

Lecture Notes

Europe in Crisis: Class 6 – Germany Ascending

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- This is just a timeline of events we discuss in this class. It will be useful for reference – sometimes the dates can get confusing.
 - September 1 1939: Poland Invaded
 - April 9, 1940: Norway and Denmark invaded
 - May 10, 1940: Benelux countries and France invaded.
 - Late May 1940: Dunkirk Evacuations.
 - June 22, 1940: French-German armistice signed.
 - August 17: September 17: Battle of Britain/ the Blitz begins.
 - June 22, 1941: USSR Invaded.
 - December 5, 1941: Germany retreats from Moscow
 - December 7, 1941: Pearl Harbor

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Invasion of Poland

- On September 1, 1939, the German army invaded Poland. By September 14, most of the Polish army had been incapacitated, and by September 27, Poland surrendered.
- Hitler was eager to go through with his plan to expand German living space. He also knew that he would soon have to fight Britain and France, and he preferred that the fight be sooner, rather than later.
 - Britain and France were rearming quickly, and would soon catch up with the German army capacity.
 - Hitler had to win quickly, because he knew Germany did not have the resources to win a war of attrition.
- Britain and France had both promised to defend Poland, and Russia was traditionally very involved in Poland. Hitler had to be very careful that his invasion did not upset *all* of these powers, or else he would be fighting too many enemies at once.
 - In August 1939, Hitler signed **the Nazi-Soviet pact**, in which both powers agreed to neutrality, and to non-aggression. They also agreed that Poland would be invaded, and split between the two countries.
 - Stalin actually asks Britain and France to sign a treaty with him against Germany, but the British and French are hesitant to provoke Hitler in such a way.
 - Stalin believes that the West is unwilling to sign with him because they are hoping Hitler will eradicate the Russian communist menace for them.
 - Stalin ends up signing with Hitler, in the hope it will prevent a German invasion of Russia.
 - Stalin hopes that Germany and the West will be bogged down in another war, like WWI, and leave the USSR alone.

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- Britain and France mobilize, but they do not give military aid to Poland (even though they said they would). They do, at least, declare war on Germany.

- Britain wants to wait until France and Britain are stronger. They also thought the blockade that the British navy was imposing on Germany would starve the Germans into submission.
- France, which will suffer more if the Nazis attack the Western powers, is less complacent. They propose some plans for bombing Germany, but the British and French can't agree on the details, so they never get off the ground.
- France is afraid of Nazi reprisals if they intervene directly in Poland. When the Polish foreign minister asked if the French were going to come through, the French replied, "Surely you don't expect us to have a massacre of women and children in Paris!"
- The Western Powers were afraid of a repeat of WWI. They thought that attacking Germany would merely reopen the Western front that had been closed only twenty years before.
- Poland is invaded September 1, and surrenders September 27. However, most serious fighting is over within a week.
 - The Nazis also bomb Warsaw, the capital of Poland. The ruthless murder of thousands of civilians showed that Hitler was fighting a new kind of war, where the old norms of international behavior didn't apply.

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Invasion of the Scandinavian Countries:

- Why did Hitler even want Norway and Denmark?
 - He was afraid the British might launch an attack on Germany from Norway.
 - He wanted to protect trade routes delivering iron ore from Sweden.
 - He wanted to control all countries near Germany.
 - He considered Scandinavians to be Aryans, and wanted all Aryans to be united under Germany.
- **Denmark:** Denmark was invaded on April 9, 1940. The Danes did not have much of an army, but did manage to inflict some damage. They wisely chose not to make a futile, if brave, stand, and capitulated quickly once the Nazis threatened to bomb civilians. Consequentially, the Germans were very lenient with Denmark – only 70/8000 Danish Jews were actually killed.
 - The rescue of the Danish Jews is portrayed in the popular children's book *Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry.
- **Norway:** It took a little longer to capture Norway, simply because Norway was big and mountainous. Also, the Norwegians chose to resist. They were hoping the British might come and help out, but the British were disorganized and were unable to get troops to Norway to quickly enough to make a difference.
 - After failing to help Norway, **Neville Chamberlain** was thrown out of office and replaced by **Winston Churchill**.
 - **Vidkun Quisling** was the Nazi puppet prime minister who supported the Nazis from the start. He is detested by the Norwegian people, and, in English, his name is synonymous with "traitor."

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Invasion of France and the BeNeLux Countries:

- Hitler quickly overran the Netherlands and Belgium, and on May 10, he invaded France. By June 14, France had fallen.

- Britain and France combined had the biggest and best army in Europe. This chart shows allied numbers:

	Britain and France	Germany
Divisions of Soldiers	135	152
Tanks	4204	2439
Fighter Planes	4981	3369

- British and French tanks and planes were just as modern as German ones.
- German generals were afraid to fight the French – they were convinced it would fail terribly. Indeed, some generals contemplated a coup to throw Hitler out of power to avoid such a deeply stupid military move.

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- So then how did Hitler take France so quickly? Blitzkrieg Warfare
 - **Blitzkrieg:** Blitzkrieg is German for “lightening war.” Blitzkrieg warfare is designed to be the antithesis of trench warfare – victory is obtained in a matter of weeks by using superior maneuvering, not superior resources. It can conquer a country quickly with a relatively small number of troops. Very different from slow-moving trench warfare.
 - How is this achieved?
 - **Surprise and Speed:** German troops would strike before the enemy had a chance to prepare and mobilize. Then, they would use tanks to advance the army, allowing them to cover 30-60 miles a day – something that was unheard of in previous wars.
 - **Tanks:** Tanks (called *panzers* in German), were used to punch holes in the enemy’s defensive lines. This maneuver would divide the troops into small groups, which could be easily circled and eliminated by infantry. Tanks could also move through rough terrain. Before this, tanks were usually used as another form of artillery.
 - **Planes:** Used to drop bombs on enemy troops, causing confusion and fear, making troops hard to organize and control. They didn’t necessarily kill many troops, but frightened enough that enemy armies were too shell-shocked to fight well. The *Stuka* were the dive bombers used by Germany to achieve this.
 - Planes would also take care to bomb telephone lines to hurt enemy communication.
 - **Maneuvering:** During WWI, there were simply too many people fighting to coordinate meticulous maneuvers. However, technological advances in speed and communications made it possible for generals to develop and execute complicated plans.
 - **Leadership:** Officers down the chain of command were not given orders. They were told the commanders intent, and given a rough outline of what the commander thought was the best way to achieve it. It was up to lower-level officers to make sure that happened.
 - **Communication:** German officers used radios to communicate with each other.
- French and British military methods assumed that the next European land war would be a repeat of WWI. Their strategies were very defensive, and were designed to minimize casualties. They aimed to maintain a front in Belgium, not to attack or push the Germans back. The Allies

did not realize that new strategies made it possible for delicate maneuvering to make a big difference in war.

- Even after witnessing the blitzkrieg in Poland, the Allies did not try to change their strategy – they were convinced that the war would just be a repeat of WWI.
- Example: Planes
 - The Allies had almost twice as many planes as the Germans. However, they did not try to use them in battle much.
 - The Allies wanted to use the planes to bomb German cities. They were anticipating a war of attrition, and wanted to bomb factories and farms. They did not see many applications in battle.
- Example: Trenches
 - After Poland, France mobilized its army. But its army spent its time digging trenches on the French-Belgian boarder instead of learning new maneuvers to fight a Blitzkrieg.

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- So what actually happened? The Invasion of the Benelux Countries and France
 - The Germans couldn't go through the French-German border because of the Maginot Line.
 - Remember, the French built the impenetrable **Maginot Line** in the 1930s, assuming that the next war would be won by the best defender. The Maginot Line is often seen as an example of French folly during the run-up to WWII.
 - So, they go through Belgium, which had reneged on a deal to extend the Maginot Line to the German-Belgian boarder so to not provoke Hitler.
 - During WWI, with the Schiefflen Plan, the Germans had gone through Belgium's low costal planes. At first, German tanks moved through these planes, and the allies, who were expecting a repeat of WWI, assumed they were repeating the Schiefflen Plan. However, the Germans were actually launching an attack through the hilly Ardennes Forest, just south of the costal planes. The allies assumed that it was impossible to move through this forest, so they disregarded all reports that the Germans were there until May 13 – three days after the attack had been launched!
 - Once the Allies figured out what was going on, they had trouble countering it. The Allies had **poor communications**.
 - Germans relied on portable **radios** to communicate. However, the Allies had decided against using radios, because they were afraid they would be intercepted. Instead, the Allied commanders used telephones (land lines, not cell phones, remember!) and messengers to communicate.
 - Many phone lines were cut by the Germans, so the best way the allies had to communicate was by visiting each other.
 - Once the Germans entered French territory, they made for the English Channel. This was consistent with the typical Blitzkrieg technique of breaking the enemy into chunks, and then encircling them. In this case, a significant portion of the Allied forces were backed up in the small French town of **Dunkirk**.
 - In an inspiring moment of British ingenuity, the Royal Navy, as well as privately owned fishing boats crossed the channel to Dunkirk and evacuated 338,000 allied troops.
 - This moment inspired the British people, and helped convince them to keep fighting the Germans.

- Meanwhile, the Germans continued marching across France. At this point, the French army was putting up only token resistance – they knew fighting was futile. The current president, Reynaud, refused to surrender, but resigned on June 16 when his cabinet turned against him. Marshal Phillipe Pétain, a WWI hero, became the new president, and promptly negotiated peace with the Germans.
- German peace was very petty. Hitler wanted revenge on the French for all the indignities they had made the Germans suffer in the aftermath of WWI. He insisted that the treaty be negotiated and signed in the same railway car that the WWI armistice had been negotiated in, 22 years earlier. He insisted that the French army be reduced to 100,000 men, just like the German army had been. The French were allowed to maintain an independent government, called Vichy France, in the south-western third of France, but the rest of France was occupied by Germany.
 - Vichy France became an authoritarian state headed by Pétain, who collaborated with the Nazis.

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The Battle of Britain:

- Britain had drawn up its war plans assuming they would be fighting a continental war with full support of the powerful French army.
- Instead, Britain had to fight the German army with little or no support. They had a few advantages
 - **Island:** Islands are very hard to attack. The last time a foreign power managed to invade Britain was in 1066, at the Battle of Hastings!
 - **The Royal Navy:** Britain has the best navy in the world.
 - **The Royal Air Force (RAF):** Also excellent, though not as good as Germany's. The British, however, had *Spitfire* fighter planes that were top of the line.
 - **RADAR:** Radar technology meant that the British knew when planes were crossing the channel.
 - **America:** America traditionally had close cultural ties with Britain. Currently, America was dealing with the Great Depression, and had a mighty isolationist streak. However, after France fell, American became more sympathetic.
 - The British made their war plans assuming America would soon enter with full financial support. America eventually does start to give support in March 1941 – but it comes much later than the British had expected.
- On the other hand, though...
 - **Easy Terms:** Hitler had made it clear on previous occasions that he would not demand much from Britain. She would certainly be allowed to maintain her independence, empire and a good chunk of her military strength. It might have been smarter for the British to settle rather than face invasion.
 - **Civilians:** Hitler had shown he had no compunctions about murdering civilians in air raids. The British predicted great civilian casualties.
- Britain obviously makes the decision to fight. They are lead by **Winston Churchill**. Churchill was a great orator who's moving speeches inspired the British people to keep fighting. The following selection is from a speech Churchill gave to Parliament shortly after France fell:
 - "What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler

knows that he will have to break us in this Island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "**This was their finest hour.**"

- **Battle of Britain:** Hitler launched his invasion of Britain on August 13. German planes fought British planes over British soil. They were fairly evenly matched, and the fighting was fierce.
 - **The Blitz:** On September 7, Germany began to bomb Britain in what is known as **The Blitz**. About 40,000 British civilians died in the bombings, and much infrastructure was destroyed. The Blitz was designed to beat down British civilians, but, instead, it inspired them to fight harder.
 - The Battle of Britain ends in late September, when the Germans make the strategic decision not to continue wasting resources on Britain.

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Operation Barbarossa: Hitler's Invasion of Russia. While the United States and Britain contributed greatly to Nazi defeat, it was stiff Russian willpower and reserve that kept Hitler and his troops distracted in the East, so that the Western powers could attack from the West. Had Hitler defeated Russia, or chosen not to invade at all, it would have been very hard for the West to defeat the Nazis.

- Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. He considered this the culmination of his life's work – achieving living space for Aryans by getting rid of the Russian communist threat.
 - Hitler decides to break his treaty with the Russians and invade the Soviet Union
 - Believes Stalin and Churchill are planning some sort of agreement.
 - Believes the Soviet Union is especially weak right now, the Red Army did poorly in a war against Finland, and is in chaos because Stalin purged many of their former leaders.
 - Believed the Soviet government was unpopular and would crumble quickly
 - Is dependent on the USSR for many material goods, which is vulnerability.
 - Take living space from the Slavs and give it to the Germans.
 - Hitler would have to win the war quickly, though, because the USSR was so large that the USSR would win in a war of attrition.
- **The USSR:**
 - Stalin had ignored intelligence that suggested Hitler was planning to invade Russia.
 - The Red Army was woefully unprepared – most of their best generals had been purged in the 1930s, and most troops were uneducated and poorly trained.
 - When Stalin was told that the Germans were attacking, he had a nervous breakdown, which delayed Soviet response. It also shows how woefully unprepared the USSR was for war.
- **The Invasion:**
 - The invasion was launched from the German-Russian border. There were three main thrusts: towards Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev.
 - At first the blitzkrieg technique worked well. The Germans easily surrounded huge swaths of Soviet troops – by October 1942, the Russians had suffered 3 million casualties.

- At first, the Nazis were greeted as liberators. They invaded many Soviet territories that were not ethnically Russian, like the Ukraine and the Baltic States. These ethnic groups chafed under harsh Soviet rule. However, as the Nazis pushed into Russian territory, they got less support from the locals, especially once it became clear how cruel Nazi occupation really was.
- However, as the Nazis pushed deeper into Russia, their **supply lines** got longer – it took longer to get food, ammunition, etc to the front line.
- **Moscow:**
 - In autumn 1941, Nazi progress is slower than expected. The Nazis decide to focus their efforts on Moscow.
 - However, the Russian army entrenched itself in the city. All the people of Moscow built vast arrays of trenches. They were supported by fresh troops from Siberia, as well as a steady stream of supplies.
 - The Germans, however, were at great disadvantage. Their supply lines were very long. Also, their weapon of choice, the tank, was ineffective in the rain and snow of autumn and winter. By December 1941, it became clear Germany could not take Moscow.
- Mistakes the Nazis Made:
 - **Underestimating the Enemy:** The Nazis had been expecting a short campaign, lasting about four months. They thought the Russian government would collapse upon itself, just like the French and Polish had, when faced with the Nazi blitzkrieg. They were so sure that the war would end quickly, that most Nazi troops had not been provided with winter clothing.
 - Believed Russians to be racial inferior, and therefore poor fighters.
 - Believed that the Russian people would rebel when faced with the stress of war, as they had in 1919. Did not predict Russian tenacity.
 - Stalin wins Russian support by rallying his people around a nationalist, rather than a communist cause.
 - **Occupation:** Nazis were cruel occupiers. They abused and killed many Russians, instead of trying to win their loyalty.
 - **Moscow vs. Kiev:** In July, when Nazi advances slowed, Hitler decided, against the advice of his generals, to focus on trying to take natural-resource rich Southern Russia, and starve the Russians into submission. His generals said that instead, efforts should be focused on taking Moscow, but Hitler ignored them. Consequentially, the Germans didn't really start to focus on Moscow until it was too late

American Entry

- On December 7, 1941, the United States naval port of Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii is attacked by the Japanese.
- Hitler was not ready to fight the United States. However, relations with the US had been deteriorating since 1938 (indeed, some naval skirmishes had already taken place). He believed that war with the US was unavoidable, and declared war shortly after Pearl Harbor.
- At the time, though, there was not a lot of public support for war in Europe, only for war in the Pacific. Hitler jumped the gun by declaring war – he probably would have been able to avoid war with the US for a few years.

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