supported communist North Korea in the Korean War by sending millions of soldiers into that conflict.

8. In the late 1950s, Mao pushed a *Great Leap Forward* that promoted industrial output over agricultural production. The result was an agrarian catastrophe that led to death by starvation for as many as 20 million people.

9. Mao's response to this disaster was to blame "outside" capitalist influences that he said were still prevalent in China, so a *Cultural Revolution* was enacted to purge all vestiges of Western culture. A decade of widespread government persecutions and re-education centers finally ended with Mao's death in 1976.

10. By the 1960s, two nations that might appear to be natural allies were enemies: the USSR and communist China. They fought over territories on their mutual borders and did little to support each other in spreading communism around the globe.

11. After Mao's death, reformers, including *Deng Xiaoping*, improved China's economy and its position on the world stage by inviting government-monitored capitalist investment from the West. The economy and people's standard of living boomed into the early 21st century, but political reforms were slower to appear.

C. Fascism

You read about the authoritarian government of fascism above, but it was not limited to the Axis Powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan. Spain enacted fascism after a civil war in the 1930s but it did not participate in expansion of territory like its European cohorts. Fascism ended in Spain in the mid-1970s. In addition, governments in Argentina and Brazil incorporated elements of fascism in the 1940s and 1950s. In all three countries, democratic movements replaced fascism by the 1980s.

IV. Other political revolutions

A. Mexico

In Mexico, a revolution promising sweeping political, economic, and social reforms to promote the well-being of the masses began in 1910 and a constitution supporting those goals was adopted in 1917. However, it was not until the 1930s that land reform occurred. This involved taking millions of acres of land from large plantations held by foreign and domestic owners and providing it for peasant farmers. Public education programs were enacted as well. After World War II, the government allowed foreign interests to again buy land in Mexico and the land reform program faded.

B. Iran

1. In the 1950s, a Western-backed emperor, the Shah, was put into power in Iran. He supported foreign investment in his nation's oil industry and received military aid from the U.S. and Western Europe during the Cold War. Iranian society allowed women to vote, and Western culture and education was encouraged. In 1979, uprisings against government oppression of opponents forced the Shah out of power. He was replaced by a radical anti-Western Muslim leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. The Ayatollah's message of Muslim unity, the supremacy of Islamic law over secular law and rejection of Western influence was supported by many in Iran. Those who did not support the changes were brutally dealt with. Women were required to be covered from head to toe, but they were still allowed to vote.

2. Khomeini actively pushed his brand of Islamic rule, promoting its spread throughout the Muslim world. He supplied rhetoric and money to support radical Islamic groups like Al-Qaeda throughout the Middle East, much to the dismay of the West.