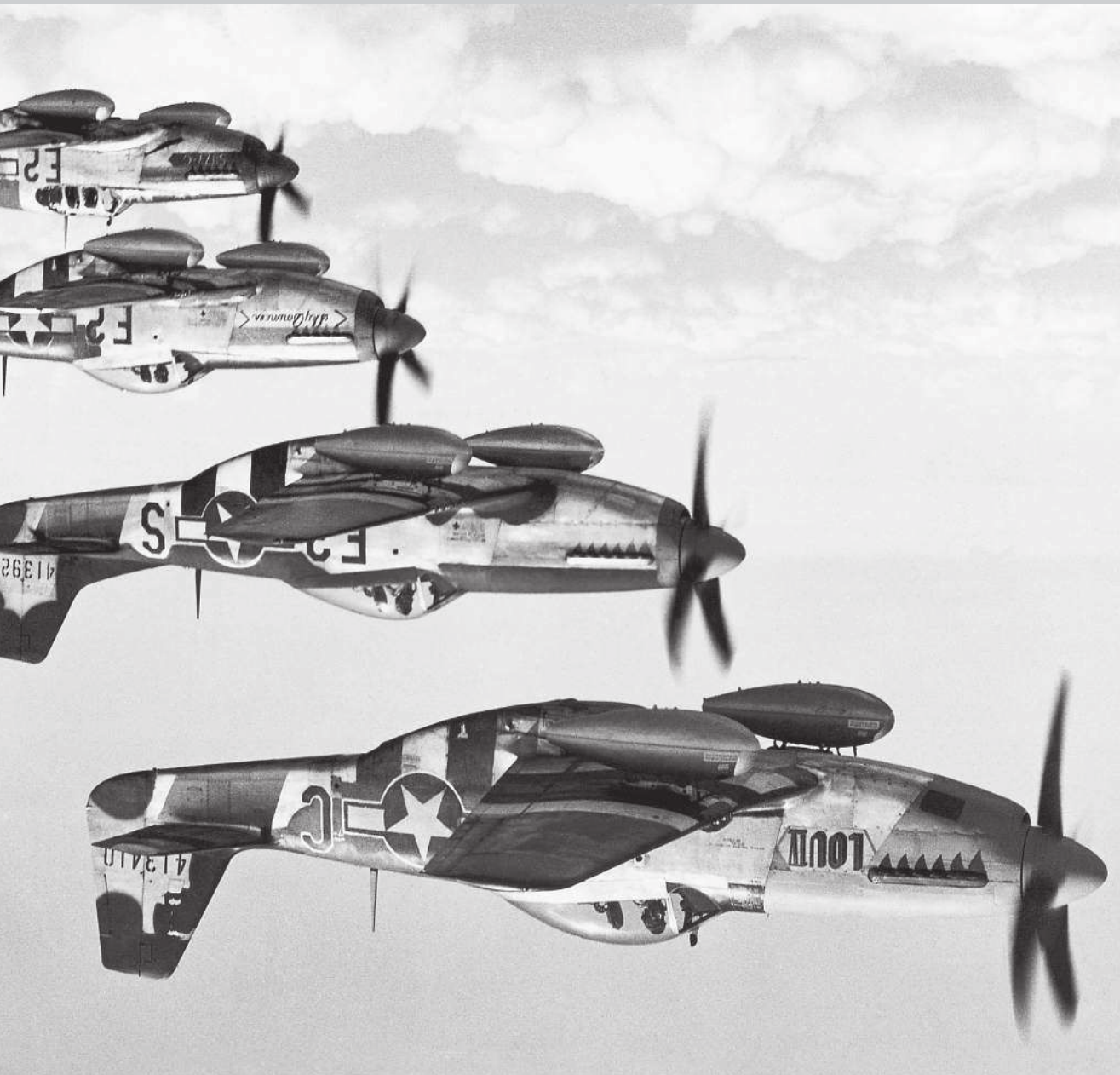


World War II

This is a revised and updated edition of Evan Mawdsley's acclaimed global history of World War II. Beginning with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, Evan Mawdsley shows how the war's origins lay in a conflict between the old international order and the new, and traces its globalisation as it swept through Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The primary focus is on the war's military and strategic history, though Mawdsley also examines the political, economic, ideological, and cultural factors which influenced the course of events. The war's consequences are examined too, not only in terms of the defeat of the Axis but also of the break-up of colonial empires and the beginning of the Cold War. Accessibly written and well-illustrated with maps and photographs, the book also includes insightful short studies of the figures, events, and battles that shaped the war, as well as fully updated guides to further reading.

Evan Mawdsley is an Honorary Professorial Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow. His extensive teaching experience at Glasgow included a specialist course on the grand strategy of World War II. He is the author of a number of recent important books and articles on World War II, including *Thunder in the East: the Nazi–Soviet War* (2006/2015), *December 1941: Twelve Days that Began a New World War* (2009), and *The War for the Seas: a Maritime History of World War II* (2019). He was also general editor of the three-volume *Cambridge History of the Second World War* (2016).

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World War II

A New History

Second Edition

Evan Mawdsley



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Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of this history of World War II was published in 2009. At the time I thought the word ‘new’ in the subtitle made sense. As well as taking account of recent writings by other historians, my analysis of how the war was fought attempted a significantly different approach.

The intention, as set out in the second sentence of the original Introduction (see below), was to break away from the ‘standard narrative’. The book looked reasonably objectively at the various power blocs. It also outlined the rationale of the proposed Axis ‘new order’ of international relations, not losing sight of the ‘old order’ which was being challenged. The basis of the latter included the Paris Peace Treaties of 1919 (‘Versailles’), which related largely to European issues. But it also included the Washington Treaties of 1922, which dealt with non-intervention in republican China and strategic relationships in the Pacific Ocean, which meant that this challenge to the old order had to be seen in global terms. One result of this *global* emphasis is that I took World War II to have begun with the outbreak of full-scale fighting in northern China in July 1937 – spreading south quickly to the Yangzi valley; September 1939 in Poland was a waystation, not a starting point. (The war in China from 1937 to 1945 had, for a range of reasons, been much neglected by Western historians. It is certainly one area where innovative and valuable historical writing has been produced in the decade after 2009.)

The 2009 book did not attempt to cover all aspects of the war. I spent part of the intervening decade as general editor (with five other editors) of the three-volume *Cambridge History of the Second World War*, bringing together the work of some seventy-five experts from around the globe. The *Cambridge History* examined not just the strategic and operational aspects of the war – the core subject of my 2009 *New History* – but also political, diplomatic, economic, social, environmental, and cultural ones. As a result I am quite convinced that the narrower focus of my 2009 book (and its 2020 successor) was correct; all aspects of the war cannot be compressed into one volume. On the positive side, I also came away from my editorial experience with a feeling that my overall judgements about what *was* dealt with in the 2009 edition had been sound. Also, my understanding of the maritime aspects of the war has improved, as I also spent a considerable time writing *The War for the Seas: a Maritime History of World War II* (published in 2019). But the overall arguments of this sea-war book were

initially worked out in the 2009 edition of *World War II: a New History*, especially in Chapters 7, 8, and 9.

The other issue to consider is whether the world has significantly changed in the ten years since 2009. Much, indeed, has happened. The financial crisis which began in 2008 shook liberal economic assumptions. The ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011 eventually caused untold suffering in the Middle East, but it also had unintended consequences in Europe, where the influx of refugees ignited heated debate. Meanwhile, for other reasons, relations between Russia and the West significantly worsened. China came to play a less cautious role in world affairs, incorporating an element of power politics. Longstanding assumptions about the post-1945 settlement were questioned by political forces in the West. Right-wing parties in Central Europe challenged what for two decades had been a liberal predominance. And then, in 2016, came the double shock of a referendum which led the British government to undertake withdrawal from the European Union, and a presidential election in which Donald Trump won on a platform of economic nationalism and the closing of borders.

Part of my response would be that the extraordinary liberal victory that emerged from the collapse of Communism in 1989 (the so-called ‘end of history’) had already been challenged in the two decades before 2009; the most notable element was the 9/11 atrocity and the ‘global war on terror’. But in any event the 2010s were still very different from the 1930s. Factors which were tellingly important in the decade before World War II are not evident in 2020, as they were not in 2009. These include Depression-based poverty in the population of the major powers, thirst for revenge (after defeat in World War I), powerful and irresponsible military elites, fear of Communism, lack of legitimacy for new forms of government after the collapse (in 1917–18) of the monarchies in Central and Eastern Europe, the uncertain territorial status of new nation states there, the tensions of formal imperialism in the Middle East and Asia, and the fragility and poverty of the Chinese republic.

It is still scarcely possible to conceive of a major war in Europe or in East Asia.¹ The countries that played a fatal role in the 1930s – Germany, Japan, Italy – are still bastions of stability, at least as far as external relations are concerned. The government in Moscow sees itself in more ‘Eurasian’ terms now, but the Russian Federation is still far less of a factor than in the Cold War, when the country possessed a larger population, a network of client states, a comprehensive international ideology (Communism), and powerful and balanced armed forces. Relations between the USA and China are more strained, but this is unlike either the Cold War or the situation in the 1930s; the Chinese ‘challenge’ is economic and technical, rather than political, territorial, ethnic, or military. And throughout – since 1945 – nuclear weapons remain a critical feature reducing the likelihood of large-scale war; their use had, and has, extremely counter-productive implications.

One final suggestion might be made. A real development of the past decade has been the growing awareness of the threat of climate change, and perhaps this does have a connection to World War II. A transnational, global structure was required to deliver Allied victory seventy to eighty years ago; this was accompanied by a remarkable degree of popular mobilisation, from both above and below. These may be a precedent for what will be involved in a determined response to the ecological challenges of coming decades.

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Finally, this book is dedicated to my family – Gillian, Michael, and Robyn. Having put up with a decade of the Eastern Front, they endured yet another World War II book. Despite all this their interest in History survived.



The heavy cruiser *Augusta*, flagship of the US Asiatic Fleet, anchored in the Huangpu River in August 1937. Shanghai burns in the background at the start of fighting there between the Chinese and the Japanese. After 1941 *Augusta* fought an action-filled war in European waters, escorting convoys to Russia and supporting with her heavy guns the Allied landings in North Africa and France. She transported President Harry Truman to and from Europe for the Potsdam Conference in July and August 1945. While sailing home in *Augusta*, eight years after the Shanghai fighting, the President released the news about the atomic attack on Hiroshima.