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## The World Wars



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*The significance of the two World Wars tends to get lost as time passes. Historically speaking both are important because they each authored a dramatic change in international relationships. Our significant take is that businesses, too, have a history to draw on and similar lessons to learn.*

**World War I:** Over the centuries, wars have been about jockeying for power. If one nation appears too strong and begins to push its way around, a few of the others combine forces to keep the big guy in check. The reason given for the first war (assassination in Sarajevo in 1914) was merely an excuse to tend to the obvious; Britain was the big guy so Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empires decided they would keep the British power and its partners (including Russia and France) in check. What neither side realized was that technology had changed the rules of the game. For the first time in human history, it was significant technology against significant technology along with the manufacturing might behind those technologies. The result was a stalemate. Neither side could advance upon the other. Previously, the outcome of wars was decided by one army outmaneuvering the other. One big battle would be the decisive one, and it was all over in a few weeks and sometimes in one day.

However, the technology of distant cannons kept the maneuvering of the troops themselves to a minimum. In fact, the soldiers had to dig in to protect themselves from the explosive environments and hence trench warfare was created. One side would attack the other, win, and gain a hundred meters of ground with a terrible loss of life. The next day the other side would attack to recover the ground lost, again at high losses to themselves. Britain invented another technological advantage to get over those trenches, the tank. However, Germany was not far behind in copying the new machinery.

What could decide such a war's outcome then? First, money. When one side ran out of the financial wherewithal to keep up the carnage, that side could no longer continue. Essentially both sides were bankrupt at the end of the WW I. Secondly, people would no longer stand for the leaders bringing the masses to the brink with the terrible deaths of the nations' young manhood, the devastating destruction of land, and financial collapse of their economies. So the people revolted; the German empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Russian empire collapsed at war's end along with their emperors. Britain too was on the political brink but, as the 'winner', Royalty did manage to survive.

**Significance of the War:** Out of this fiasco came a lesson for humankind: We learned that modern technology ensured that when major powers were involved, war was a losing game for both sides.

**Global Action on Lesson Learned:** Therefore, it was imperative to stop all great nations from deciding to attack one another. Thus was created *The League of Nations* – an objective watchdog over the world to stop any of the big boys from getting into wars again. While Canada was instrumental in setting up the League of Nations, Canada's leader, Mackenzie King, was equally instrumental in sabotaging it by creating a clause for Canada (which then applied to all nations) of being able to choose not to participate in policing action against an identified hostile nation. Hence, without any teeth, *The League of Nations* was a sham that could do nothing about the outbreak of World War II.

**Looking at Canada:** Because of Canada's huge contribution to the winning side of the World War I, Canada became a significant world nation for the first time in its history. (Canada had lost 3 times as many personnel in WW I as the United States. Britain was bankrupt, while Canada was stronger financially.) Canada also learned at that time that it could not automatically get a thank you from, or even trust, either Britain or the United States. United States for its part did not want Canada in on the World War I treaty negotiations. Further, Canada learned subsequently that in the event that should the U.S. ever decide to attack Canada (as Canada had only one border in the world and that was with the U.S.), Britain secretly documented an official policy that it would not come to Canada's aid.

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**World War II:** This war, too, started off attempting to keep things in check globally. Firstly, Hitler wanted to undo the horrible punishment inflicted on Germany by the Versailles Treaty at the end of World War I. Today, politically savvy people agree that the Versailles Treaty created a time bomb that would explode again as soon as Germany recovered from the World War I mess, regardless of who would be its leader. Besides, then Hitler, who was fond of Britain, wanted an alliance with Britain and called Britain one of the two greatest stabilizing forces in the world (along with the Roman Catholic church). Hitler gambled that upon his attacking Poland to regain previous German land, Britain would do nothing. He lost his gamble, because Britain's treaty with Poland was one that Britain followed through with. Thus began World War II in 1939. There was no significant trench warfare because another technology moved to the forefront: air bombing. Canada's troops sat in England for four years until the Normandy invasion was mapped out. Five years after it had begun, the war ended with the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**Significance of the War:** The learning from World War II was the knowledge that the atomic deterrent (then, in the hands only of U.S., Britain and Canada) could blow any aggressor apart in an instant. Russia, recognizing its vulnerability, developed its own nuclear weapons to have a balance of power. It took 30 years to sort out that balance, but by then all nations acknowledged that any major country that would go to war would not only be signing its own death warrant, but that of the entire world.

**Global Action:** Accepting the past failure of *The League of Nations*, Canada was instrumental in setting up an improved world body, called the United Nations. Russia scuttled the new world ship by insisting on two structural faults: the creation of the Security Council with only a few members monopolizing power, and the veto in the Security Council which ensured that a spoiled boy would get his way.

**Canadian Viewpoint:** The end of World War II saw Canada as an atomic power, a country with the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest navy in the world and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest armed forces in the world. Fortunately, Canada had suffered only 1/3 of the manpower losses in World War II versus World War I. Canada's economy had blossomed with war production to put Canada among the top five or six nations economically. Canada, recognizing the futility of the toothless United Nations, put the U.N. to use by creating an international police force for minor wars (for which, its author, Lester Pearson, won the Nobel Peace Prize).

**The Business Lesson:** One business lesson coming from modern war, is that both sides lose even when one side is declared the winner. Businesses that "go to war" (usually through lawyers) to resolve an issue will end up with both losing, even if one is nominally declared the winner. Far better to negotiate a settlement that, while usually felt to be unfair by each of them, will be far easier on them than any "war" would have been. A second lesson is that the combatting companies should get a third party involved; their "UN" would be a professional conflict mediator. And lesson three is to ensure the mediator has decision-making power.

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