**Government 1732**

**The Origins of Modern Wars**

World War II and Military Strategy

Strategy is the application and distribution of military means for political ends. WWII is an excellent window into the analysis of military strategy, because both the means and the ends were so extreme. As in WWI, the great powers expended massive amounts of lives and resources. But *unlike* WWI, these efforts produced major changes that created the modern world as we know it. During WWII, the Allies occupied and transformed two of the most powerful states; they replaced a multipolar system with bipolar competition; Western Europe became peaceful and cooperative; empires begin to disintegrate; and nuclear weapons revolutionized military power.

None of this would have happened without the big powers making tough strategic choices. In section this week, we’ll focus on what those choices were, and what we think about them. In doing so, we will focus on the difference between analyzing military strategy ex ante and ex post. The distinction is important. After the fact, for instance, we know that Germany and Japan end up losing big. But we can argue over how close they came to achieving their objectives. What if Japan had not bombed Pearl Harbor, might Germany have ended up with dominion over Europe? By contrast, Britain ends up a winner. But in 1941 it was in a very bad position, and it was by no means assured that the US and the USSR would be able or willing to help.

So who was the better strategist: Hitler or Churchill? Did Japan’s leaders make a mistake in attacking the United States? What did the Soviets gain that was worth sacrificing twenty-five million lives? Based on what the great powers knew *before the fact*, how did they make major strategic decisions, and what do you think of them?

To address these questions I will again divide you up into groups. Each of you will focus on a particular country and its strategy for fighting the war. I understand you will be studying for the midterm this week, so this will help you prioritize your readings. I do not expect that you will be able to talk about other countries’ strategies. But you should be able to speak in section about the following aspects of your own:

* What were your objectives?
* What options did you have to achieve those objectives?
* What is your basic strategy?
* What are the benefits and drawbacks of this strategy? How likely was it to succeed?
* Was the strategy wise? If not, what should your country have done instead?

Unlike the debate, this is not a role-play: please address these questions objectively. That said, please try to see all sides of the issue. Germany and Japan lost the war but that does not mean their decisions were bad, and the reverse is true for the Allies.

Here are your assignments and some questions to think about:

Germany

*Monday Section*: Mary, Georgia, Andrew. *Tuesday Section*: Lila, Kyle H.

* What are the similarities and differences to the Schlieffen Plan – why would a bid for Continental dominance have failed last time and worked this time?
* What are some of the key assumption Germany needed to make in order for its plan to have worked?
* Why did you attack the USSR? What might have happened if you didn’t?
* How close do you think Germany came to succeeding?

Japan

*Monday Section*: May Lan, Eeke. *Tuesday Section*: Billy, Larmon

* What would have happened if you *didn’t* attack the United States?
* Why did you choose a surprise attack on the United States and what were the drawbacks of this approach?
* How did you think you were going to win this war?

France

*Monday Section*: Diana, Dan. *Tuesday Section*: Teddy, Becca

* What was the purpose of the Maginot Line and why might it have been a *good* idea?
* If you hadn’t chosen to rely on the Maginot Line, what else might you have done?
* Did your failures come from flaws in the concept or flaws in the execution?

Britain

*Monday Section*: Mauricio, Rebecca. *Tuesday Section*: Kyle C.

* Why did you continue to fight after the withdrawal from Dunkirk? Why not just sign a peace with the Germans?
* Was it wise to count on the United States entering the war?
* What was the point of invading Northern Africa?

USA

*Monday Section*: Rodolfo, Laura. *Tuesday Section*: Rob, Meseret

* Why enter the war in Europe at all? Wouldn’t the USSR have won it anyway?
* Why enter the war in the Pacific? What kinds of interests did we have in that conflict?
* If Germany and Japan had won then so what?
* How is your war strategy influenced by your interests in shaping the post-war order?

USSR

*Monday Section*: Joan, Paula. *Tuesday Section*: Naji, Catherine

* If the Germans hadn’t attacked you, do you think you would have entered the war?
* You ended up paying an enormous cost – was it worth it?
* What was the point of cooperating with the West; do you think Soviets were using this alliance for anything more than temporary, pragmatic purposes?
* How is your war strategy influenced by your interests in shaping the post-war order?