

The Winter War

In November 1939, Soviet authorities issued a series of demands to neighboring Finland. The Finnish government refused and Soviet troops invaded on November 30, beginning what became known as the **Winter War**.

American Neutrality in 1939

During the 1920s a growing **isolationist movement** appeared, which argued that American interests would be best served by focusing American attention only on the Western Hemisphere and leaving Europe to sort out its own problems.

Between 1935 and 1939, Congress passed four major **Neutrality Acts** that sought to limit the possibility of American involvement in the growing crises around the world.



Major U.S. Neutrality Acts

1. The Neutrality Act of 1935 forbade the export of munitions to belligerent nations once the president declared a state of war existed; restricted the use of American ports by belligerent submarines;

The Moscow Peace Treaty (1940): Under this deal, Finland ceded large sections of territory to the Soviet Union as well as economic resources. In fact, the Soviet gains were greater than their initial demands in November 1939.

and allowed the president to declare that Americans traveling on ships of belligerent nations did so at their own risk.

2. In 1936, the Neutrality Act was revised, but the only major addition was an amendment that forbade America from lending money to belligerent nations.

3. The 1937 act forbade Americans from traveling at all on ships of belligerent nations and prohibited the arming of American merchant vessels. In return President Roosevelt got what became known as **cash-and-carry**. This policy would allow American companies and the government to sell war material, but not lethal weapons.¹²

4. The 1939 act allowed for the sale of arms to nations under the cash-and-carry policy.

1940

Prelude to the Attack on France

In April 1940, German forces assaulted Denmark and Norway. Control of Denmark allowed for German control of the entrance to the Baltic Sea and placed German air power closer to Norway to support the invasion there.

An important outcome of the Norwegian campaign was that it led, in part, to a change in power in the British Government. Neville Chamberlain was forced to resign on May 10 over the perceived mishandling of the war up to that point. In his place, **Winston Churchill** would become a central figure in the Allied war effort to defeat Nazi Germany.¹³

The Attack on France



The assault on France, codenamed **Case Yellow**, began on May 10, 1940. Both the French and the British military believed that the main German assault against France would come through Belgium.

The **Maginot Line** was thought to be an impenetrable line of forts that would halt any German advance in its tracks. However, there was a 250-mile gap along the border with Belgium, a heavily wooded region known as the **Ardennes Forest**.

north while the main attack would come through the Ardennes. By May 15, German forces under the command of **Erwin Rommel** had splintered the French defenses and began a rapid advance through the French countryside.

British military planners had feared that it would be necessary to evacuate their troops from the continent and the small port town of **Dunkirk** had been selected as the most likely point of evacuation.

By May 29, 70,000 British troops had been evacuated by sea back to Britain, and that number swelled to 194,000 by May 31. By June 2–3, more than 350,000 British and French troops had been evacuated.

German military decided that the attack would consist of a feint into Belgium in order to lure the French and British forces further

The escape of the British Expeditionary Force would allow Britain to continue the war against Germany even as France fell.