

>> On June 22, 1941, under the code name Operation Barbarossa, Germany invaded the Soviet Union. It was the largest German military operation of World War II. German authorities planned to annihilate the Communist nation.



Interactive Flipped Video

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World War II lasted from 1939 to 1945. It pitted the Axis powers against the Allies, which eventually included Britain, France, the Soviet Union, China, the United States, and 43 other nations. Unlike World War I, with its defensive trenches, the new global conflict was a war of aggressive movement. In the early years, things went badly for the Allies as Axis forces swept across Europe, North Africa, and Asia.

## >> Objectives

**Trace** the course of German aggression and British resistance in Europe.

**Describe** the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

**Explain** how Japanese imperialism and the attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war.

## >> Key Terms

blitzkrieg

Luftwaffe

Dunkirk

Vichy

Erwin Rommel

Erwin Rommel

(1891–1944) was a career military officer and one of Hitler's most successful generals. He took his own life after a failed attempt to assassinate Hitler.

Lend-Lease Act

Atlantic Charter

Hideki Tojo

# Axis Powers Advance

## Axis Domination of Europe

**Germany's "Lightning War"** The Nazi invasion of Poland revealed the power of Hitler's **blitzkrieg**, or "lightning war." The blitzkrieg used tank and air power technology to strike a devastating blow against the enemy.

First, the **Luftwaffe**, or German air force, bombed airfields, factories, towns, and cities. Screaming dive bombers attacked troops and civilians. Then fast-moving tanks and troop transports pushed their way into the defending Polish army, encircling whole divisions and forcing them to surrender.

As Germany attacked from the west, Stalin's forces invaded from the east, grabbing lands promised to them under the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Within a month, Poland ceased to exist as an independent nation. Because of Poland's location and the speed of the attacks, Britain and France could do nothing beyond declaring war on Germany.

Hitler passed the winter without much further action. Stalin's armies, however, forced the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to host bases for the Soviet military. Soviet forces also seized part of Finland, which put up stiff but unsuccessful resistance.

In April 1940, Hitler launched a blitzkrieg against Norway and Denmark, both of which soon fell. Next, his forces slammed into the Netherlands and Belgium.



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**The Rescue at Dunkirk** During that first winter, the French hunkered down behind the Maginot Line, a border created by the French in the 1930s to protect from German invasion. Britain sent troops to wait with them. Some reporters referred to this quiet time as the “phony war.”

In May 1940, German forces surprised the French and British by attacking through the Ardennes Forest in Belgium, an area that was considered invasion proof. Bypassing the Maginot Line, German troops poured into France. Retreating British forces were soon trapped between the Nazi army and the English Channel.

In a desperate gamble, the British sent all available naval vessels, merchant ships, and even fishing and pleasure boats across the channel to pluck stranded troops off the beach of **Dunkirk**. Despite German air attacks, the improvised armada ferried more than 300,000 troops to safety in Britain. This heroic rescue raised British morale.

**France Surrenders** Meanwhile, German forces were heading south toward Paris. In June, Mussolini had declared war on France and Britain. He sent Italian troops to attack France from the south.

Overrun and demoralized, France surrendered. On June 22, 1940, Hitler forced the French to sign the surrender documents in the same railroad car in which

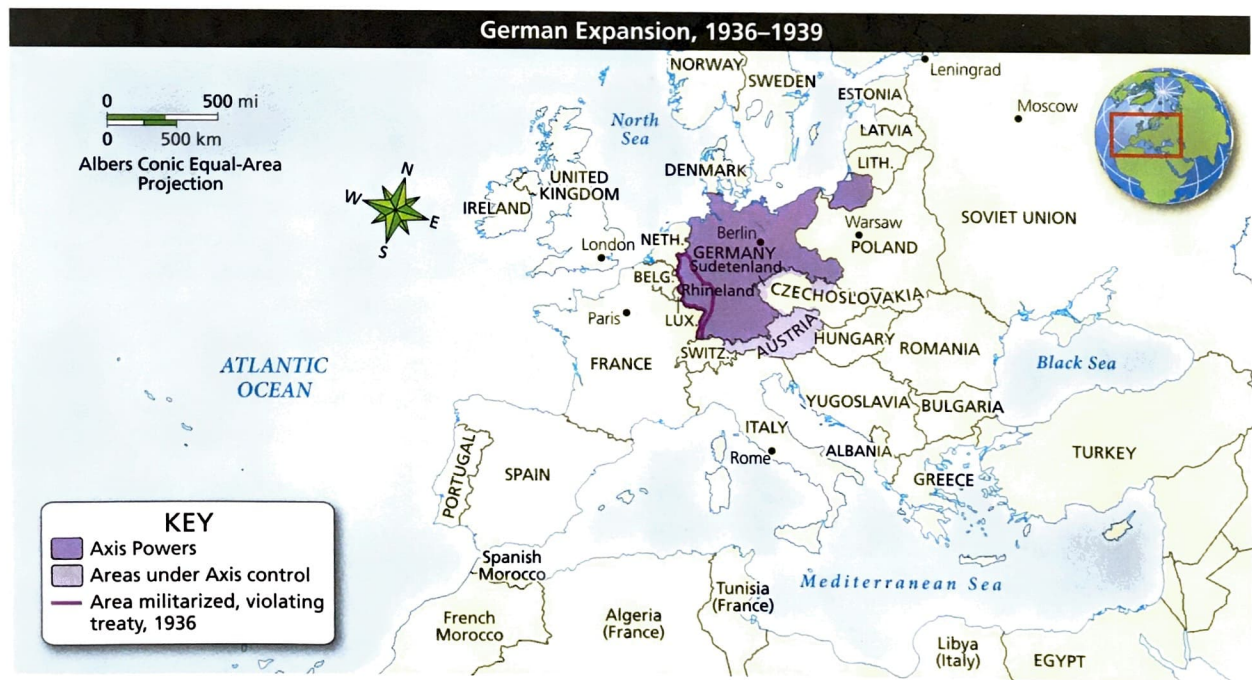
Germany had signed the armistice ending World War I. Following the surrender, Germany occupied northern France. In the south, the Germans set up a “puppet state,” with its capital at **Vichy** (VEE shee).

Some French officers escaped to England and set up a government-in-exile. Led by Charles de Gaulle, these “free French” worked to liberate their homeland. Within France, resistance fighters used guerrilla tactics against German forces.

**Operation Sea Lion** With the fall of France, Britain stood alone in Western Europe. Hitler was sure that the British would sue for peace. But Winston Churchill, who had replaced Neville Chamberlain as prime minister, had other plans. Churchill’s defiance gave voice to the determination of the British.

“We shall defend our island,  
whatever the cost may be, we shall  
fight on the beaches, we shall fight  
on the landing grounds, we shall fight  
in the fields and in the streets, we  
shall fight in the hills; we shall never  
surrender.”

Winston Churchill, June 4, 1940



>> Germany advanced aggressively from 1936 to 1939, until its invasion of Poland sparked another world war. **Analyze Maps** How did Germany violate the Treaty of Versailles?







>> In his first speech in Parliament, Prime Minister Winston Churchill vowed, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." He ended with the words, "Come then, let us go forward together with our united strength."



>> The Battle of Britain started in July 1940, but by September, Hitler decided on a new tactic. Hitler believed the British would surrender if he targeted civilians, so he began a daily bombing campaign. London was Hitler's first target.

 **Interactive Gallery**

Faced with this defiance, Hitler made plans for Operation Sea Lion—the invasion of Britain. In preparation for the invasion, he launched massive air strikes against the island nation.

Beginning in August 1940, German bombers began a daily bombardment of England's southern coast. For a month, Britain's Royal Air Force valiantly battled the Luftwaffe. Then the Germans changed their tactics. Instead of bombing military targets in the south, they began to bomb London and other cities.

**England Survives the Blitz** German bombers first appeared over London late on September 7, 1940. All through the night, relays of aircraft showered high explosives and firebombs on the sprawling capital. The bombing continued for 57 nights in a row and then sporadically until the next May. These bombing attacks are known as "the Blitz." Much of London was destroyed, and thousands of people lost their lives.

London did not break under the Blitz. Defiantly, Parliament continued to meet. Citizens carried on their daily lives, seeking protection in shelters and then emerging to resume their routines when the all-clear sounded. Even Churchill and the British king and queen chose to support Londoners by joining them in bomb shelters rather than fleeing to the countryside.

German planes continued to bomb London and other cities off and on until May 1941. But contrary to Hitler's hopes, the Luftwaffe could not gain air superiority over Britain, and British morale was not destroyed. In fact, the bombing only made the British more determined to turn back the enemy. Operation Sea Lion was a failure.

**Hitler's "New Order"** As Nazi forces rampaged across Europe, Hitler expanded his plan to build a "new order" in the occupied lands. Hitler's new order grew out of his racial obsessions. He set up puppet governments in Western European countries that were peopled by light-skinned Europeans, whom Hitler and his followers believed to be an Aryan "master race." The Slavs of Eastern Europe were considered to be an inferior "race." They were shoved aside to provide more "living space" for Germans.

To the Nazis, occupied lands were an economic resource to be plundered and looted. The Nazis systematically stripped conquered nations of their works of art, factories, and other resources. To counter resistance movements that emerged in occupied countries, the Nazis took savage revenge, shooting hostages and torturing prisoners.

**War in North Africa and the Balkans** Axis armies also pushed into North Africa and the Balkans. In September 1940, Mussolini ordered forces from Italy's



North African colony of Libya into Egypt. When the British army repulsed these invaders, Hitler sent one of his most brilliant commanders, General **Erwin Rommel**, to North Africa. The “Desert Fox,” as he was called, chalked up a string of successes in 1941 and 1942. He pushed the British back across the desert toward Cairo, Egypt.

In October 1940, Italian forces invaded Greece. They encountered stiff resistance, and in 1941 German troops once again provided reinforcements. Both Greece and Yugoslavia were added to the growing Axis empire. Even after the Axis triumph, however, Greek and Yugoslav guerrillas plagued the occupying forces. Meanwhile, both Bulgaria and Hungary had joined the Axis alliance. By 1941, the Axis powers or their allies controlled most of Europe.

**? DESCRIBE** Describe how the Axis powers gained control of most of Europe in 1941.

## Nazi Attack the Soviet Union

After the failure in Britain, Hitler turned his military might to a new target—the Soviet Union. The decision to invade the Soviet Union took pressure off Britain. It also proved to be one of Hitler’s costliest mistakes.

In June 1941, Hitler broke the Nazi-Soviet Pact by invading the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa, a plan which took its name from the medieval Germanic leader, Frederick Barbarossa. Hitler made his motives clear. He wanted to gain “living space” for Germans and to win control of regions rich in resources. “If I had the Ural Mountains with their incalculable store of treasures in raw materials,” he declared, “Siberia with its vast forests, and the Ukraine with its tremendous wheat fields, Germany under National Socialist leadership would swim in plenty.” He also wanted to crush communism in Europe and defeat his powerful rival, Stalin.

**A Rapid Advance** Hitler unleashed a new blitzkrieg in the Soviet Union. About three million German soldiers invaded. The Germans caught Stalin unprepared. His army was still suffering from the purges that had wiped out many of its top officers.

The Soviets lost two and a half million soldiers trying to fend off the invaders. As they were forced back, Soviet troops destroyed factories and farm equipment and burned crops to keep them out of enemy hands. But they could not stop the German war machine. By autumn, the Nazis had smashed deep into the Soviet



>> Erwin Rommel led the military operation in Libya. Rommel was sent to North Africa to help the Italian forces fight the British. Rommel was an expert at tank warfare.

Union and were poised to take Moscow and Leningrad (present-day St. Petersburg).

**Winter Halts the Blitzkrieg** There, however, the German advance stalled. Like Napoleon’s Grand Army in 1812, Hitler’s forces were not prepared for the fury of “General Winter.” By early December, temperatures plunged to 0°F (-18°C).

Cold was a killer. German troops had set out in summer and had no warm winter uniforms. Fuel froze in tanks, and much of the Germans’ mechanized equipment was useless. Thousands of German soldiers starved or froze to death.

**Siege of Leningrad** The Soviets, meanwhile, suffered appalling hardships. In September 1941, the two-and-a-half-year siege of Leningrad began. Food was rationed to two pieces of bread a day. Desperate Leningraders ate almost anything. For example, they boiled wallpaper scraped off walls because its paste was said to contain potato flour.

Although more than a million Leningraders died during the siege, the city did not fall to the Germans. Hoping to gain some relief for his exhausted people, Stalin urged Britain to open a second front in Western



Europe. Although Churchill could not offer much real help, the two powers did agree to work together.

**? IDENTIFY SUPPORTING DETAILS** Why did Hitler nullify the Nazi-Soviet Pact by invading the Soviet Union?

## U.S. Involvement in the War

When the war began in 1939, the United States declared its neutrality. Although isolationist feeling remained strong, many Americans, including President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, sympathized with those who battled the Axis powers. In time, Roosevelt found ways around the Neutrality Acts to provide aid, including for Britain, as it stood alone against Hitler.

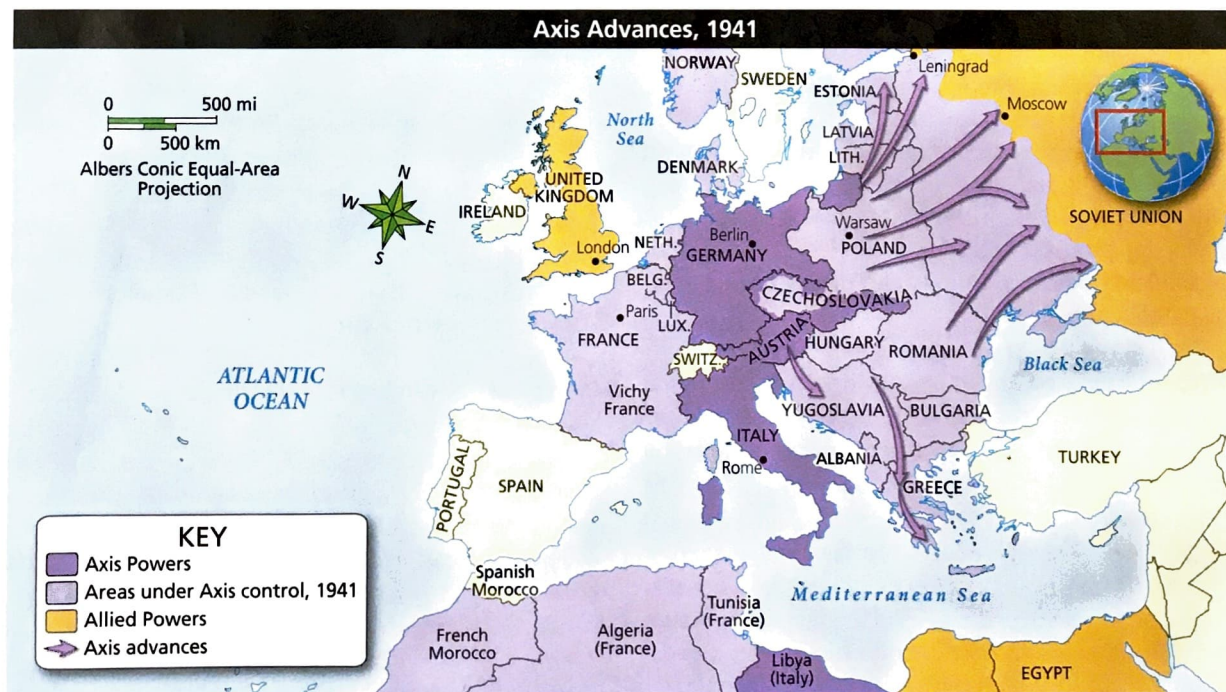
**Roosevelt Supports the Allies** In March 1941, FDR persuaded Congress to pass the **Lend-Lease Act**. It allowed him to sell or lend war materials to “any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States.” The United States, said Roosevelt, would not be drawn into the war, but it would become “the arsenal of democracy,” supplying arms to those who were fighting for freedom.

To show further support, Roosevelt met secretly with Churchill on a warship in the Atlantic in August 1941. The two leaders issued the **Atlantic Charter**, which set goals for the war—“the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny”—and for the postwar world. They pledged to support “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live” and called for a “permanent system of general security.”

**Growing Tensions with Japan** Although Roosevelt viewed Hitler as the greatest menace to world peace, it was tensions with Japan that finally brought the United States into the war. The United States held several possessions in the Pacific, including the Philippines and Hawaii.

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, the Japanese saw a chance to grab European possessions in Southeast Asia. Japanese forces took control across Asia and the Pacific. Japan claimed that its mission was to help Asians escape Western colonial rule. In fact, the real goal was a Japanese empire in Asia. The rich resources of the region, including oil, rubber, and tin, would be of immense value in fighting Japan's war against the Chinese.

In 1940, with Europeans distracted by war, Japan advanced into French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies. In response, the United States banned the sale of war materials, such as iron, steel, and oil, to Japan.



>> The Soviet Union joined the Allies after Germany's invasion. **Analyze Maps** How might this new enemy affect Germany's war effort in geographic terms?



Japanese leaders saw this move as a threat to Japan's economy and its Asian sphere of influence.

Japan and the United States held talks to ease the growing tension. But extreme militarists were gaining power in Japan, including General **Hideki Tojo** who became prime minister in 1941. Prior to the war, Tojo had strongly supported the invasion of China and the formation of the alliance with Germany and Italy. Tojo and other militarists hoped to seize more lands in Asia and the Pacific and believed the United States was interfering with their plans.

**The Attack on Pearl Harbor** With talks at a standstill, General Tojo ordered a surprise attack. Early on December 7, 1941, Japanese airplanes bombed the American fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The attack took the lives of about 2,400 people and destroyed battleships and aircraft.

The next day, a grim-faced President Roosevelt told the nation that December 7 was “a date which will live in infamy.” He asked Congress to declare war on Japan. On December 11, Germany and Italy, as Japan's allies, declared war on the United States.

**Japanese Victories in the Pacific** In the long run, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor would be as serious a mistake as Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. But in the months immediately after Pearl Harbor, European and American possessions in the Pacific fell one by one to the Japanese.

The Japanese captured the Philippines and other islands held by the United States. They overran the British colonies of Hong Kong, Burma, and Malaya, advanced deeper into the Dutch East Indies, and completed the takeover of French Indochina. By 1942, the Japanese empire stretched from Southeast Asia to the western Pacific Ocean.

The Japanese invaders treated the Chinese, Filipinos, Malaysians, and other conquered people with great brutality. In China, the Philippines, Malaysia, and elsewhere, they killed and tortured civilians. They seized food crops, destroyed cities and towns, and made local people into slave laborers. Whatever welcome the Japanese had first met as “liberators” soon turned to hatred. In the Philippines, Indochina, and elsewhere,



>> On Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was jolted awake by a surprise air attack. Japanese planes dropped bombs and torpedoes, stunning Americans.

resistance forces organized to wage guerrilla warfare against the Japanese invaders.

**? IDENTIFY CENTRAL ISSUES** Why did Japanese leaders view the United States as an enemy?

## ASSESSMENT

1. **Integrate Information** How were people of occupied territories treated by the Axis powers?
2. **Describe** Explain why Hitler's blitzkrieg tactics were successful at the beginning of the war.
3. **Synthesize** What was the role of Winston Churchill during World War II?
4. **Describe** Explain the purpose of Hitler's “new order.”
5. **Synthesize** What role did Japanese imperialism play in igniting World War II?