

Axis powers: the powers of Germany, Italy and Japan, who, along with their supporters, fought against the Allied powers in World War II

Allies: the name for the countries that allied themselves against the Axis powers during World War II. They included the United States, the Soviet Union and Britain and her former colonies.

Soviet Union (officially the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or USSR). The war, which now involved nations all around the globe, was basically fought between the **Axis powers** (supported by pro-Nazi governments in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia) and the Allied powers (the **Allies**), which included Britain and her former colonies, the Soviet Union and the United States.

Australia's involvement

For Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies, Britain's involvement in war against Germany meant that he had to declare Australia's involvement as well.

Many Australians did not support this pro-British conclusion. The Australian Labor Party declared its opposition to Australians serving outside Australian territory and men did not rush to enlist as they had in 1914. In December 1941 Australia declared war on Japan in support of the United States, whom Australian Prime Minister John Curtin saw as the nation's only hope against the Japanese advance through Asia.

During the six-year war, nearly one million Australians participated in military campaigns against:

- German and Italian forces in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East
- Japanese forces in South-East Asia and the Pacific.

The Australian mainland came under direct attack when the Japanese bombed towns in northern Australia and Japanese midget submarines attacked Sydney Harbour.



Source 11

An extract from Prime Minister Robert Menzies' 3 September 1939 radio broadcast announcing Australia's entry into war against Germany

Source question

What is Menzies' 'melancholy duty' in source 11 and how does he justify it?

Fellow Australians. It is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that, in consequence of the persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war on her, and that, as a result, Australia is also at war...

It may be taken that Hitler's ambition is not to unite all the German people under one rule, but to bring under that rule as many countries as can be subdued by force. If this is to go on, there can be no security in Europe and no peace for the world.

A halt has been called. Force has had to be resorted to, to check force. The right of independent people to live their own lives, honest dealing, the peaceful settlement of differences, the honoring of international obligations — all these things are at stake.

There was never any doubt as to where Great Britain stood in regard to them. There can be no doubt that where Great Britain stands, there stands the people of the entire British world.

Published in *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 4 September 1939.

ACTIVITIES

CHECK KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What was the Weimar republic and what problems did it face?
- 2 Write a paragraph to explain how Hitler and the Nazis increased their power in the period from c.1923 to 1933.
- 3 Using appropriate historical terms, create a mind map to explain the factors leading to World War II. Use different colours to indicate those which are long- and short-term factors and/or those linked to specific countries or issues. Create a key to show what your colours represent. Alternatively, show this as a collage using words and images.

eBook plus Use the **Nazi propaganda** weblink to view a gallery of Nazi propaganda posters.

eBook plus Use the **Doormat cartoon** weblink to view an interpretation of David Low's cartoon.

STUDENT WORKBOOK 2.1 The rise of Nazism

2.2 The European war begins

'Phoney war', blitzkrieg and the Battle of Britain, 1939–40

Following their September 1939 invasion, German forces very quickly gained control of western Poland (Soviet troops took the east). For some months after that, during what became known as the 'phoney war', there was very little fighting. Then, from 9 April 1940, German troops began their occupation of Norway and Denmark and moved to take control of the Netherlands, Belgium and 60 per cent of France. By late June 1940, Germany controlled a large area of northern and western Europe. Of its western European opponents, only Britain remained free.

Source 1

Map showing German expansion from 1936 to mid 1940



Source question

List the areas that Germany brought under its control in the period 1936–1940.

Contestability: Blitzkrieg

Some historians use the term *blitzkrieg*, meaning 'lightning war', to describe German tactics and methods in the early part of the war. For them, blitzkrieg refers to German forces coordinating aircraft, artillery, infantry and tanks in short, quick attacks to gain control of territory before enemy forces had time to mobilise, organise defences and retaliate. German forces moved decisively at great speed and then moved on, having created panic among the civilian population and leaving the enemy government and its military confused and ineffectual. Reinforcements then took control of the newly gained territory.

Other historians contest this and argue that, rather than being a new, carefully planned form of warfare, Germany's military actions at this time evolved in response to doing what was needed to gain quick victories. They say that blitzkrieg, a term invented by *Time* magazine reporters, became a convenient explanation for the Allies' early failures.

The evacuation of Dunkirk, May–June 1940

By 20 May 1940, advancing German forces had pushed British, French and Belgian troops back to an area of coastline about 97 km in length and 24–40 km in width around the French port of Dunkirk, just south of the French–Belgian border. The Germans surrounded them and blocked potential support from the rest of the Allied forces in France.