Topic #2: Origins of Major Power Wars

Name

Institution

**Origins of Major Power Wars**

**Introduction**

In the 1900s, the British, Germans, French, and Russia were major powers (Lecture Notes, p. 4). They acquired this name as a result of their military, economic and political supremacy worldwide (Fromkin, 2005). Despite being major powers, these nations participated in many wars. World War I and the Second World War represents some of the wars in which these nations were involved. Due to these wars, other major powers such as the United States and Russia emerged. In this discussion, how militarism, alliances and politics, imperialism, and Archduke Ferdinand's assassination led to World War will be covered. Besides, the way aspects like a betrayal of the Treaty of Versailles, weak nations, and harsh economic conditions triggered World War II will be explored.

**World War I (WWI)**

**Background Information**

World War I is one of the most recognized wars in Europe. This war occurred between the years 1914 and 1918. By the end of World War I, about seventeen million individuals had died. The world powers affected by WWI include Britain, France, Germany, Hungary, and many others. The First World War ended after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. With the help of this treaty, many nations agreed to reduce the number of their military. Major Powers were also assured of maintaining their colonies. Several factors played pivotal and crucial roles in WWI in Europe (Fromkin, 2005). Whereas what triggered WWI is infinitely more complex and still debated up to date, the paragraphs below will provide an overview of its origin.

**Origins of World War I**

The first cause of the First World War was militarism. As major powers entered the early 1900s, an arms race had already started in Europe. In specific, many nations in Europe began to enhance the population of their troops (Lecture Notes, P 9). As learned, one of the significant dilemmas that can contribute to war is an arms race (Lecture Notes, p. 9). They also initiated training programs in a bid for preparing most of the young men for war. Apart from training, nations enhanced their military weapons, quality armor, and many other elements. For instance, by 1914, the Germans owned about one hundred warships (Fromkin, 2005). It had also exposed about two million men to its military training program. However, nations such as Britain enhanced their naval warships. The aftermath of the steps mentioned above is that militarism began to influence public policy, thus pushing major powers to war.

The other aspect which led to this war was alliances and politics. In the years before WWI, European countries were quickly forming alliances and extending their power. For instance, the Germans allied with the Italians and Austria–Hungary. In specific, these nations agreed that they would protect each other if they were attacked by nations such as the French (Lecture Notes, 11).

Nonetheless, Italians broke the agreement by forming a secret alliance with the French, stating that they would barely support the Germans (Fromkin, 2005). The Russians and French allied in 1892 in a bid for responding to Germans alliances. In 1904, the French and British also made another alliance. In 1907, the French, Russians, and the British signed another agreement identified as Triple Entente. With these alliances, the Germans felt that the nations surrounding them posed a real threat in Europe. The structural theory measures power and predicts war if an unstable balance threatens the survival of a state (Lecture Notes, p. 17). Thus, the Germans opted to start the First World War.

Apart from alliances, imperialism triggered World War I. In the years before the war, the British, French, and Germans were great enemies in the economic exploitation of the Africans' colonizing. Many incidents linked with the Germans in Africa stimulated the British and French fears, who resolved their disparities in the region to protect what they had. Britain and France were particularly concerned that the Germans were opposing and challenging the established colonial order (Fromkin, 2005). On the contrary, in the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire's collapse added conflict between nations such as Serbia, Austria-Hungry, and many other nations.

The other aspect which enabled European nations to get involved in this war is nationalism. The Germans' Prussian-led unification in the 1900s was most likely attained via a battle with the French. The start of a broad German state in the center of Europe interfered with its continental geopolitical landscape and left the French ready to revenge.

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However, in the East, Balkans faced hurdles with the nations and groups which opposed Austrian control. Specifically, the Serbians intended to join the entire Slavs in the areas where it controlled (Fromkin, 2005). The Russian Empire supported this ambition. However, when the Germans decided to support the Serbian demands, they triggered World War I.

Finally, the immediate cause of the First World War, which set the above-mentioned factors into motion, was Archduke Ferdinand's assassination. This specific event is broadly perceived to be the most important event which leads to the war. Archduke was an emperor of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. When Archduke revealed that he intended to trip to Saravejo, Bosnians found the chance to strike him (Fromkin, 2005). The Bosnians assassinated him given that they intended to have their nation and not be governed by Austria-Hungary. The assassins who were hired to kill him were particularly identified as the Black Hand.

After the death of Archduke, Austria-Hungary administrators observed the assassination as a direct attack on their nation. They also perceived that the Serbians played pivotal roles in helping the Bosnians organize the assassinations. In response, the Austrian government began to make harsh demands on Serbia which its administrators opposed (Fromkin, 2005). As a consequence, Russians started to mobilize the military in a bid to protect the Serbians. In all these dynamics, major powers were the major players in the war and influenced the weaker states (Lecture Notes, p. 17). When the Serbians opposed the demands, Austria-Hungary opted to engage the Serbians in a war. After some days, the Germans declared that they would attack the Russians to help their ally Austria-Hungary. As Germany showed, Allies are always ready to help each other. Likewise, the French started to mobilize their allies and military in a bid to help Austria-Hungary. A few days later, the Germans proceeded by declaring war on the French, leading to World War I.

**World War II**

**Background Information**

World War II (WWII) was one of the deadliest and biggest wars in Europe's history. About thirty nations were involved in this war. The major powers battled for six years during WWII until the Japanese and Germans were overpowered by the Allies in 1945. The Second World War started in Europe when the Germans declared that they were invading Poland. The conflict between the Soviets and the Americans started on 22nd June 1941. Over seventeen million individuals were killed during WWII, including forty million civilians and twenty million military personnel. Most of the people died due to mass bombings, starvation, genocide, infections, and many other aspects. In the next paragraphs, the origin of WWII will be explored in detail.

**Origin of World War II**

First of all, major powers participated in this war since they felt betrayed by the Treaty of Versailles. As mentioned above, this was a treaty that was signed to end the First World War. The Germans opposed this treaty, given that they noticed it was flawed in several ways. For instance, they felt that the treaty had forced them to pay heavy reparations. According to the Institutional theory of war, chances of war are higher if there are no institutional mechanisms for negotiation binding agreements between world powers. For instance, Germans felt disenfranchised and believed the treaty would make them lose their colonies (Lecture Notes, p. 18). Finally, Germany felt threatened that this treaty had forced it to reduce the population of its troops. A war can be caused when a nation feels that an adversary coalition has been created to block its rise and to create an unstable balance of power (Lecture Notes p. 10). In this context, Germany felt weak that it could be easily dominated when attacked by its enemies.

Secondly, harsh economic conditions led to the Second World War. The economic downtowns are linked with creating global, political, and civil unrest (Andrade, 2016). The Germans were mainly hit hard by hyperinflation in the years 1923 and 1924. Although Germany recovered after some years, the global crash that hit it in 1929 led to another economic downturn. Apart from the global crash, the Great Depression also played an active role in creating another economic downtown. Although many efforts were implemented to curb its aftermath, the Germans hardly benefited from the reforms. Consequently, the Great Depression particularly created problems such as unemployment, poor living conditions, and so on.

The other aspect which led to WWII was politically chaotic and weak nations. China and Germany represent some of the nations which experienced this problem. One of the major sources of war is a country’s analysis of relative power and objective threat (Lecture Notes, p. 5). For example, In China, the warlords of several provinces frequently feuded, and its central government was weak, thus not doing anything to minimize the conflict. In 1927, Chiang acquired the power of controlling the Chinese government (Andrade, 2016). In this context, he organized the Chinese army to an expedition to overpower the warlords in the Southern part of China and acquire the north's warlords' support. Although he was successful in this effort, Chiang was kidnapped by the deposed warlord until he agreed to unite with the communists against attacking Japan. In response, Japan decided to stage the Battle of Lugou Bridge to stimulate an open war between the Chinese and Japanese. As a result of this strategy being successful, the Sino-Japanese War began. Overall, this was part of the Second World War, which began years before other major powers got involved in WWII.

The last aspect which exacerbated World War II was the failure of peace efforts. In the 1920s, many efforts were made so that nations in Europe would attain stable peace. This aspect was evident when major power came up with the League of Nations. The League's main intention was to settle the common disputes among the major powers (Kindsvatter, 2003). Despite this effort, this league power was restricted due to persuasion and many levels of sanctions. In the Washington Conference of 1921 and 1922, the principal naval powers agreed to restrict their navies based on a fixed ratio. Apart from the League of Nations, the Washington of Congress enabled the powerful nations to develop a treaty that arbitrated agreement between Poland and the Germans. Even though all the major powers were involved in the efforts mentioned above, failure to keep their promises exposed them to the Second World War (Kindsvatter, 2003).

**Conclusion**

In this deliberation, the origin of major power wars has been explored. The wars whose origins have been traced include World War I and World War II. The aspects which triggered WWI were nationalism, militarism, imperialism as well as alliances and politics. The last aspect which exacerbated the First World War was the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand. On the contrary, World War II emerged due to the failure of peace efforts. It was also triggered by the harsh economic conditions and breaking of the Treaty of Versailles. The economic downtowns were caused by the Great Depression and civil, political as well as global unrest. World War II further began due to weak and chaotic nations. In general, this war affected major powers negatively.

References

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