

An Isolationist Voice

As war erupted in Europe, Americans debated what stance the United States should take on the global conflict. Charles A. Lindbergh, the popular aviation hero, felt strongly that it would be a mistake for the United States to enter the new war in Europe:

“We must band together to prevent the loss of more American lives in these internal struggles of Europe. . . . Modern war with all its consequences is too tragic and too devastating to be approached from anything but a purely American standpoint. We should never enter a war unless it is absolutely essential to the future welfare of our nation. . . . Our safety does not lie in fighting European wars. It lies in our own internal strength, in the character of the American people and of American institutions.”

—Charles Lindbergh, radio address,
September 15, 1939

▲ Women protesting the Lend-Lease Act

From Isolation to Involvement

Objectives

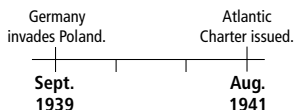
- Understand the course of the early years of World War II in Europe.
- Describe Franklin Roosevelt’s foreign policy in the mid-1930s and the great debate between interventionists and isolationists.
- Explain how the United States became more involved in the conflict.

Terms and People

blitzkrieg	Neutrality Act of 1939
Axis Powers	Tripartite Pact
Allies	Lend-Lease Act
Winston Churchill	Atlantic Charter

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Sequence Sequence the major events described in the section in a timeline.



Why It Matters While Britain and France appeased the dictator in Germany at Munich, American President Franklin Roosevelt condemned aggression in Asia but did little to stop it. As war exploded in Europe, it became increasingly difficult for the United States to maintain its neutrality. Once again, Americans would have to decide what role they were willing to play in shaping world events. **Section Focus Question:** How did Americans react to events in Europe and Asia in the early years of World War II?

Roosevelt Opposes Aggression

The unrestrained violence of the 1937 Japanese attack on China shocked Americans, even before the notorious Rape of Nanjing in December 1937. Japan attacked without a declaration of war. Its planes rained terror on Chinese cities, especially Shanghai and Nanjing. The Japanese had even killed three American sailors when Japanese warplanes sank the United States gunboat *Panay* on the Chang River.

In the midst of these bloody events, President Franklin Roosevelt criticized Japan’s aggression in a speech in Chicago on October 5, 1937. He lamented the “reign of terror and international lawlessness,” the bombing of civilian populations, and the horrible acts of cruelty. Speaking in a city where American isolationist sentiments

were strong, Roosevelt suggested that no part of the world was truly isolated from the rest of the world. He warned:

Primary Source

“When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease. . . . War is a contagion, whether it be declared or undeclared. It can engulf states and peoples remote from the original scene of hostilities. We are determined to keep out of war, yet we cannot insure ourselves against the disastrous effects of war and the dangers of involvement.”

—President Franklin Roosevelt, Quarantine speech, October 5, 1937

Roosevelt’s solution for stopping aggression involved an informal alliance of the peace-loving nations, but he did not suggest what steps the peaceful nations should take in quarantining the aggressive ones. Roosevelt’s speech was widely criticized, and for a time, the President backed away from his more interventionist stance. The speech did, however, alert some Americans to the threat Japan posed to the United States.



Checkpoint How did President Roosevelt react to Japan’s aggression in China in the late 1930s?

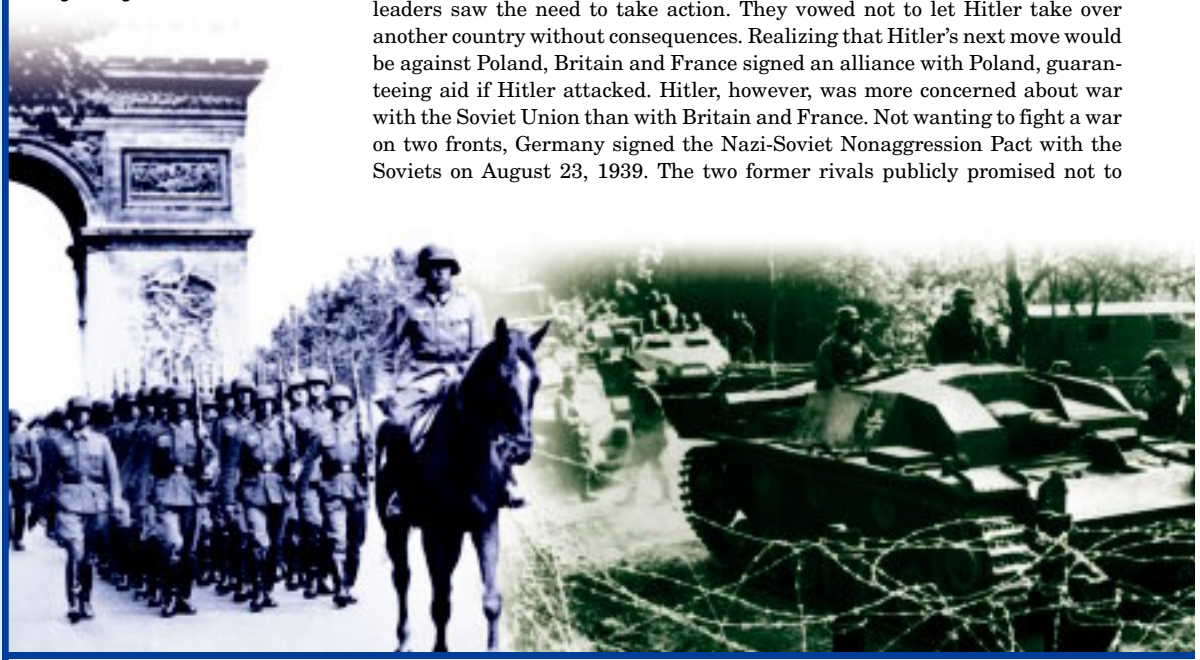
War Erupts in Europe

Roosevelt’s words failed to prevent Japan from extending its control over much of China. Similarly, France and Britain’s efforts to appease Hitler in Europe failed to limit the dictator’s expansionist plans. By the end of 1938, even the leaders of France and Britain realized that Hitler’s armed aggression could only be halted by a firm, armed defense. The urgency of the situation grew in the spring of 1939 when Hitler violated the Munich Pact by absorbing the remainder of Czechoslovakia into his German Reich.

Hitler Launches a Blitzkrieg Against Poland Finally, British and French leaders saw the need to take action. They vowed not to let Hitler take over another country without consequences. Realizing that Hitler’s next move would be against Poland, Britain and France signed an alliance with Poland, guaranteeing aid if Hitler attacked. Hitler, however, was more concerned about war with the Soviet Union than with Britain and France. Not wanting to fight a war on two fronts, Germany signed the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact with the Soviets on August 23, 1939. The two former rivals publicly promised not to

The German Juggernaut Rolls Through Europe

As the map on the next page shows, the Nazi war machine rampaged through Europe from 1939 through 1941. Below, victorious German troops parade through the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, France (left), after Nazi tanks had rolled through Belgium (right).



attack one another. Secretly, they agreed to invade and divide Poland and recognize each other's territorial ambitions. The public agreement alone shocked the West and guaranteed a German offensive against Poland.

War came to Europe in the early hours of September 1, 1939, when a massive German **blitzkrieg** (BLITS kreeg), or sudden attack, hit Poland from three directions. *Blitzkrieg* means "lightning war." It was a relatively new style of warfare that emphasized the use of speed and firepower to penetrate deep into the enemy's territory. The newest military technologies made it devastatingly effective. Using a coordinated assault by tanks and planes, followed by motorized vehicles and infantry, Germany broke through Poland's defenses and destroyed its air force. The situation became even more hopeless on September 17 when the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east. Although France and Britain declared war against Germany, they did nothing to help save Poland. By the end of the month, a devastated Poland fell in defeat.

France Falls to the Axis Powers Europe was at war, just as it had been 21 years earlier. The **Axis Powers** eventually included Germany, Italy, Japan, and several other nations. The **Allies** included Britain, France, and eventually many other nations, including the Soviet Union, the United States, and China. But after the Polish campaign, the war entered an eight-month period of relative quiet, known in Britain as the "phony war." Things would not remain quiet for long, however.

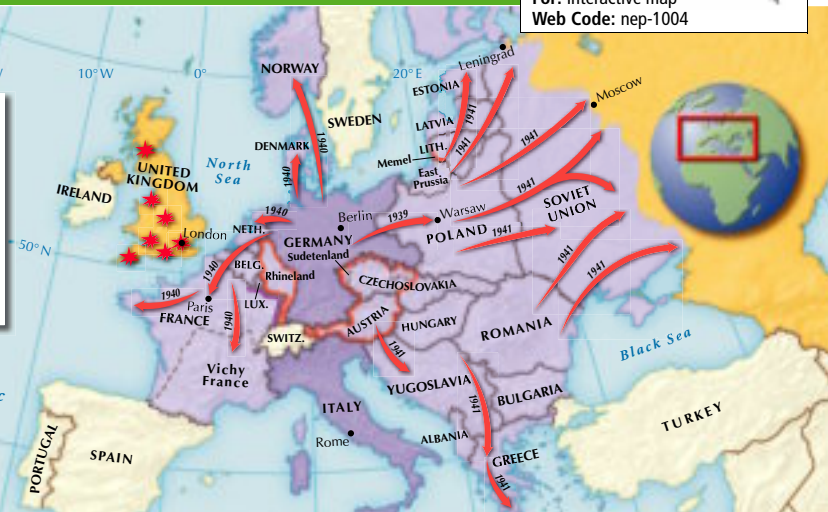
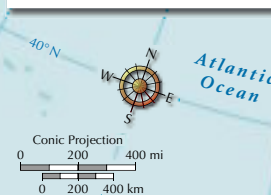
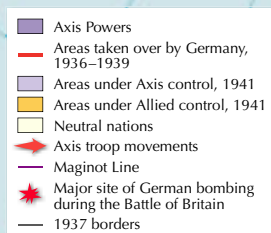
The next storm erupted with raging fury in the spring of 1940. Germany's nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union freed Hitler to send his army west. On April 9, 1940, Germany attacked Denmark and Norway. The two countries fell almost immediately. On May 10, he sent his blitzkrieg forces into the

A woman weeps as she salutes her new rulers.



German Aggression, 1936–1941

Geography Interactive
For: Interactive map
Web Code: nep-1004



Map Skills In 1939, Hitler used force, rather than diplomatic gymnastics to add territory to the German Reich.

- 1. Locate:** (a) Sudetenland, (b) Poland, (c) Vichy France
- 2. Location** What made Poland a difficult ally for France and Britain to protect?

- 3. Synthesize Information** How does this map illustrate the dire situation of the Allies in 1941?

Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The small nations fell like tumbling dominoes. Hitler seemed invincible; his army unstoppable.

Hitler next set his sights on France. France had prepared for Germany's invasion by constructing an interconnected series of fortresses known as the Maginot Line along its border with Germany. Additionally, France had stationed its finest armies along its border with Belgium—the route that Germany had used to attack France in 1914. In between the Maginot Line and Belgium lay the Ardennes, a hilly, forested area that military experts considered invasion proof.

But once again the military experts were wrong. In early May 1940, German tanks rolled through the Ardennes, ripped a hole in the thin French line there, and raced north toward the English Channel. The German plan involved attacking the French and British forces from the front and the rear and trapping them against the channel. It almost worked. Only a few tactical German mistakes gave Britain enough time to evacuate its forces from the French port of Dunkirk. Some 338,000 British and French troops escaped, to Britain. Had they not escaped, it is doubtful if Britain could have remained in the war.

The Miracle of Dunkirk was a proud moment for Britain, but as the new prime minister **Winston Churchill** cautioned Parliament, “wars are not won by evacuations.” Although the British army escaped, the Germans took Paris and forced the French to surrender in the same railway car that the French had used for the German surrender in 1918. France was then divided into two sections: a larger northern section controlled by the Germans and known as Occupied France, and a smaller southern section administered by the French and known as Unoccupied France, or Vichy France, after its capital city. Although Vichy France was officially neutral, it collaborated with the Nazis.

The Battle of Britain Is Fought in the Air France had fallen to Hitler in just 35 days. Hitler next turned his fury on Britain. After the evacuation at Dunkirk, Churchill made it clear that he had no intention of continuing the policy of appeasement. He told his nation:

Primary Source

“We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, 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, 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

Churchill's words stirred his nation as the British readied themselves for battle. Hitler's plan to invade Britain, code-named Operation Sea Lion, depended upon Germany's Luftwaffe, or air force, destroying the British Royal Air Force and gaining control over the skies above the English Channel. The Battle of Britain, then, was an air battle, fought over the English Channel and Great Britain. It began in July 1940. The British lost nearly 1,000 planes, the Germans more than 1,700. Germany bombed civilian as well as military targets, destroying houses, factories, and churches and conducted a months-long bombing campaign against London itself, known as “the blitz.” But the British held on and, sensing failure, Hitler made a tactical decision to postpone the invasion of Britain indefinitely.



Checkpoint Which side seemed to be winning the war at the end of 1940?


The Miracle of Dunkirk

Almost cut off from escape by the German army, British and French troops evacuated from Dunkirk using almost any sailing vessel available, including private yachts and fishing boats as small as 14 feet long! Some of the small boats were used to get close to shore to pick up men and then ferry them to larger naval vessels waiting in deeper waters. *Why do you think the evacuation from Dunkirk raised morale in Britain?*



Edward R. Murrow Reports on the Blitz



American news correspondent Edward R. Murrow (above) broadcast live from London as the Luftwaffe bombed the city. He described the purpose of his reports: "I have an old-fashioned belief that Americans like to make up their own minds on the basis of all available information."  AUDIO

How do you think Murrow's reports influenced Americans?



A milkman (above) delivers milk as usual in October 1940 amid the devastation of an air raid. Londoners (left) take refuge in an underground train station converted into an air-raid shelter.

Americans Debate Involvement

Winston Churchill referred to the United States in many of his speeches during the crisis in France and the Battle of Britain. The fight against Hitler, Churchill implied, was more than simply a European struggle. Nazi aggression threatened the freedoms and rights cherished by democratic nations everywhere. The contest was between ideologies as well as nations.

America Favors Isolation President Roosevelt shared Churchill's concerns, but at the beginning of the war in Europe he understood that the majority of Americans opposed U.S. intervention. The severe economic crisis of the Great Depression had served to pin the nation's attention firmly on domestic affairs throughout the 1930s. In addition, many believed that U.S. involvement in World War I had been a deadly, expensive mistake. The rise of fascism in Europe made the sacrifices of World War I seem even more pointless.

In the 1930s, numerous books and articles presented a new theory about why the United States had become involved in World War I that disturbed many Americans. The theory held that big business had conspired to enter the war in order to make huge fortunes selling weapons. In 1934, a senate committee chaired by Gerald Nye of South Dakota looked into the question. Although the Nye Committee discovered little hard evidence, its findings suggested that "merchants of death"—American bankers and arms manufacturers—had indeed pulled the United States into World War I. The committee's findings further reinforced isolationist sentiments.

In order to avoid making the "mistakes" that had led to U.S. involvement in World War I, Congress passed the Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937.

The acts imposed certain restrictions on Americans during times of war. For example, Americans were prohibited from sailing on ships owned by belligerents or nations at war. The acts also prevented Americans from making loans to belligerents or selling them arms and munitions. The acts did not distinguish between aggressors like Germany and Italy and victims like Poland, or their allies, France and Britain.

Interventionists Urge Support for the Allies Once war began in Europe, Roosevelt felt confined by the limitations of the Neutrality Acts. Though he issued a proclamation of American neutrality, he was firmly anti-Nazi and wanted to aid the democracies of Europe. In the end, Congress agreed and passed the **Neutrality Act of 1939**, which included a cash-and-carry provision. This provision allowed belligerent nations to buy goods and arms in the United States if they paid cash and carried the merchandise on their own ships. Since the British navy controlled the seas, cash-and-carry in effect aided the Allies.

Many Americans disagreed with Roosevelt's openly pro-Allies position. They argued that FDR's policies violated American neutrality and threatened to push the United States into the war. Between early 1940 and late 1941, a great debate raged in America between isolationists and interventionists. The debate became particularly heated after the fall of France left Britain standing by itself in Europe against Germany. Interventionist organizations such as the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies claimed that Britain was fighting for free countries everywhere. Sending aid to Britain was a way for America to stay out of the conflict.

Isolationists Argue for Neutrality Isolationists countered by claiming that giving aid to the Allies was automatically harming the Axis and would culminate with the United States entering the conflict. They argued that the only way to keep America safe was to follow a policy of complete neutrality. The America First Committee, an isolationist group, held rallies and sponsored speeches that criticized Roosevelt's openly pro-British policies. Charles Lindbergh became the leading isolationist voice. Lindbergh believed that the real threats to America were the Soviet Union and Japan, and he did not want to see his country weaken itself fighting in Western Europe to save Britain. Lindbergh's addresses were measured and clear. He appealed to Americans' minds but not their hearts.

Roosevelt Inches Toward Involvement Events in Europe shocked Americans out of strict neutrality. Reports by Edward R. Murrow, a CBS reporter stationed in London, during the blitz brought the war into American living rooms. His frequent live radio reports, which began with the words "This is London," emphasized that the Germans were bombing not armies or military sites but civilians—grandparents, parents, and children.

These reports and the turn of events in Europe against the Allies convinced many Americans that the United States needed to at least prepare to defend itself. Shortly after the fall of France in September 1940, Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the **Tripartite Pact** and became



Analyzing Political Cartoons

The Only Way to Save Democracy? In this cartoon, a figure symbolizing democracy begs Uncle Sam to stay out of the war in Europe.

1. What does this cartoonist think has happened to democracy in Europe?
2. According to this cartoonist's vision, how will the United States be able to save democracy?

Should the United States Enter World War II?

Quick Study

Isolationist Viewpoint

- The United States should avoid alliances with other nations.
- Americans should focus on issues at home, such as the depression.
- Complete neutrality was the way to keep the United States safe.
- Intervention in a foreign war would be a mistake, just as World War I was.

Interventionist Viewpoint

- The United States should work with other nations to promote collective security.
- Axis aggressions were wrong and threatened American interests.
- The United States should aid the Allies, who were fighting for democracy and freedom.
- The United States should put pressure on the Axis Powers and prepare for war.

allies. In that same month, after a heated debate between isolationists and interventionists, Congress passed a Selective Service Act—a peacetime draft—providing for the military training of 1.2 million troops and 800,000 reserve troops each year.

At the same time, President Roosevelt took an additional step to strengthen Britain. He gave Britain 50 World War I-era battleships in exchange for eight British defense bases. Britain needed the destroyers to convoy goods across the Atlantic. Believing the act to be an emergency measure, Roosevelt made the transfer without the consent of Congress.

The American people evaluated FDR's leadership the next month in the presidential election. Roosevelt ran for an unprecedented third term against Republican nominee Wendell L. Willkie of Indiana. Willkie was critical of FDR's handling of both the economy and foreign affairs but not of the President's basic positions on either. Given such little differences between candidates, Americans voted overwhelmingly not to change leaders in the middle of a crisis.



Checkpoint According to interventionists, how would aiding the Allies actually keep the United States out of the war?

America Takes Steps Toward War

Once safely reelected, President Roosevelt increased his support of Britain. When Britain began to run short on funds to purchase cash-and-carry goods in the United States, FDR took the opportunity to address Congress. On January 6, 1941, he spoke about “four freedoms”—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—that were threatened by Nazi and Japanese militarism. Roosevelt believed that the best way to stay out of the conflict with Germany was to aid Britain.

Lend-Lease Gives Aid to the Allies Roosevelt compared America's situation to the scenario of a fire in a neighbor's home. If a neighbor asked to borrow your fire hose to put out the fire, you would not debate the issue or try to sell the hose. Extending help was both being a good neighbor and acting to keep the fire from spreading to your own home.

Britain, Roosevelt said, needed American aid, and it had run out of money to pay for it. The President called for America to become “the great arsenal for democracy.” Once again, America answered Britain's plea for help. In March 1941, Congress approved the **Lend-Lease Act**, symbolically numbered 1776, after another heated debate between isolationists and interventionists. The act authorized Roosevelt to



Aid to Britain

The president of Bundles for Britain (above) collects money for her organization, which sent food and clothing to help British people suffering from the effects of the war. *Is Bundles for Britain an example of the interventionist or isolationist viewpoint?*

Vocabulary Builder

evaluate—(ee VAL yoo ayt) *v.* to judge or find the value of



Roosevelt and Churchill

President Roosevelt (left) met with British prime minister Winston Churchill (right) in August 1941. Although the United States was still not at war with Germany, the two leaders set out some common goals in the Atlantic Charter. *How did President Roosevelt's actions reveal his interventionist stance?*

“sell, transfer title to, exchange, lease, lend, or otherwise dispose of, to any such government any defense article” whenever he thought it was “necessary in the interests of the defense of the United States.” By 1945, the United States had sent more than \$40 billion of Lend-Lease aid to the Allies, including the Soviet Union. The Lend-Lease Act was nothing less than an economic declaration of war against Germany and the Axis Powers.

The Atlantic Charter Reinforces America's Support of Britain

In August 1941, President Roosevelt and prime minister Churchill met secretly on a warship off the misty coast of Newfoundland. They talked not only about Britain's problems in the war but also about their hopes for the world after Hitler's defeat. On board the ship they signed the **Atlantic Charter**, a document that

endorsed national self-determination and an international system of “general security.” The signing of the Atlantic Charter signaled the deepening alliance between the two nations.

U.S. Navy Battles German U-Boats Hitler was not blind to America's actions in support of the Allies. Nor did he fail to notice the fact that the United States had begun to escort arms shipments to Iceland, where the British picked them up and transported them to England.

In the fall of 1941, he ordered his German U-boats, or submarines, to attack American ships. The U-boats shot at the USS *Greer*, hit the USS *Kearny*, and sunk the USS *Reuben James*, killing more than a hundred sailors. The attacks shocked and angered Americans, moving them closer to declaring war on Germany. Though the United States was still officially a neutral nation, Roosevelt gave orders to the navy to attack German U-boats on sight. In June 1941, Germany had gone to war against the Soviet Union, and by November, war against the United States seemed inevitable.

 **Checkpoint** How did the United States support the Allies after Roosevelt's reelection?

SECTION 2 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nea-1005

Comprehension

1. Terms and People For each item below, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- blitzkrieg
- Axis Powers
- Allies
- Winston Churchill
- Neutrality Act of 1939
- Tripartite Pact
- Lend-Lease Act
- Atlantic Charter

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Sequence Use your timeline to answer the Section Focus Question: How did Americans react to events in Europe and Asia in the early years of World War II?

Writing About History

3. Quick Write: Compare Points of View

Compare the image of the women protesting the Lend-Lease Act to the excerpt from Roosevelt's Quarantine speech in this section. Write a paragraph summarizing the two different points of view presented by these two documents.

Critical Thinking

4. Summarize Describe the course of World War II in Europe until the end of 1940.

5. Identify Point of View Why did members of the America First Committee believe that the United States should avoid war with Germany?

6. Recognize Causes Why did the United States give more and more help to the Allies?