

## 7.7: Conducting World War II

### Standards Table

Theme	Learning Objective	Key Concept(s)	Historical Thinking Skill(s)	Standards Alignment
Governance (GOV)	Explain similarities and differences in how governments used a variety of methods to conduct war	KC-6.2.IV.A.ii; KC-6.1.III.C.ii	Comparison, Causation, Contextualization, Sourcing	AP World History: Modern Unit 7

### Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify major methods governments used to wage World War II.
- Explain how total war required the mobilization of civilians, industry, ideology, and empire.
- Analyze historical documents through sourcing, contextualization, and evidence use.
- Evaluate similarities and differences in how democratic, fascist, communist, and imperial governments conducted World War II.

### Lesson Overview

World War II was fought not only by armies at the front but by whole societies organized for total war. Governments directed factories, rationed consumer goods, censored information, spread propaganda, conscripted soldiers, and mobilized women, colonial subjects, and occupied populations for labor and military service. In both democratic and authoritarian states, governments claimed extraordinary powers in the name of survival, but the methods they used and the degree of coercion often differed sharply. Totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union demanded sweeping sacrifice and exercised intense control over daily life, while Britain and the United States also expanded state power through propaganda, industrial planning, and mass mobilization.

At the same time, new military technologies and tactics dramatically increased wartime casualties. Strategic bombing, submarine warfare, mechanized offensives, and eventually the atomic bomb widened the scale of destruction beyond the battlefield. Civilians became direct targets through bombing campaigns, occupation policies, genocide, and forced labor systems. In this lesson, you will work with AP-style documents showing how different governments mobilized populations and used ideology, media, and technology to conduct war. As in a DBQ, you will need to identify

point of view, purpose, audience, and historical situation while building an argument about both similarity and difference.

### Essential Vocabulary

- **Total War:** Warfare in which states mobilize all available military, economic, political, and social resources for victory.
- **Strategic Bombing:** The use of air power to destroy an enemy's industry, transportation, cities, or morale.
- **Rationing:** Government control of scarce goods to ensure that resources are directed toward the war effort.
- **Forced Labor:** Compulsory labor extracted by governments or occupying powers, often under coercive or brutal conditions.
- **Home Front:** The civilian sphere of wartime life in which populations support military campaigns through labor, production, sacrifice, and mobilization.

### Background Reading

World War II required governments to mobilize societies on a scale greater than in any previous war. States directed industrial output toward weapons, vehicles, ships, aircraft, and munitions while rationing food, fuel, and consumer goods. In the United States, wartime agencies coordinated production and labor, helping transform the economy into an enormous military supply system. In Britain, rationing, civil defense, and propaganda tied daily life directly to survival in war. Outside evidence such as the War Production Board or British ration books can help students explain how governments expanded their authority over civilian life.

Governments also used propaganda, media, and ideology to secure support and obedience. Democratic governments often appealed to patriotism, sacrifice, and defense of freedom, while fascist and totalitarian governments relied more heavily on censorship, surveillance, ideological conformity, and direct repression. Nazi Germany mobilized citizens through intense nationalism and racial ideology while simultaneously stripping away basic freedoms and using terror against political enemies, Jews, and occupied peoples. The Soviet Union, under communist rule, mobilized labor and military service in the name of defending socialism and the motherland. These differences matter because they show that all governments conducted total war, but not all did so in the same way or to the same extent.

Colonies and former colonies also played an important role in the war effort. Britain drew heavily on India, African colonies, and other imperial territories for soldiers, laborers, and resources. France relied on colonial troops, and Japan mobilized labor and military support from its empire across East Asia. These contributions reveal that World War II was not just a European war but a truly global conflict sustained by

imperial systems. Outside evidence such as Indian troop service, African labor battalions, or Korean labor under Japanese rule can strengthen a DBQ argument about the global character of wartime mobilization.

Military technology and tactics also changed how governments fought. Mechanized warfare and air power increased the speed and destructiveness of campaigns, while strategic bombing deliberately targeted industrial centers and civilian areas. Nazi Germany used blitzkrieg to combine tanks, aircraft, and rapid movement for shock effect, while the Allies later relied on sustained bombing campaigns against German and Japanese cities. The war's final stage introduced atomic weapons, whose destructive power far exceeded previous forms of warfare. In a DBQ, students can compare these methods to World War I to show continuity in total war but change in the scale of civilian vulnerability and technological destruction.

## DBQ Documents Analysis Section

### Document 1

- **Type of Source:** Government propaganda poster text
- **Author:** United States Office of War Information
- **Date:** 1943

“Behind every soldier stands a worker, and behind every worker stands a nation determined to prevail. The battlefield is not only in the jungle, on the sea, or in the skies above Europe; it is also in the factory, the shipyard, the field, and the home. Every hour lost to carelessness, absenteeism, or waste delays victory and endangers American lives. The task before us demands discipline no less real than that required of the men at the front. Buy bonds, conserve fuel, accept rationing, and produce without interruption. Our enemies have organized all their strength for conquest, and free people must prove that sacrifice freely chosen is stronger than obedience forced by fear. The war will be won not by courage alone, but by the combined labor of millions who understand that in modern conflict the nation itself must become an instrument of battle.”

**Historical Situation:** The United States government used mass media and propaganda to mobilize civilians after entering World War II.

**Perspective / Limitation:** As wartime propaganda, this source highlights patriotic voluntary sacrifice and understates social tensions, labor disputes, and inequalities on the home front.

**Use in Argument:** This document can be used to show how democratic governments mobilized civilian labor, consumption, and morale in total war.

## Questions

1. How does the purpose of this propaganda source shape the way it presents civilian sacrifice and labor?
2. What evidence in the document shows that the U.S. government viewed the home front as part of the battlefield?
3. How does this document help explain one method governments used to conduct total war during World War II?

## Document 2

- **Type of Source:** Political speech
- **Author:** Joseph Goebbels
- **Date:** 1943

“The struggle in which we are engaged has entered a stage in which half-measures can no longer suffice. A war of this magnitude demands that the nation place every remaining reserve at the service of victory. Luxury, private convenience, and habits formed in easier years must now yield to the iron necessities of existence itself. The enemy does not aim merely at defeating our armies; he seeks the destruction of our people, our order, and our future. Therefore every German must understand that this is no conflict for limited aims, but a total war requiring total commitment. The state must direct labor where it is most needed, silence defeatism wherever it appears, and ensure that no individual interest obstructs the common struggle. If sacrifices are greater, it is because the danger is greater. Only a nation prepared to subordinate all aspects of life to war can prove worthy of survival in such an age.”

**Historical Situation:** After major setbacks, Nazi leaders called for even more complete mobilization of German society.

**Perspective / Limitation:** The speech is ideological and coercive, presenting obedience and state control as necessities while concealing the regime’s responsibility for the war and its repressive brutality.

**Use in Argument:** This document can be used to show how totalitarian regimes used ideology and repression to justify intensified wartime control.

## Questions

1. How does Goebbels’s position within the Nazi state shape the message and tone of this speech?
2. What evidence in the document shows the expansion of state control over daily life?
3. How does this document help explain both similarities and differences in wartime mobilization among governments?

### Document 3

- **Type of Source:** Government order
- **Author:** Soviet State Defense Committee
- **Date:** 1942

“In the face of the fascist assault upon Soviet territory, every institution of the state, every factory collective, and every citizen capable of labor is required to place the defense of the motherland above all personal considerations. Industrial enterprises essential to armaments, transport, and military supply shall continue production without interruption, and local authorities are charged with eliminating disorder, idleness, and speculation. The movement of machinery, technical personnel, and workers to secure regions shall proceed according to military necessity, not private preference. At the same time, all propaganda organs are instructed to strengthen public resolve by demonstrating that the present struggle is both a patriotic duty and a defense of socialism itself. The enemy must be met not only at the front but in the workshop, on the railway, and in the discipline of civilian life. Victory requires the concentration of all resources in the hands of the state.”

**Historical Situation:** The Soviet Union mobilized industry, labor, and ideology after the German invasion.

**Perspective / Limitation:** The source emphasizes patriotic necessity and centralized planning, but it minimizes the hardships of forced relocation, labor pressure, and harsh discipline imposed on civilians.

**Use in Argument:** This document can be used to show how communist governments combined ideological appeal and centralized command to conduct total war.

### Questions

1. How does the emergency context of German invasion shape the policies described in this order?
2. What evidence in the document shows both economic and ideological mobilization?
3. How does this document help explain similarities and differences between Soviet and other governments’ wartime methods?

### Document 4

- **Type of Source:** Colonial military appeal
- **Author:** British imperial recruitment office in India
- **Date:** 1941

“At this decisive hour, the safety of India and of the wider empire depends upon the loyal service of those prepared to defend civilization against aggression. The war is not a

distant quarrel but a struggle whose outcome will affect trade, security, and the future of all peoples under the Crown. Indian soldiers have already shown distinction in many theaters, and the need now is greater than ever. Service offers honor, pay, training, and the opportunity to participate in a cause larger than any province or community. Every village that sends its sons contributes not merely to imperial defense but to the protection of homes, harvests, and livelihoods from a world descending into violence. The enemy relies on terror and conquest; the empire calls instead for courage, discipline, and common purpose. Those who enlist stand in defense of order, stability, and the future of the lands to which they will return.”

**Historical Situation:** Britain drew on India and other colonies for troops and support during World War II.

**Perspective / Limitation:** This source frames imperial service as honorable and protective while obscuring the unequal power relationship of colonial rule and anti-colonial criticism.

**Use in Argument:** This document can be used to show how imperial governments mobilized colonial populations as part of total war.

### Questions

1. How does the intended audience of this source shape the promises and language it uses?
2. What evidence in the document shows how Britain connected colonial service to the wider war effort?
3. How does this document help explain the global and imperial dimensions of conducting World War II?

### Document 5

- **Type of Source:** Medical and military report
- **Author:** Japanese physician attached to a city relief office
- **Date:** 1945

“The destruction inflicted in a single morning surpassed the effects ordinarily associated with repeated air raids conducted over many months. Persons at considerable distance from the center of the explosion presented burns of unusual severity, injuries from flying debris, and symptoms that could not be explained solely by blast or flame. Hospitals already damaged by the attack proved incapable of receiving the wounded in any organized manner, and those charged with relief were compelled to improvise among scenes of general ruin. The number of dead cannot be determined with precision, but it is evident that entire districts ceased to function within moments. Many among the survivors, though outwardly less injured, later exhibited weakness, fever, and bleeding for which existing medical experience offers no satisfactory

account. It must therefore be concluded that this new weapon has introduced into warfare a form of destruction not limited to immediate mechanical force, but extending in ways still imperfectly understood.”

**Historical Situation:** Japanese observers documented the human consequences of atomic bombing in 1945.

**Perspective / Limitation:** The source captures the immediate medical and humanitarian effects of atomic warfare but does not address Allied strategic reasoning or broader wartime context.

**Use in Argument:** This document can be used to show how new military technology dramatically increased casualties and altered the conduct of war.

### Questions

1. How does the author’s role as a medical observer shape the type of evidence included in this report?
2. What evidence in the document shows that atomic warfare differed from earlier forms of bombing?
3. How does this document help explain how new technology changed the conduct and human cost of World War II?

### Document 6

- **Type of Source:** Forced labor testimony
- **Author:** Polish civilian laborer in German-controlled territory
- **Date:** 1944

“We were told that our labor was necessary for order and production, but in truth we were taken because the factories required hands and the authorities believed that occupied peoples existed to serve German needs. Food was insufficient, movement was restricted, and any complaint could be answered with beating, imprisonment, or disappearance. The work itself was never presented as temporary; it was part of a system in which war swallowed all distinctions between soldier and civilian, factory and prison. Guards spoke of duty and victory, yet what they demanded was not patriotic sacrifice freely given but toil enforced by fear. We understood that the machines we fed were making weapons for a war not our own, while our own communities were left weakened by arrests, shortages, and terror. In such conditions, production became another form of occupation, and the enemy’s war extended into every hour of ordinary life.”

**Historical Situation:** Nazi Germany relied heavily on forced labor from occupied territories to sustain its war economy.

**Perspective / Limitation:** As a victim testimony, this source vividly captures coercion

and suffering, though it is limited to one person's experience rather than a full administrative view.

**Use in Argument:** This document can be used to show how totalitarian states conducted war through forced labor, occupation, and repression.

### Questions

1. What perspective does this source provide on how Nazi Germany sustained wartime production?
2. What evidence in the document shows that labor mobilization in occupied Europe was coercive rather than voluntary?
3. How does this document help explain a major difference between authoritarian and democratic wartime mobilization?

### Document 7

- **Type of Source:** Strategic bombing memorandum
- **Author:** Allied air force planner
- **Date:** 1944

“In a war sustained by industry, transport, electrical power, and the morale of urban populations, air attack offers the means to strike not merely armies in the field but the entire mechanism by which the enemy continues resistance. Factories do not function in isolation; they depend upon rail networks, fuel depots, workers' housing, and municipal services. To confine bombing only to the immediate line of battle would be to misunderstand the nature of modern war, in which the productive capacity of the whole society has become an essential military target. It is regrettable that civilians must bear a share of the burden, yet such consequences arise from the enemy's decision to organize its economic life for aggression. If bombing can shorten the war by reducing production, disrupting transport, and undermining confidence in victory, then it may save lives otherwise lost in prolonged ground campaigns. The conduct of modern war leaves no clean separation between the front and the city behind it.”

**Historical Situation:** Allied strategists defended large-scale bombing of cities and industrial infrastructure during World War II.

**Perspective / Limitation:** The source rationalizes civilian destruction as military necessity and downplays the ethical and humanitarian consequences of strategic bombing.

**Use in Argument:** This document can be used to show how total war blurred the line between civilian and military targets.

## Questions

1. How does the author justify bombing civilian-linked infrastructure as part of military strategy?
2. What evidence in the document shows the logic of total war?
3. How does this document help explain similarities and differences in wartime methods used by major governments?

## Methods Governments Used to Conduct World War II

Method	Documents	How the method functioned
Propaganda and morale mobilization	1, 2, 4	Governments used media and patriotic language to gain support, labor, enlistment, and sacrifice
State control of labor and production	1, 2, 3, 6	Governments directed industry, labor, and resources toward war, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes by force
Ideological mobilization	2, 3	Fascism and communism justified sacrifice, obedience, and expanded state authority
Imperial / colonial mobilization	4, 6	Empires drew on colonies and occupied peoples for soldiers, labor, and resources
New technology and tactics	5, 7	Atomic warfare and strategic bombing increased civilian vulnerability and total destruction

## Similarities and Differences in Wartime Conduct

Government / System	Similarities	Differences
United States / Britain	Used propaganda, rationing, industrial mobilization, strategic bombing	Relied more on voluntary patriotic language and formal political freedoms, though still expanded state power
Nazi Germany	Mobilized labor, propaganda, technology, and total war	Used racial ideology, terror, forced labor, and extensive repression on a massive scale
Soviet Union	Mobilized labor, propaganda, state-directed production, military sacrifice	Combined communist ideology with harsh centralized control and compulsory labor discipline
Japanese Empire	Used nationalism, imperial mobilization, and new technology	Drew heavily on imperial coercion and later experienced atomic warfare directly

## Historical Reasoning Section

### Change Over Time

Compared with earlier wars, World War II required even greater state involvement in economic life, media, labor, and everyday civilian behavior. Governments did not simply raise armies; they reorganized entire societies around military production and ideological commitment. Strategic bombing and atomic warfare also made civilians more directly vulnerable than in most earlier conflicts. Although World War I had already introduced aspects of total war, World War II expanded them through larger industrial systems, wider imperial mobilization, and more destructive technology. In a DBQ, students can use this change over time to argue that World War II deepened the fusion of military and civilian spheres.

### Continuity Over Time

Some wartime methods in World War II continued patterns already visible in earlier periods. Governments still used nationalism to inspire loyalty, portrayed sacrifice as honorable, and justified expanded state authority in the name of security. Empires continued drawing on colonial subjects for labor and military service, just as imperial powers had done before. States also continued to link industrial strength to military success. In a DBQ, this continuity helps students show that total war methods had earlier roots, even though their scale and intensity increased.

### Comparison

Different governments used similar methods such as propaganda, industrial mobilization, censorship, and mass sacrifice, but they differed in the degree of coercion and ideology involved. Democratic governments like the United States and Britain typically framed sacrifice as patriotic duty within systems that formally preserved civil institutions, while totalitarian states such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union exercised much broader direct control over labor, expression, and daily life. At the same time, all major powers accepted actions that placed civilians at greater risk, including bombing campaigns and harsh home-front controls. In a DBQ, comparison allows students to argue that World War II governments were similar in mobilization but different in political structure, ideological purpose, and treatment of subject populations.

## Key Takeaways

- World War II was a total war in which governments mobilized entire societies, not only armies.
- Democratic, fascist, communist, and imperial governments all used propaganda, industrial control, and nationalism, but they differed in degree of coercion and repression.
- Colonies and occupied territories were essential to the global war effort through military service, labor, and resource extraction.
- Strategic bombing, fire-bombing, and atomic warfare increased civilian casualties and blurred the line between battlefield and home front.
- Comparing governments is essential: they shared methods of mobilization, but not the same political goals, ideologies, or limits on state power.

## DBQ Practice Section

### **Prompt:**

Evaluate the extent to which World War II governments used similar methods to conduct total war.

### **Task Instructions:**

Develop a thesis. Use at least 4 documents. Include outside evidence. Explain sourcing for at least 2 documents.