



Chapter 34

Origins of World War II

Could World War II have been prevented?

34.1 Introduction

The Great Depression in the United States led to a worldwide depression. This depression and the effects of World War I had left the German economy in tatters. In the 1930s, a German dictator, Adolf Hitler, took advantage of Germany's troubles to stir up German nationalism. He rearmed the country, violating the Treaty of Versailles, and began to threaten his neighbors.

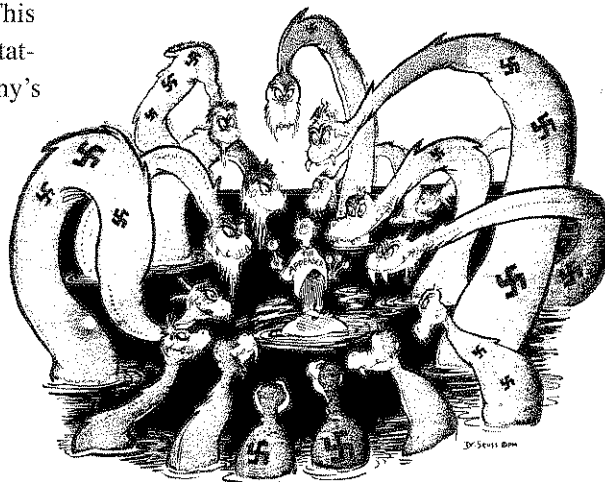
In 1936, German troops occupied the Rhineland, a German region on the border with France. Although the Versailles Treaty banned military activities in this region, the League of Nations did nothing in response. Two years later, Hitler demanded that the Sudetenland, a German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia, be turned over to Germany. At this point, many Europeans feared that Hitler was pushing Europe toward war.

France and Great Britain still bore the scars of World War I and would go to great lengths to prevent another conflict. In September 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain flew to Germany to talk with Hitler. At the meeting, Chamberlain asked Hitler if he would be satisfied with the Sudetenland and leave the rest of Czechoslovakia alone. Hitler convinced Chamberlain that his aims were peaceful and that he had no desire to control other countries.

France and Britain distrusted Hitler. Yet they had already decided on a policy of **appeasement**—yielding to an enemy's demands in order to maintain peace. Germany would get the Sudetenland, despite Czechoslovakia's objections. Chamberlain told the British people that it did not make sense to go to war over such a small territory. "If we have to fight, it must be on larger issues than that," he said. Chamberlain and Hitler then worked out the details of what became known as the **Munich Pact**. Together with the leaders of France and Italy, they signed the agreement in Munich, Germany, on September 29, 1938. Chamberlain flew home with doubts about the pact. But he also had hope.

◀ Neville Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler shake hands, September 30, 1938

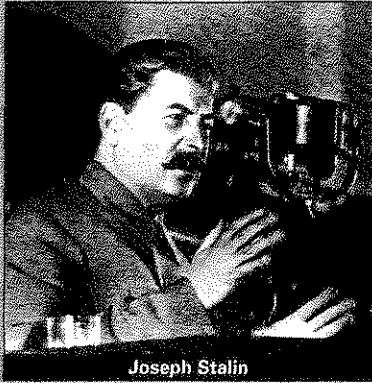
*'Remember . . . One More Lollypop,
and Then You All Go Home!'*



"The Appeaser" by Theodor Seuss Geisel, August 13, 1941, Dr. Seuss Collection, Mandeville Special Collections Library, UC San Diego

Theodore Geisel, known as Dr. Seuss, won fame as an author of children's books. During World War II, however, he drew hundreds of political cartoons. His cartoon "The Appeaser" shows a man offering candy to monsters bearing the swastika, the symbol of Hitler's Germany. It was a clear criticism of efforts to appease Hitler.

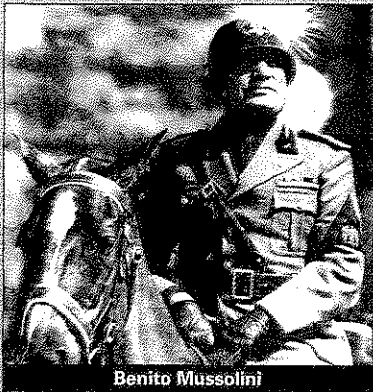
Characteristics of Totalitarianism in the Soviet Union Under Stalin



Joseph Stalin

- Communist Party as the only authority
- State planning of the economy
- State-owned collective farms
- Brutal purges to maintain political control

Characteristics of Fascism in Italy Under Mussolini



Benito Mussolini

- Extreme nationalism
- Individual liberties crushed
- State is paramount
- Bring back glory of ancient Rome through military conquest

34.2 Dictators and Militarists Rise to Power

Hitler's violation of the Treaty of Versailles boosted his popularity in Germany. Germans hated paying war reparations, as the treaty required. They also objected to the war-guilt clause, which blamed them for World War I. The nationalistic feelings aroused by the treaty allowed Hitler to seize control and turn Germany into a dictatorship. Nationalism also helped strong leaders take power in Italy and Japan. In the Soviet Union, however, dictatorship emerged from a different source—communism.

Stalin Creates a Totalitarian Dictatorship in the Soviet Union In 1917, the Russian Revolution overthrew Czar Nicholas II. Soon afterward, the Communist Party, led by Vladimir Lenin, established itself as the sole authority in the country. In 1922, the communists formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), commonly known as the Soviet Union. After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin plotted his way to power. By the early 1930s, Stalin had established a totalitarian dictatorship. **Totalitarianism** is a system in which the government totally controls all aspects of a society, including the economy.

Stalin set two main economic goals for the Soviet Union. He wanted to raise agricultural production and to modernize industry. The two goals were linked, in that increased exports of food would bring in cash to finance industrialization.

In 1928, Stalin established a Five-Year Plan to reach his goals. This plan called for taking private land from farmers and forcing them to move onto huge collective farms. Many farmers did not want to resettle on these cooperative, state-owned farms. But those who resisted were shot or forced to do hard labor in prisonlike concentration camps. Millions of others died in the famine that followed the shift to collective farms. Stalin could have diverted food to starving farmers, but instead he sold it abroad to earn cash. The industrial part of Stalin's plan was a success. By the early 1930s, modernized factories were churning out machinery, iron and steel, and consumer goods.

Stalin also used brutal methods to strengthen his control of the Communist Party. In 1934, he started to purge party officials by having them arrested, put on trial, and executed. By 1936, the Soviet secret police were rounding up and killing enormous numbers of party leaders, military officers, industrial managers, and others. This Great Purge, which claimed millions of lives, ensured that remaining officials would be loyal to Stalin.

Mussolini Establishes a Fascist Dictatorship in Italy Serious problems plagued Italy after the First World War. Inflation and labor strikes hurt the Italian economy, and communists threatened to take over the democratic government. In addition, Italians felt insulted by the Versailles Treaty, because its grant of territory to Italy fell far short of their expectations. Benito Mussolini, a veteran of the war, took advantage of conditions in Italy to emerge as a national figure and eventually form a dictatorship.

In 1919, Mussolini founded the first fascist political movement. **Fascism** is based on an extreme nationalism in which the state comes first

and individual liberty is secondary. Fascists are strongly opposed to communism and democracy. They favor military values, the use of violence, and a leader who is strong and ruthless. One fascist slogan in Italy called on youth to "believe, obey, fight." Another claimed, "A minute on the battlefield is worth a lifetime of peace." Fascism often arises during a time of crisis, promising to revive an earlier era of glory. In Italy's case, that era was ancient Rome.

Mussolini used his extraordinary skill at public speaking to promote fascism. He did not speak with the calm, soothing voice of Franklin Roosevelt in a fire-side chat. Instead, Mussolini agitated crowds with emotional outbursts and dramatic gestures. At these rallies, tough young men wearing black shirts provided security. These supporters also formed violent Blackshirt squads that broke up political meetings and labor strikes, assaulted socialists and communists, and terrorized local populations.

By 1922, fascists dominated several areas of Italy, and Mussolini prepared to take control of the whole country. In October, he and thousands of Blackshirts threatened to march on Rome. Influential business and army leaders persuaded Italy's king, Emmanuel III, that Mussolini might be able to solve the nation's problems. The king asked Mussolini to form a government. As prime minister, Mussolini quickly took charge, taking the name *Il Duce*, Italian for "the leader." Within a few years, he turned Italy into a fascist dictatorship. He banned labor unions, outlawed opposing political parties, and censored the press. He also employed spies and secret police to keep an eye on the people.

Mussolini wanted to build Italy's economy, and his industrial development and public works programs had some success. He also hoped to turn Italy into a great European power, using the Roman Empire as a model. Like the ancient Romans, he sought glory through military conquest.

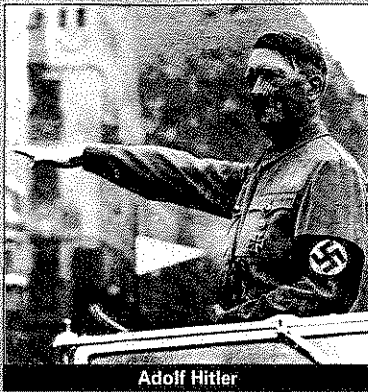
Hitler Leads the Rise of Nazism in Germany Like Italy, Germany also turned to fascism after World War I. In 1919, Adolf Hitler—Germany's future leader—joined a small political party that later became known as the Nazi Party. Under his leadership, this party would direct a mass movement based on a form of fascism known as *Nazism*. Nazis believed that Germans and other Nordic peoples—Hitler called them Aryans—were physically and morally superior to other races. Nazis wanted to purify Germany by removing other races, especially Jews.

Hitler laid out the Nazi philosophy in his book *Mein Kampf*, or "My Struggle." He started the book in 1924, while spending a year in prison for trying to overthrow the government of the German state of Bavaria. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler said that the superior Aryan race was locked in a struggle with other races. He introduced the idea of *Lebensraum*, or "living space," declaring that Germany needed land on which Aryan settlers could raise large families. Those families, in turn, would conquer more territory, expanding the German empire. Eventually, Germany and the Aryan race would rule the world.

The Nazis held mass rallies to motivate the German army and to inflame nationalist spirit. Tens of thousands of Germans would attend these events. Hitler spoke at this rally in Nuremberg in September 1934.



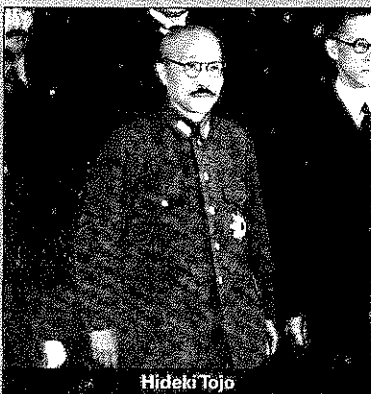
Characteristics of Nazism in Germany Under Hitler



Adolf Hitler

- Extreme nationalism and racism
- Territorial expansion to create "living space"
- Civil liberties abolished
- Force used to eliminate opposition

Characteristics of Militarism in Japan Under Tojo



Hideki Tojo

- Extreme nationalism
- Military control of civilian government
- Territorial expansion to obtain raw materials

Germany's economic depression gave Hitler the opportunity to spread his ideas. The country's parliamentary government could not cope with the crisis. Hungry, unemployed Germans began looking for a leader who could save the nation from ruin. Hitler addressed large crowds, blaming the Jews for nearly every German problem, from the world war to the depression. He promised to restore Germany's economy and empire. At these Nazi rallies, bodyguards protected Hitler.

Hitler's extreme nationalism appealed to many voters. In the 1932 elections, the Nazi Party won more seats in the parliament than any other political party in Germany. As a result, Hitler was named chancellor, or prime minister. He moved quickly to dissolve the republic, replacing German democracy with a totalitarian government.

The Nazis called this government the Third Reich—the successor to two earlier German empires. They passed new laws targeting Jews, barring them from certain jobs and exposing them to persecution. Jews and other "undesirables" were shipped off to concentration camps. Hitler also centralized the government, placing Nazis in the main positions of authority. In 1934, he became both president and chancellor, giving himself the title *der Führer*, or "the leader." Hitler now had complete command of Germany. He set about building Germany's military into a powerful war machine.

The Military Takes Control of the Government in Japan Like Germany, Japan had a mixed history of military rule and democracy. Before World War I, Japan had begun to industrialize. Lacking raw materials for industry, it relied on a strong military to obtain natural resources from other countries. After the war, however, Japan became less aggressive. It helped form the League of Nations in 1920. It also signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact, joining 14 other nations in a pledge to resolve disagreements peacefully. Civilians gained more power in the government, although Japan's emperor continued to play a strong role.

In the 1930s, however, the worldwide economic depression undermined civilian rule and caused Japan to move toward a policy of **militarism**. The Japanese military began to increase its power and to play a greater role in politics.

Japan's growing militarism was combined with an extreme form of nationalism. Many Japanese turned away from Western influences and embraced traditional values and culture. Radical nationalists also called for more aggressive military action abroad to acquire territory and raw materials. Like Hitler, they wanted to expand Japan's "living space" and acquire oil and other vital resources.

Some nationalists joined with a group of army officers in efforts to overthrow the civilian government. In 1932, they assassinated the prime minister. More assassinations and upheaval followed in 1936. The government put down these rebellions and executed the rebels. Nevertheless, civilian politicians, fearing for their lives, gave up more power to the military.

Japanese militarism got another boost in 1941, when General Hideki Tojo became prime minister, replacing a civilian leader. Tojo, an aggressive militarist, continued to develop the military and prepare the nation for war.

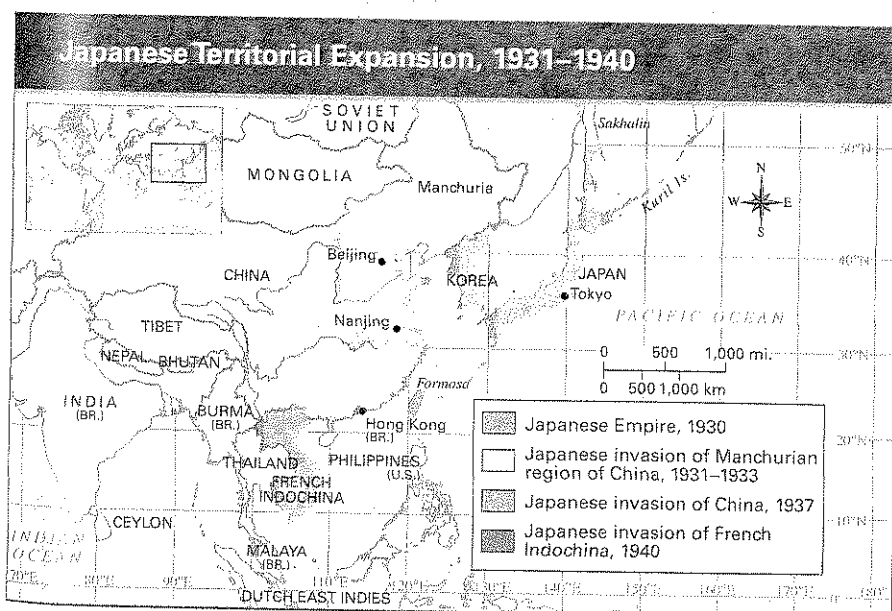
34.3 Military Aggression Meets a Weak Response

During the early 1930s, Americans still strongly favored isolationism. With the bitter memory of the first world war and the challenge of economic problems at home, they did not want the nation to become entangled in another war. For this reason, President Franklin Roosevelt took no direct action against aggressive dictators in Asia and Europe. He did, however, speak out against aggression in principle. In his 1933 inaugural address, Roosevelt vowed that the United States would be a "good neighbor" who "respects the rights of others." This pledge was meant to send a message to aggressor nations. But it also reflected his desire to end U.S. intervention in Latin America and improve relations with that region.

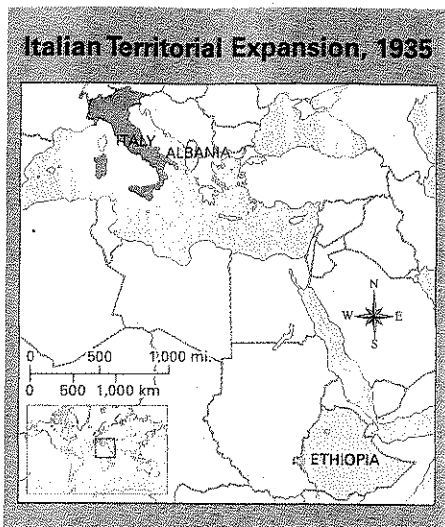
At a conference later in the year, 21 nations in the Western Hemisphere signed on to Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy." They declared, "No state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another." Over the next few years, the United States would encourage Japan, Germany, and Italy to abide by this principle, but it still would not back up its words with action.

Militarists Expand Japan's Empire One of the first examples of blatant aggression came in 1931, when Japan seized a portion of China. Japan and other imperialist powers had previously established spheres of influence in China, where they exploited the country's land and resources. Japan's sphere of influence was Manchuria, a region in northeastern China. When China's nationalist government threatened to expel foreign powers, the Japanese army invaded Manchuria and took control of the region.

The takeover of Manchuria had several major consequences. It gave Japan a large piece of territory that was rich in resources. In addition, it began an era in which the military dominated the Japanese government. It also isolated Japan from most other nations. In 1932, the League of Nations ordered Japan to withdraw its army from the region. Japan refused, choosing to withdraw from the League instead.



Throughout the 1930s, Japan's quest for raw materials drove its imperial expansion. In 1940, however, it still did not have a secure source of oil. Without oil, Japan could not expand, nor could it fight a war. Japan's militarists began eyeing the Dutch East Indies, which had abundant oil supplies.



As part of Mussolini's plan to create a New Roman Empire, Italy invaded and occupied Ethiopia in 1935. Italian forces also occupied Albania.

Emperor Haile Selassie fled Ethiopia just before Italy annexed his country. Selassie had pleaded with the League of Nations to take strong action against Italy. He later told the League, "It is us today. It will be you tomorrow."



More aggression followed in 1937. In July, the Japanese army clashed with Chinese forces outside Beijing, China's capital. The clash soon became a full-fledged war. The Chinese army pulled back, but the Japanese caught up with them at the city of Nanjing. After capturing the city, Japanese soldiers went on a six-week rampage known as the Rape of Nanjing. They massacred as many as 300,000 Chinese civilians and brutally raped about 20,000 Chinese women. The war did not stop there. By the end of the year, Japan's military occupied China's main cities and much of its fertile land.

Jolted by Japan's aggression, Roosevelt called on "peace-loving nations" to end the "epidemic of world lawlessness." He spoke of the need to quarantine aggressor nations. In international relations, a quarantine is a blockade or boycott. Roosevelt's "quarantine" speech did nothing to stop Japan. By 1941, Japan had added French Indochina to its Asian empire to go along with Formosa (now called Taiwan), Korea, large areas of China, and several small Pacific islands.

Europe's Dictators Test the League of Nations Japan's aggression tested the League of Nations. The League was intended to serve as an instrument of international law. In theory, it could impose boycotts and other economic sanctions or use the combined military force of its members to keep unruly nations in line. In practice, however, it was a weak organization, partly because the United States was not a member. The League failed to respond effectively to Japan's challenge. Throughout the 1930s, Germany and Italy would also test the League's will.

Like Japan, Germany pulled out of the League of Nations in 1933. At the same time, Hitler began rebuilding the German military. In 1935, he announced the formation of an air force and the start of compulsory military service. Both actions went against the Treaty of Versailles. The League of Nations lodged a formal protest, but it refused to consider sanctions against Germany. The next year, Hitler openly challenged France by sending troops into the Rhineland. This was another test of the League's resolve to stand up to aggression.

Meanwhile, Mussolini began his quest to build a New Roman Empire. In October 1935, the Italian army invaded the African nation of Ethiopia. The poorly equipped Ethiopian forces could not stop the invaders. Ethiopia appealed to the League of Nations, which voted to impose economic sanctions on the aggressor. The sanctions were mild, and few League members seriously applied them. In May 1936, Italy officially annexed Ethiopia. Hitler heartily approved of the invasion. In October, he and Mussolini joined in a treaty of friendship that forged an alliance, known as the Rome-Berlin axis, between their countries.

Events in Spain also aided the growth of fascism. In July 1936, a military rebellion started the **Spanish Civil War**. Led by General Francisco Franco, the Spanish military and its right-wing allies, known as the Nationalists, sought to overthrow Spain's democratic republic. Italy and Germany backed the rebels with supplies, weapons, and troops. Various left-wing

groups, known as the Republicans, battled to save the republic, with aid from the Soviet Union and volunteer fighters from other countries. Although some 3,000 Americans volunteered, the U.S. government stayed out of the conflict. At least half a million people died in the three-year war. In the end, Franco and the Nationalists won and established a right-wing dictatorship.

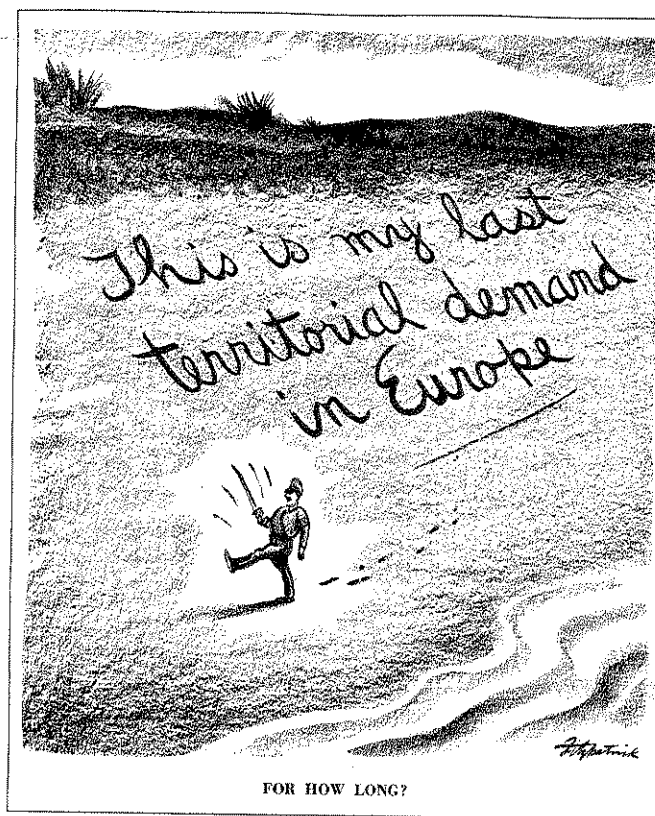
Great Britain and France Seek to Appease Hitler Encouraged by events in Italy and Spain, and by his own successful occupation of the Rhineland, Hitler continued his campaign of expansion. During this time, Britain and France did little to stop him, choosing instead to follow a policy of appeasement.

Hitler next set his sights on neighboring Austria, the country of his birth. At the time, Austria had an unstable government with fascist elements. Hitler pressured its leaders to join the Third Reich. Finally, in 1938, a member of the Austrian Nazi Party took over as chancellor of Austria. On March 12 of that year, Hitler's army crossed the border into Austria without opposition. The following day he proclaimed *Anschluss*, or "political union," with Austria. Britain and France remained passive spectators to this German expansion.

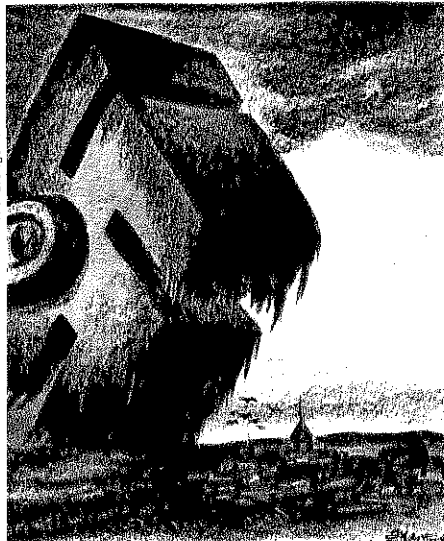
Hitler next wanted to take over Czechoslovakia. By signing the Munich Pact in September 1938, he acquired the Czech region of the Sudetenland. Hitler told Chamberlain that this would be his "last territorial demand." Chamberlain chose to believe Hitler, declaring that he had achieved "peace with honor" and adding, "I believe it is peace in our time." Another member of Parliament, Winston Churchill, disagreed. He wrote, "By this time next year we shall know whether the policy of appeasement has appeased, or whether it has only stimulated a more ferocious appetite."

The U.S. Congress Legislates Neutrality During this period, the United States did little to thwart aggression. When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, for example, the League of Nations considered establishing an oil embargo, or suspension of trade, against Italy. Italy's offensive would grind to a halt without oil. The League asked the United States, a major oil supplier, if it would join the embargo. Roosevelt said no, pointing out that he had just signed the Neutrality Act of 1935. This act prevented the United States from supplying "arms, ammunition, or implements of war" to nations in conflict. Because the law said nothing about oil, Roosevelt chose not to block oil shipments to Italy.

Congress passed additional *neutrality acts* in 1936 and 1937, all designed to keep the country out of conflicts brewing in Europe, such as the Spanish Civil War. Americans passionately supported this isolationism. Like Europeans, they recalled the horrors of World War I and wanted to avoid getting drawn into a new conflict. Roosevelt did, however, devote enormous energy to preserving peace. He wrote letters to the aggressors and to League members, urging them to settle their differences through negotiation.



Adolf Hitler declared that he had no interest in European expansion. The leaders of Great Britain and France wanted to believe him. Others, like Winston Churchill, were more skeptical of Hitler's aims.



Blitzkrieg tactics made the German army seem unstoppable. The Nazi war machine took just a month to crush Poland. It then turned its aggression on other European countries.

34.4 Hitler Plunges Europe into War

Great Britain and France chose to avoid war with Germany by allowing Hitler to behave as he pleased. But Hitler had no interest in avoiding war and grew bolder with every aggressive step he took. In March 1939, he broke the Munich Pact by invading Czechoslovakia and seizing control of Prague, the Czech capital. As Churchill suspected, appeasement only made Hitler more eager to conquer new territory. The takeover of Czechoslovakia finally caused Britain and France to draw a line in the sand. They declared that if Germany made any further attacks on small states, then they would declare war.

Hitler Signs a Nonaggression Pact with Stalin Part of Hitler's plans for war involved Stalin, the communist leader of the Soviet Union. Communists and Nazis despised each other and had little reason to cooperate. Yet Hitler sought an agreement with Stalin to keep the Soviet Union neutral in the coming war. Hitler offered Stalin a nonaggression treaty, and Stalin accepted it.

The German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, signed in August 1939, served the interests of both leaders. Hitler planned to attack Poland, an action that was likely to ignite a broader war in Europe. The geography of that war concerned him. The Soviet Union lay to the east. Britain and France lay to the west. Hitler could not afford to fight a war on two fronts, east and west, at the same time. For that reason, Soviet neutrality was vital. The pact helped Stalin, too. The Soviet dictator wanted more power and secure borders. As part of the pact, Hitler secretly promised to give Stalin part of Poland and grant him a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.

But Hitler already had plans to attack the Soviet Union, which had vast, fertile farmlands that were a key to fulfilling the quest for *Lebensraum*. Hitler also understood that Nazi Germany could not coexist for long with the communist USSR to its east.

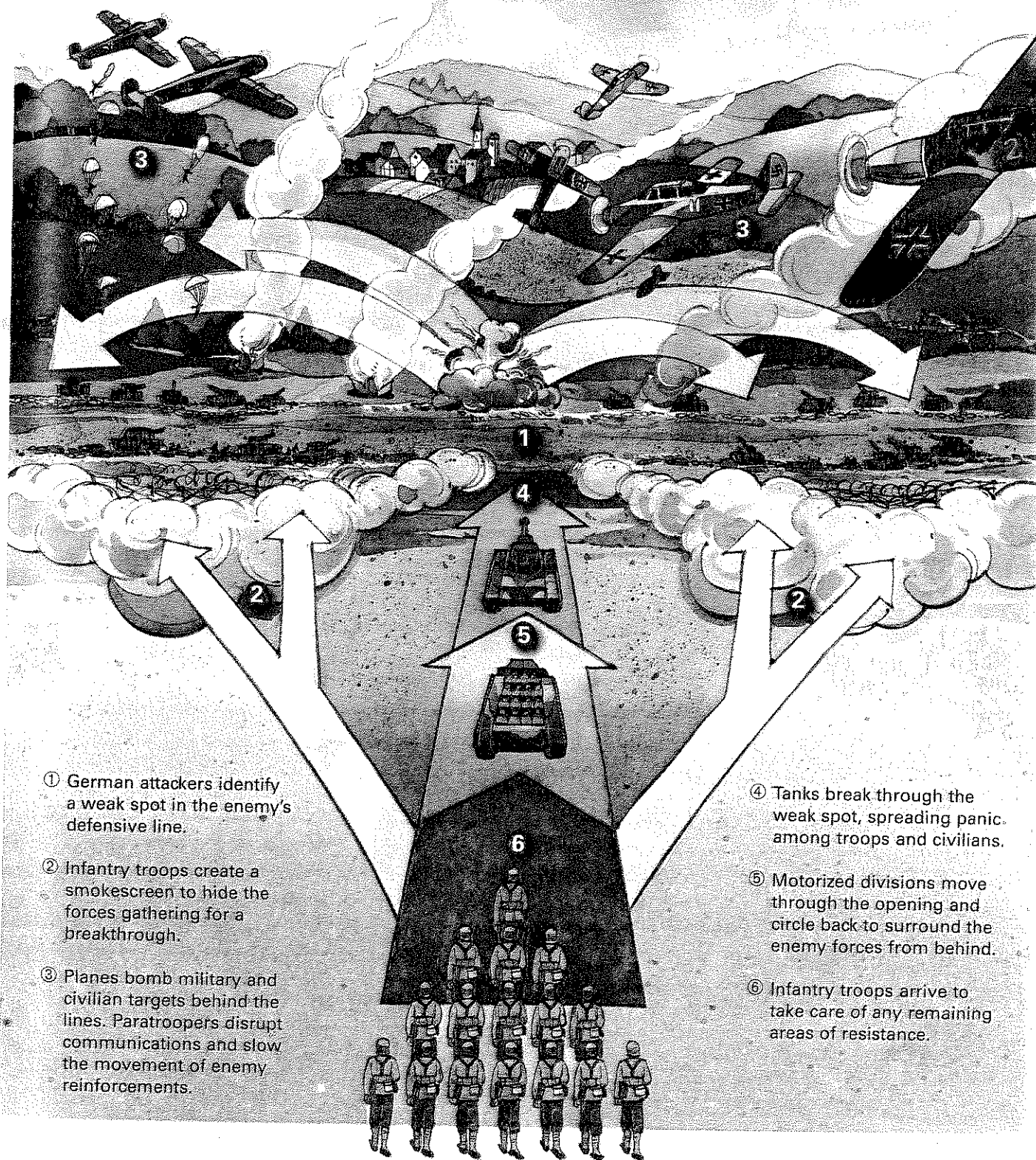
German Armies Roll Across Europe With the Soviet Union neutralized, Hitler sprang into action. On September 1, 1939, the German army marched east into Poland. Two days later, France and Britain—the Allied powers—declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

In Poland, the German armed forces relied on a strategy of *blitzkrieg*, or “lightning war.” Without any warning, German bombers launched attacks on railroads, airfields, communications networks, military bases, and other strategic sites. These attacks helped prevent Polish **mobilization**, the assembling of troops and equipment for war. Meanwhile, waves of infantry, supported by tanks and artillery, pushed toward key cities. Germany's method was to out-flank, surround, and destroy. Motorized units quickly swept around and encircled the Polish army. Warplanes rained bombs and bullets on the enemy. Then the foot soldiers moved in to finish the job.

Ill-equipped and overwhelmed, the Polish forces quickly collapsed. On September 17, the Soviet army invaded Poland from the east. By the first of October, Germany and the USSR had complete control of the country.

How Did Germany's Blitzkrieg Tactics Work?

Germany's blitzkrieg tactics were designed to avoid the stalemate and trench warfare of World War I. The objective was to break through enemy lines at the weakest points and then rush forward to spread fear and confusion behind the lines. Pockets of enemy resistance could then be isolated and destroyed. A blitzkrieg attack unfolded in six stages.



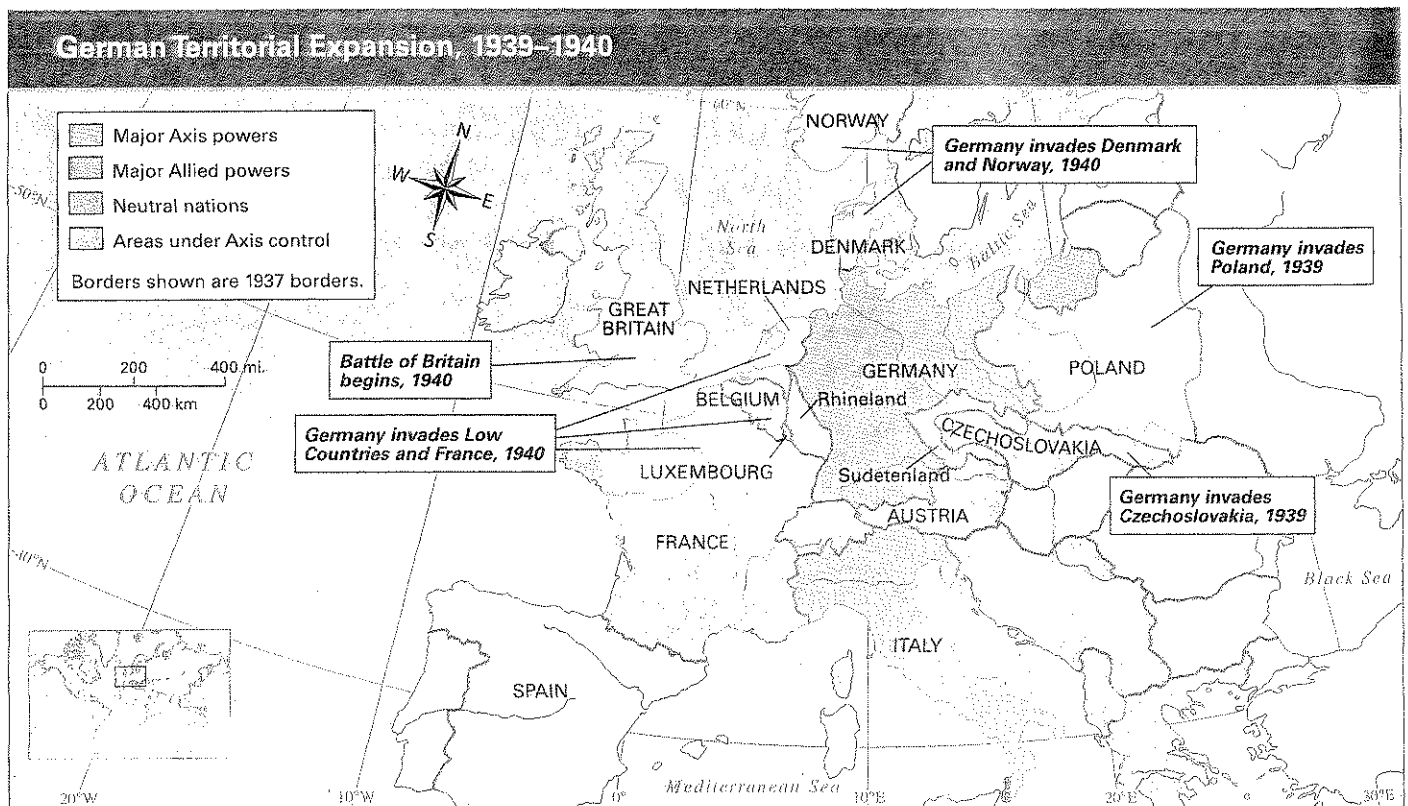
Hitler now switched his focus to the west. He moved soldiers to Germany's border with France and the Low Countries—Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. France relied for its main defense on the Maginot Line, a string of heavily armed fortresses along the German border. Most French troops massed here, while others gathered along the border with Belgium. British forces crossed the English Channel, prepared to aid France and the Low Countries. For the next few months, not much happened on the western front. American newspapers began referring to this as the “Phony War.”

Then suddenly, in a series of lightning actions, the Germans struck. In April 1940, they launched a surprise attack on Denmark and Norway. Within a few weeks, Germany had conquered these two Scandinavian countries. Next, on May 10, the Germans invaded the Low Countries. In just 18 days, these three countries would fall into German hands.

Using blitzkrieg tactics, the main German force burst through Luxembourg and southern Belgium into France in just four days. Then it began a dramatic drive toward the French coast. Skirting the Maginot Line, the Germans sped westward, encircling defenders. Hundreds of thousands of French and British troops found themselves trapped in a shrinking pocket of French countryside. They retreated toward the port of Dunkirk on the northwest coast of France. Britain sent every boat it could find across the English Channel to evacuate the soldiers. The daring rescue saved some 338,000 men.

Meanwhile, Paris was about to fall to the Germans. Mussolini took this opportunity to declare war on Britain and France. Italy and Germany became known as the Axis powers. On June 22, France surrendered to Germany. Under the terms of the armistice, Germany would occupy three fifths of the country.

Germany had enormous success in the first year and a half of World War II. Except for neutral nations, nearly all of Europe fell under Axis control. Only Great Britain managed to hold off Hitler's invading armies.





The southeast would become a **puppet government** known as Vichy France. A puppet government is one that is run by citizens of a conquered country who carry out the policies of the conqueror.

Britain Fights on Alone Britain, now led by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, stood alone against the Axis powers. After the evacuation from Dunkirk, Churchill had vowed to fight Germany and defend Britain with every resource at his disposal. In a speech to Parliament, he declared,

We shall not flag [tire] nor fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight . . . on the seas and oceans; we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be; we shall fight on the beaches, landing grounds, in fields, in streets and on the hills. We shall never surrender.

—Speech before the House of Commons, June 4, 1940

During the Blitz, German bombs pounded residential areas of London. Hundreds of thousands of children were evacuated to safer rural areas. Many Londoners who stayed in the city took shelter in the subway, or the Underground, during air raids. The Underground could hold more than 170,000 people.

Hitler wanted to conquer Britain, but he knew that the large and powerful British navy could keep his army from crossing the English Channel. To defeat that navy, he had to establish dominance in the air. He set up air bases in conquered lands from France to Norway and moved in some 2,800 bombers and fighter planes.

German planes flew raids throughout the summer of 1940 and into the fall. They attacked British ships, ports, airfields, radar stations, and industrial centers. To counter this onslaught, the British sent up the fighter pilots of the Royal Air Force (RAF) in an engagement known as the Battle of Britain. The RAF pilots, flying their Spitfires and Hurricanes, proved effective against the German air campaign. By late August, they had downed more than 600 German aircraft, at a cost of 260 British planes.

In September 1940, Britain launched its first bombing raid on Berlin. Germany shifted its targets to British cities. For the next several months, bombing attacks devastated sections of London and other large cities. Londoners called this campaign the Blitz, a shortening of blitzkrieg. By the spring of 1941, the number of raids dwindled. The British had successfully defended their homeland. That victory gave the Allies reason to believe that Hitler could be stopped.

34.5 The United States Enters World War II

After war broke out in Europe, isolationism lost some of its appeal for Americans. Most now openly supported the Allies. Hoping to keep the United States out of the war, Hitler sought to expand his alliance. In September 1940, Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact, making Japan a member of the Axis powers. The three nations agreed to provide mutual support in the event of an attack by a country not yet in the war. The attacker they had in mind was the United States. If the United States entered the war, it would have to fight on two fronts—Asia and Europe. Hitler hoped that the threat of a two-front war would ensure American neutrality for a while longer.

Roosevelt Inches Away from Neutrality The start of war put the United States in a risky position. Americans feared getting drawn into the fighting, but they wanted to help the Allies. France and Great Britain needed weapons. Yet the neutrality acts banned the sale of arms to belligerent nations. In November 1939, Roosevelt pushed a bill through Congress that repealed the arms embargo. This Neutrality Act of 1939 included a “cash-and-carry” provision. Nations had to pay cash for materials and carry them away in their own ships.

After the fall of France, the United States finally began rearming itself in earnest. In September 1940, Congress enacted the first peacetime military draft in U.S. history. A month later, the Selective Training and Service Act had enrolled 16 million men. Yet during the 1940 election campaign, Roosevelt assured Americans, “Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars.” In November, he won an unprecedented third term as president.

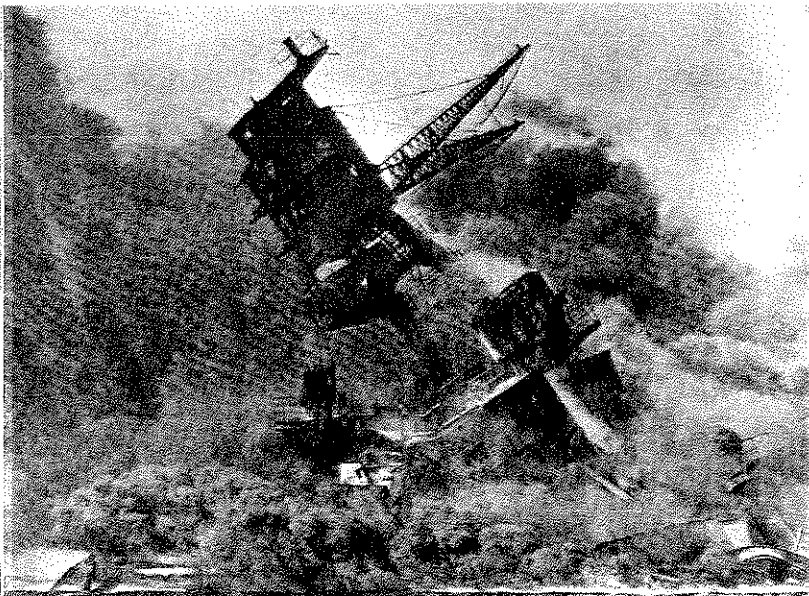
In December 1940, the Battle of Britain was raging. Churchill declared that his country was nearly bankrupt. Roosevelt was determined to provide Britain “all aid short of war” and urged Congress to adopt a plan to lend, not sell, arms to Britain. This legislation, the **Lend-Lease Act**, passed in March 1941, but only after heated public and congressional debate.

In June 1941, Hitler broke the Nonaggression Pact by attacking the Soviet Union. Great Britain announced its support for the USSR, and the United States began sending supplies to the besieged country under the Lend-Lease Act.

In August, Churchill and Roosevelt met in secret aboard a warship in Canadian waters of the North Atlantic. There they prepared a declaration of common principles known as the Atlantic Charter. They promised not to use the war to expand their own territory, and they asserted the right of all peoples to self-government. Three months later, Congress voted to allow American merchant ships to arm themselves and sail to Britain.

Japan Attacks the United States From 1940 to 1941, Japan continued seeking raw materials through conquest. It occupied French Indochina, in Southeast Asia, and set its sights on the Dutch East Indies. Its goal was to push Western powers out and establish a “new order in East Asia,” with

By attacking Pearl Harbor, the Japanese hoped to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Although the Japanese inflicted major damage, they failed to destroy the fuel depot that served the fleet. They also failed to sink any aircraft carriers, which were not in Pearl Harbor at the time.



Japan at the center. The United States tried to undercut Japan's aggression in several ways. It sent loans and other aid to Japan's enemy, China, and froze Japanese assets in American banks. It also blocked the export of vital resources, including oil, to Japan. Relations between the two nations steadily worsened.

By 1941, American intelligence officers had managed to intercept and decode secret messages from Japan to its foreign offices. Late in the year, officers learned of a coming attack on American territory in the Pacific Ocean. They thought the attack might target an American base in the Philippines. Instead it was aimed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii—the home of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

On December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft carriers approached Hawaii. From the carriers, more than 300 bombers and fighter planes launched the attack on Pearl Harbor. In a little more than two hours, the Japanese sank or damaged 18 American ships. At nearby airfields, Japanese warplanes damaged or destroyed about 300 military aircraft. In all, the raid left more than 2,400 Americans dead and nearly 1,200 wounded. The Japanese lost just 29 planes in the attack.

The next day, Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan. "Hostilities exist," he said. "Our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger." Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. Americans began to prepare for a conflict that would test the nation's strength and courage.



Navy sailor Dorie Miller, a ship's cook, manned an antiaircraft gun during the attack on Pearl Harbor. He shot down four enemy planes. Miller was later honored with the Navy Cross.

Summary

By the 1930s, extreme nationalists had gained power in Italy, Germany, and Japan, which became known as the Axis powers. By seeking to expand through military conquest, these countries began World War II. In 1941, the United States entered the war as one of the Allied powers.

Totalitarianism In 1924, Joseph Stalin became the dictator of the communist Soviet Union. Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler gained power by promising to restore German strength. He built up the German military and began a campaign of expansion. Similar actions took place in Italy under dictator Benito Mussolini and in Japan under Japanese militarists.

Munich Pact Great Britain and France tried to appease Hitler. In the Munich Pact, they agreed to give him part of Czechoslovakia in return for peace. But Hitler continued with territorial expansion. Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 triggered World War II.

Neutrality Acts A series of neutrality acts in the 1930s kept the United States from being drawn into European conflicts, including the Spanish Civil War. As World War II began, however, Franklin Roosevelt and Congress revised the acts to allow arms trading with the Allies.

Lend-Lease Act Germany quickly occupied most of Europe and threatened to invade Great Britain. As German bombers ravaged British cities, the United States decided to help Britain by passing the Lend-Lease Act. This law allowed the United States to lend arms to Britain and, later, to the Soviet Union.

Attack on Pearl Harbor On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. This attack caused the United States to declare war on Japan and enter World War II.