

Liberty University

**Torn Between the “Creeds of the Devil”:
The German-Finnish Co-Belligerency in World War II**

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by

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INTRODUCTION:
A PIECE OF DRIFTWOOD, A RIVERBOAT, OR A NAZI COLLABORATOR?
THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF FINLAND IN WORLD WAR II

In an article for the *Sunday Chronicle* in June 1937, Winston Churchill described Nazism and Communism as “the creeds of the devil.”¹ The newly independent Finland was caught between these two ideologies that “[were] at each other’s throats.”² Throughout the tumultuous decades of the 1930s and 1940s, Finland struggled to remain a sovereign nation between the great powers of Germany and the Soviet Union as they both vied for its strategically vital territory and resources. This would prove virtually impossible after the November 1939 Soviet invasion of Finland. Reeling from the destructive Winter War, Finnish leaders strove never to be in that position again. This context is particularly important when studying the motives of Finnish leaders. Convinced that cooperation with Germany was their only viable option to regain lost territory and vital resources, Finnish leaders pragmatically decided to commit first to military cooperation and then to a co-belligerency with Nazi Germany in the months following the end of the Winter War. However, the decisions made during World War II must be placed within this context—the context of Finland’s early history when it was caught between Sweden and Russia’s battle for supremacy, and its immediate context, the decades preceding the outbreak of World War II and the Winter War.

As renowned historian William Shirer observed, “Finland had much to answer for by the choice she made—and for which, in the end, she would have to pay so dearly.”³ The Finnish

¹ “Creeds of the Devil,” June 27, 1937, *The Sunday Chronicle*, <https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour-extras/the-creeds-of-the-devil-churchill-between-the-two-totalitarianisms-1917-1945-1-of-3/>.

² Ibid.

³ William L. Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland in Our Time* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1955), 335.

leaders and citizens failed to understand not only the nature of warfare on the Eastern Front but also the ramifications of allying with a nation like Nazi Germany. Finland became intertwined with a genocidal war on the Eastern Front, and some of its soldiers participated in Nazi atrocities committed against Jews, Soviet prisoners of war, and civilians. Although the Nordic region, including Finland, is often “regarded generally as [the] backwaters of World War II while gigantic struggles and terrible cruelties took place elsewhere,” events there during the war had a profound impact on its course and the future of the Nordic region.⁴ The Finnish-German co-belligerency played a significant role in the history of World War II and especially in Finland’s struggle as a newly independent nation navigating a complex geopolitical environment.

Since the end of World War II, historians have discussed the decisions and motives of Finnish leaders during the war. Molded by the post-war atmosphere of Finland, the historiography represents a fascinating development that is as essential to understanding Finland during the war as it is to the actual events of the war. As historian Richard Overy observes, “the impact of that war [World War II] has remained a contested historical narrative to this day.”⁵ Generally, there have been three schools of thought or interpretative lenses through which historians approached the topic of Finland’s actions following the end of the Winter War in March 1940 until the resumption of war with the Soviet Union in June 1941.⁶ The Soviets established the first school of thought, a Marxist interpretation, while early historians professed Finnish innocence with the second school of thought, the “driftwood theory.” Later historians in the 1960s and 1970s promoted a more balanced third interpretation known as the *Poltamo* Thesis, but the more recent Ideological Approach includes much-needed considerations of the

⁴ John Gilmour and Jill Stephenson ed., *Hitler’s Scandinavian Legacy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶ Kent Forester, “Finland’s Foreign Policy 1940-1941: An Ongoing Historiographic Controversy,” *Scandinavian Studies* 51, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 109.

irredentism belief of a “greater Finland,” the Finnish SS volunteers, and antisemitism. This approach forms an unofficial fourth school of thought, which includes questions of how ideologically aligned Finland was with Nazi Germany.⁷ Between the extremes of Finnish leaders resembling a piece of driftwood or acting as Nazi collaborators, the historian should strive to find a balance between them that considers, without hindsight, context and the nuances of the period in which Finland found itself.

When analyzing these early schools of thought, it is vital to understand Finland’s ongoing relations with the Soviet Union post-World War II and how that impacted and hindered the historiographical debates among historians.⁸ The first school of thought originated within the Soviet Union with historian H. M. Vainu.⁹ In his work, heavily inundated with Marxist ideals, he postulated that “Finnish ‘fascist conspirators’ . . . pro-German Finns, including the country’s ‘twenty monopolist families’ used the War Cabinet to align Finland secretly with Germany as early as December 1940 for a premeditated attack on the USSR.”¹⁰ Vainu’s work is also a reflection of the Stalinist era of the Soviet Union in which he wrote. Nevertheless, Vainu’s thesis was the preferred Soviet view and was used to justify their actions.

While accurately including the pro-German elements within Finnish society, the Marxist overtones of Vainu’s theory limited its acceptance among Western historians.¹¹ Without a doubt, there were many pro-German elements within Finnish society, particularly among the military. Historians, such as Jason Lavery, note that roughly 2,000 Finnish soldiers were trained in

⁷ Oulu Silvennoinen, “Still Under Examination: Coming to Terms with Finland’s Alliance with Nazi Germany,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 37, no. 2 (2009): 74.

⁸ Forester, “Finland’s Foreign Policy,” 109.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰ H. M. Vainu, “‘Iz istorii bolsoi strategii’ pravitelei Finljadii v pervoi polovine 1941 goda, *Skandinavskij sbornik* 15 (1970):103-21.

¹¹ Forester, “Finland’s Foreign Policy,” 110.

Germany as part of the 27th Jäger Battalion during the Great War.¹² These men later became key officers and political leaders during World War II. In *A Frozen Hell: The Russo-Finnish Winter War of 1939-1940*, William Trotter also explores the importance of this training and its impact on Finnish views of Germany.¹³ Perhaps more impactful in shaping Finnish views of Germany was the fact that German troops helped Finland secure its independence during the Finnish Civil War. However, most Finns failed to realize that the Germany of 1940 was not the same as the imperial Germany of 1918, which had aided their struggle for independence against communism.¹⁴ Therefore, it is important here to distinguish that pro-German does not necessarily mean pro-Nazi. Although this first school of thought initially had a limited impact, Vainu's theory has recently received more attention as historians investigate Finnish ideology and what he meant by "pro-German."¹⁵

The antithesis to Vainu's thesis and the second school of thought emerged in *Finland and World War II 1939-1944*, edited by American John H. Wuorinen. It presents the complete opposite perspective of Finland's foreign policy decisions after the Winter War. Wuorinen received the anonymous manuscript in 1946 and recalled, "it is the first fairly extensive presentation of the Finnish side of the story...this book throws a flood of light upon a phase of the Second World War which has hitherto been largely left to the mercies of the inept and the propagandists."¹⁶ He further believed that it was written by a high-ranking Finnish official.¹⁷ Wuorinen also noted how the current conditions in Finland "have been such as to prevent the publication of serious, objective studies of Finland's part in the war. Russian sensibilities cannot

¹² Jason Lavery, *The History of Finland* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 86.

¹³ William Trotter, *A Frozen Hell: The Russo-Finnish War of 1939-1940* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1991), 5.

¹⁴ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 87.

¹⁵ Vainu, "Iz istorii bolsoi strategii," 121.

¹⁶ John H. Wuorinen, ed., *Finland and World War II: 1939-1944* (New York: Ronald Press, 1948), 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

be hurt or suspicions aroused.”¹⁸ Through investigations and a process of elimination, Arvi Korhonen was revealed to be the author of the original manuscript.

In his thesis, Korhonen proposed that “Finland’s leaders during the fifteen months following the Winter War had headed a small state swept along helplessly and innocently in the stream of Great Power politics like a piece of driftwood which in June 1941 was sucked into the German-Soviet vortex.”¹⁹ Borrowing the metaphor of “Finland as mere driftwood” from the German ambassador in Helsinki, Korhonen’s thesis became known as the “driftwood theory.”²⁰ Not surprisingly, the testimonies of various Finnish leaders during the War Crimes Trials conducted from November 1945 to February 1946 also supported his thesis.²¹ Korhonen postulated that fears of the Kremlin’s intentions greatly influenced Finland’s actions after the end of the Winter War.²² These fears were also furthered by continued Soviet demands for the nickel mine in Petsamo and the use of Finnish railroads to move troops to the newly leased Port of Hanko.²³ Korhonen also asserted many Finns believed “their very independence was in jeopardy...[which] dictated certain Finnish responses. Foremost of these responses was a drift toward Germany.”²⁴ The last significant part of Korhonen’s thesis was his claim that there was “no pact, no alliance, and no knowledge on the Finnish side of Germany’s Plan Barbarossa,” despite frequent interactions between the two nations.²⁵ This interpretation dominated the academia of Finland during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 102, 184-185.

²⁰ Michael Jonas, “The Politics of an Alliance: Finland in Nazi Foreign Policy and War Strategy,” *Finland in World War II: History, Memory, Interpretations*, edited by Tiina Kinnunen and Ville Kivimäki (Leiden, The Netherlands, Brill Publishing, 2012), 106.

²¹ Forester, “Finland’s Foreign Policy,” 111.

²² Arvi Korhonen, *Barbarossa-sunnitelma ja Suomi, jatkosodan synty* (Helsinki: Soderstrom, 1961), 22.

²³ Forester, “Finland’s Foreign Policy,” 111.

²⁴ Ibid., 112.

²⁵ Ibid., 113.

Reflecting the growing access to German documents following World War II, the 1957 work of American scholar C. L. Lundin, *Finland in the Second World War*, challenged the accepted narrative. He stressed the responsibility of Finnish leaders in dictating Finnish interactions with other nations.²⁶ Further challenges to the “driftwood theory” continued into the 1960s. Historian H. Peter Krosby, in his 1968 *Finland, Germany, and the Soviet Union, 1940-1941*, noted some aspects of the “driftwood theory” have elements of truth. The increased tensions after the absorption of Estonia and the debate surrounding the economically and strategically vital Petsamo nickel mines caused concern for Finns.²⁷ However, Krosby was not a proponent of the “driftwood theory.” He contested Finnish innocence, observing “even during the war itself, fact and fiction began to mix, as conflicting versions of how and why Finland on three separate occasions became involved in a war were presented.”²⁸ Additionally, Krosby’s work shed light on the economic dealings of Finland with Germany.²⁹ The increasing interactions between Finland and Germany and the economic ties built through various agreements further support the argument that Finnish leaders pragmatically led their nation. Finland’s journey towards Germany was not “like a rushing stream captures a piece of driftwood,” but rather, its leaders actively steered Finland closer to Germany.³⁰

Beyond increasing economic ties, Finnish diplomat Max Jakobson observed the September 1940 Transit Agreement between Finland and Germany as a key turning point in Finnish foreign policy in his 1961 work, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War*.³¹ Due to the nature

²⁶ C. L. Lundin, *Finland in the Second World War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1957), ix.

²⁷ H. Peter Krosby, *Finland, Germany, and the Soviet Union 1940-1941: The Petsamo Dispute* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), viii.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, vii.

²⁹ Krosby, *Finland, Germany, and the Soviet Union*, 80.

³⁰ Tiina Kinnunen and Markku Jokisipila, “Shifting Images of ‘Our Wars,’” *Finland in World War II*, 442.

³¹ Max Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War: An Account of the Russo-Finnish War, 1939-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 256.

of the Transit Agreement, historian C. L. Lundin, echoing Jakobson, noted that it is difficult to conclude that the Finnish government knew nothing of German intentions or that they were simply drifting along into the Nazi maelstrom.³² As additional documents from both the German perspective and the Finnish were discovered, more historians, such as British scholar Anthony Upton and American James E. McSherry, believed that “Korhonen, in particular, had overdrawn Finnish innocence.”³³ Upton further noted that Hitler’s change of approach to Finland resulted in secret overtures by German officials starting in August 1940.³⁴ Crosby also concluded that “Soviet demands oblig[ed] the Finns to move—not drift—toward Berlin for support.”³⁵

Eino Jutikkala introduced this new third school of thought, named the *Poltamo* [river boat] Thesis in 1977, by proposing that “the Finnish Ship-of-State was more of a river boat [*poltamo*] that could pass the rapids without crashing if it was skillfully guided.”³⁶ He added that Finnish “leaders had some room for maneuver which entailed first rapprochement with Germany in late 1940 and then a cautious, but deliberate, move toward alignment.”³⁷ Although it is difficult to produce a concrete date or exact details for the German-Finnish military coalition, there was clearly an agreement. Korhonen’s claim of no pact or agreement between the two nations ignores direct documentary evidence. Although they did not have the same abilities as much larger nations, Finnish leaders still directed the policies of the nation and chose to take the route they did, often with the full support of the people.

³² Lundin, *Finland in the Second World War*, 115.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Anthony F. Upton, *The Politics and Strategy of the Second World War: Finland 1939-1940* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1974), 157.

³⁵ H. Peter Crosby, *Suomen valinta 1941* (Helsinki: Kirjallisuus, 1967), 237.

³⁶ Eino Jutikkala, Viljo Rasila and Keijo K Kuha, *Suomen poliittinen historia 1809-1975* (Helsinki: Soderstrom, 1977), 221.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

As with any controversial topic, the historiography is always evolving as more information is discovered and included in the discussion. The study of Finland's role in World War II has seen a recent resurgence of interest over the past two decades. This new interest emerged with a reevaluation of Vainu's interpretation of the months leading up to the start of the Continuation War. Understandably, many historians note the clear contradiction of a people within a democracy, with few objections, aligning themselves with Nazi Germany in 1940.³⁸

One of the leading proponents of this reevaluation is Finnish historian Oula Silvennoinen. He has written various works, but his chapter in a book edited by John Gilmour and Jill Stephenson provides the most concise presentation of his argument available in English. He focuses on Finnish decisions after the start of the Continuation War, including the movement beyond the 1939 borders as an indication of the irredentism belief in a "greater Finland" (*Suur-Suomi*) that had emerged with the Finnish Civil War.³⁹ This expansionist temptation would be exacerbated by the course of events during World War II and by the actions of both Finnish and Soviet leaders. Furthermore, the idea of a "greater Finland" received additional support after the Winter War left Finland not only "territorially reduced," but also "embittered to the core by Soviet aggression."⁴⁰ Combined with the nationwide disillusionment with the West and the League of Nations after no substantial aid was provided when the Soviet Union invaded, "the choice [by the Finnish people to reach an agreement with Nazi Germany] was a foregone conclusion."⁴¹ As Silvennoinen describes, by early spring 1941, "the point of no return had

³⁸ Gilmour and Stephenson, *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, 129.

³⁹ Oula Silvennoinen, "Janus of the North? Finland 1940-1944: Finland's Road into Alliance with Hitler," in *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, 131.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

already passed.”⁴² Finnish society contained elements sympathetic to the expansionist ideals of Nazism, and clearly, Finland was not as innocent as early historians described.

This ideological school of thought also challenges the accepted understanding of Finnish ideology regarding antisemitism and Finland’s role in the Holocaust on the Eastern Front as a co-belligerent of the Nazis.⁴³ The original standard work regarding the Finnish role in the Holocaust was Hannu Rautkallio’s 1987 *Finland and the Holocaust: The Rescue of Finland’s Jews*. In many ways reflecting elements of the “driftwood theory,” Rautkallio projected Finland as non-complicit, and that “in the face of the deepest darkness the European continent had ever known, Finland protected its Jews and kept them from falling into the grip of the Nazis.”⁴⁴ While Rautkallio did not ignore the deportation of a few Jewish non-citizens and noted the role of the Finnish State Police (*Valtiollinen poliissi* or the *Valpo*), he did not investigate any potential ideological underpinnings.⁴⁵

Various historians have challenged Rautkallio’s limited assessments. Historians Simo Muir and Hana Worthen edited a compilation of works in *Finland’s Holocaust: Silences of History*. They argue that, like many European nations in the 1930s, Finland had a strict immigration policy. The policies became more restrictive over time, and the government, through the 1933 Alien Decree Act, gave the *Valpo* more power to deport any foreigner that “had through his actions shown that his presence in the country was not desirable.”⁴⁶ According to

⁴² Ibid., 136.

⁴³ Antero Holmila, “Finland and the Holocaust: A Reassessment,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 3 (Winter 2009): 413.

⁴⁴ He also blamed the deportation on one Jewish refugee, Walter Cohen, whose actions aroused suspicion. Hannu Rautkallio, *Finland in the Holocaust: The Rescue of Finland’s Jews* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1987), 2.

⁴⁵ Holmila, “Finland and the Holocaust,” 414.

⁴⁶ From 1941 to 1944, 135 non-Finnish civilians, including twelve foreign Jews, were deported and turned over to the Nazi authorities. The twelve Jews that were deported all had ties to either the Soviet Union or were involved in petty crimes. Only one survived the war. Simo Muir and Hana Worthen ed., *Finland’s Holocaust: Silences of History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 196, and 208-212.

Silvennoinen, “there is ample evidence...of...the pervasive interweaving of anti-communism and antisemitism among State Police officials [which] caused the organization to perceive...foreign Jews in particular as security risks.”⁴⁷ Further investigations into the *Valpo* revealed that not only did they deport undesirables, but they also led recruitment efforts for volunteers for the Waffen SS battalion.

The renewed investigation of Finland’s actions with regard to the Holocaust culminated with the publication of the 250-page report, *The Finnish SS Volunteers and Atrocities 1941-1943: An Archival Study*, in February 2019.⁴⁸ Led by Finnish historian Lars Westerlund and supported by several Finnish universities and the National Archives of Finland, this report provides a “comprehensive investigation into the role played by Finnish volunteers serving in the Waffen SS Division *Wiking*.”⁴⁹ Finnish scholars compiled seventy-six diaries of Finnish Waffen SS volunteers as well as offered a detailed discussion of this volunteer battalion.⁵⁰ The report details that the motivations of the volunteers ranged from desiring to receive military training in Germany, to improve one’s socio-economic status, and to seek adventure.⁵¹ However, the most significant factor revealed through the diaries was anti-Russian/anti-communist views that were only further radicalized by the experiences of the Winter War. The deployment of Finnish Waffen SS volunteers, who did not fight as part of Army Group North recovering the lost territories, adds a level of complexity to German-Finnish relations. It also serves to further discredit early proponents of the “driftwood theory,” who claim that there was no agreement

⁴⁷ Ibid., 212.

⁴⁸ Lars Westerlund, *The Finnish Waffen SS-Volunteers and Atrocities, 1941-1943* (Helsinki: National Archives of Finland and Finnish Literary Society, 2019), 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁵¹ Ibid., 20.

between Finland and Germany and that the sole focus of Finnish war efforts was aimed at gaining the territory lost in the Winter War.

Although not usually racially motivated, Finnish SS volunteers were not simply bystanders.⁵² Members within this battalion witnessed and took part in the atrocities committed by the German army on the Eastern Front during the years of its existence, from 1941 until it was disbanded in August 1943.⁵³ By understanding the role of the Finnish SS volunteers, the report revealed the convoluted, complex interaction between Finland and Nazi Germany. Seizing the opportunity to gain the territory they lost during the Winter War, Finland became complicit in some of the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany on the Eastern Front. The existence of the Finnish Waffen SS volunteer battalion not only adds to the complexity of the relations between the two nations, but it also validates the ideological approach undertaken by recent historians.

Each of the schools of thought and their various historians present a slightly different view of the course of events that led Finland to become a co-belligerent of Nazi Germany. The “driftwood theory” ignores the active role Finnish leaders played and discounts the clear indications of an agreement with Nazi Germany. However, some of the historians within the more recent ideological approach, such as William B. Cohen and Jorgen Svensson, often overemphasize the alignment between Finland and Nazi Germany. Additionally, the *Poltamo* Thesis needs revision to incorporate the new information that has come to light regarding Finnish irredentism and antisemitism, as well as Finland’s actions on the Eastern Front to fully contextualize the nature of the Finnish-German co-belligerency. Works such as Henrik O.

⁵² In a letter dated July 24, 1941, SS volunteer Olavi Karpalo, along with several other soldiers, requested a transfer back to the front lines from Finnish Military Liaison Officer Enso Pihkala. The request stated that “poorer shooting skills than ours are enough for executing Jews,” and the volunteers were frustrated because they were “using their shooting skills in executing Jews” instead of Russian soldiers. “Letter to Enso Pihkala from Olavi Karpalo *et al*, July 24, 1941,” in *The Finnish SS Volunteers*, 44-46.

⁵³ Simo Muir and Hana Worthen ed., *Finland’s Holocaust*, 223.

Lunde's *Finland's War of Choice* and Claes Johnson's *Hitler's Nordic Ally* both exemplify this needed balance. A thorough, balanced interpretive lens must be utilized that considers all the complexities of a small nation navigating between two great powers but does not excuse Finnish compromises and previous ideologies that led them to fight alongside a nation like Nazi Germany and participate in its atrocities on the Eastern Front.

While not excusing Finnish actions during World War II, context does matter. One can better acknowledge Finland's truly precarious situation, especially after the signing of the Treaty of Non-Aggression between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in August 1939.⁵⁴ This brutal geopolitical reality required Finnish leaders to strike a delicate balance between two dictators. Ultimately, Finland failed. While understandably trying to regain lost territory and thwart Soviet aggression, Finnish leaders from General Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim to President Risto Ryti, in many ways, failed to understand the type of war they were entering with Germany. They also failed to realize the only way Finland could maintain that territory was if the Soviet Union was utterly defeated. In *Hitler's Great Gamble*, historian James Ellman argues that "the folly of the Finnish attack on the USSR was the failure of the Nordic nation's leaders to discern that their gains would be illusionary if the USSR survived. The Finns did not appreciate that they had entwined themselves in a genocidal death struggle between communism and fascism, and half measures on their part would only result in defeat."⁵⁵ As a result, Finland paid a high price for its attempt to regain what had been seized by the Soviet Union.

⁵⁴ "Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, August 23, 1939," *United States Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy: From the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry Series D (1937-1945)*, (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1956).

⁵⁵ James Ellman, *Hitler's Great Gamble: A New Look at German Strategy, Operation Barbarossa, and the Axis Defeat in World War II* (Lanham, MD: Stackpole Books, 2019), 206.

Defending his actions, Mannerheim wrote, “as a consequence of the short Winter War fought with honour for the freedom of Finland and the security of the North, and by the armed peace that followed, Finland was dragged into the whirlpool of high politics from which it was unable to extricate itself.”⁵⁶ While not as simplistic as Mannerheim presented, historian H. Peter Krosby suggested “the truth lies somewhere in between the extreme opposite versions of how the Continuation War originated. If it can be said that Finland took the road to co-belligerency with Germany against the Soviet Union because of compelling circumstances largely beyond its control, it must also be said that the Finns marched down that road without too much reluctance and without looking around for an alternative road—if such were actually open to them.”⁵⁷

The debate will likely continue because several factors make exploring Finland’s actions during World War II difficult. Historians often contend with a lack of source material because some decisions are made quickly, leaving little to nothing written down.⁵⁸ Additionally, for decades, the official Finnish stance on their actions during World War II, as described by Shirer, was “that there were no agreements of any kind, either military or political, between Nazi Germany and Finland.”⁵⁹ While, thankfully, this stance has changed, access to official documents remains a slow process. Many of the key documents lie in the closed archives of Finland and Russia. While the captured German documents have shed light on many interactions with Finland, much remains unknown.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Carl G. Mannerheim, *The Memoirs of Marshall Mannerheim*. translated by Count Eric Lewenhaupt. (Boston: E. P Dutton, 1954), x.

⁵⁷ In Finland, World War II is mostly considered through the lens of three wars. The first, when the Soviet Union invaded in November 1939, is referred to as the Winter War. When Finland joined with Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, this is referred to as the Continuation War. Finally, as a condition for peace, the Finns had to expel the German troops within their nation, resulting in the third war, the Lapland War. Krosby, *Finland, Germany, and the Soviet Union*, viii.

⁵⁸ Wuorinen, *Finland and World War II*, 29.

⁵⁹ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 337.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Finland's actions and the decisions of its leaders are a complex subject that requires an understanding of Finland's relationship with Germany and the Soviet Union to be placed within the proper context. Although historians criticize many of the decisions made by Finnish leaders, and in some cases rightly so, it is important not to apply anachronistic judgments. When approaching any area of study, balance is always important. By understanding the historiography of Finnish actions during World War II, perhaps a better comprehension of the actual events can be reached. Historian Richard Overy, when analyzing the actions of Finnish leaders, wrote, "it is necessary to see them in a particular historical context in which choices in everyday life were suddenly, by the rupture of war, invested with a moral significance they do not usually possess."⁶¹ Finland's actions during World War II must also be placed in the context of its history long before the outbreak of the Winter War to comprehend the ever-changing relations with Germany and the Soviet Union that eventually erupted into war.

⁶¹ Richard Overy, "Scandinavia in the Second World War," in *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, 36.

CHAPTER ONE: A BATTLEFIELD BETWEEN EMPIRES: EARLY FINNISH HISTORY AND THE JOURNEY TO AN INDEPENDENT FINLAND

Long before the cataclysmic events of World War II, long before Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin battled for dominance in the region, and long before Finnish troops controversially crossed beyond the pre-war borders in 1941, Finland's strategic location ensured that it would always be a gateway between Eastern and Western Europe. Despite its location on the northern periphery of Europe, Finland has been involved and contributed to key international developments. Being a part of both Sweden and Russia at different times has "left impressions on [Finland's] culture as indelible as the glaciers left upon the land."¹ However, several factors, such as geography and language, contributed to an emerging and developing unique Finnish culture distinct from their rulers. Furthermore, as a function of culture, geography and Finland's position as a strategic land bridge between Eastern and Western Europe has played a significant role in Finnish history that shaped Finnish views of themselves and the neighboring empires.

Evaluations of the decisions of Finnish leaders must be considered within the framework of their shared and experienced history. In a similar manner to the other nations in the Baltic region, Finland's history can be first generally characterized by being used as a pawn between great powers and empires, followed by a growing sense of nationalism, and culminating with independence after the Great War.² Specifically, historians have divided Finland's history into four distinct periods: Prehistoric, the Kingdom of Sweden, the Age of Autonomy/The Imperial Age, and the Age of Independence.³ All but the first is of direct relevance to this study. Each

¹ Glenda Dawn Goss, *Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 13.

² Prit Buttar, *Between Giants: The Battle for the Baltics in World War II* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2013), 14.

³ Jason Lavery, *The History of Finland* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 1.

age shaped the developing Finnish identity, and its location served as a buffer zone and battleground between the rise and fall of the conflicting Swedish Empire and the Imperial Russian Empire.

The Kingdom of Sweden

Finnish history is inextricably tied to the rise and fall of the Swedish empire, and due to the nature of the long Swedish-Russian rivalry, Russia became the traditional enemy of Finland. Finland was a part of the Swedish Empire or under Swedish control from approximately 1155-1809.⁴ More than six centuries of Swedish rule left a lasting mark on Finland, and in many ways, Sweden's influence resulted in a distinctly Western European culture, with the exception of its language. The Finnish language, in its unique Eastern Finno-Ugrian branch, remained, and thereby, a distinct Finnish folk culture survived throughout the small pockets of villages in the sparsely populated land.⁵ Thus, from the beginning, Finland has dealt with conflicting and competing influences from Eastern and Western Europe.

Due to a lack of traditional written sources, historians have struggled to contextualize early Swedish-Finnish history.⁶ Approaching from a more traditional, political perspective, as Byron Nordstrom observes, "Finland's history is the history of Sweden in most respects."⁷ The beginning of Swedish rule in Finland is unclear, and much of it is clouded in folklore and legends.⁸ Three distinct kingdoms emerged, according to epics and sagas, and by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, they developed into the kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway.⁹ During this period, a battle of dominance in the Baltic among these three kingdoms characterized

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Fred Singleton, *A Short History of Finland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17.

⁶ Sverre Bagge, *Cross and Scepter: The Rise of the Scandinavian Kingdoms from the Vikings to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 12.

⁷ Byron J. Nordstrom, *Scandinavia Since 1500* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 141.

⁸ Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 18.

⁹ Bagge, *Cross and Scepter*, 28.

Finnish history, with Denmark initially being the most formidable.¹⁰ Although it is likely that the Swedish kingdom did not fully unify until 1250, the written stories suggest that Swedish King Erik conquered and claimed Finnish lands during the 1150s.¹¹ First written down in the fourteenth century, the *Chronicle of Erik* details his expeditions against the Russians in Karelia.¹² During the 1290s, Sweden continued to settle areas of Finland, specifically Karelia, and in 1292, they constructed the city of Viborg.¹³ Despite the conflicts between the Danes, Teutonic Knights, Novgorod, and other groups, Sweden became the dominant influence in Finland.¹⁴

Sweden's victories came with the unintended consequences of conflict with the Russian principality of Novgorod.¹⁵ Thus, early in its history, the territory of Finland served as a buffer zone between the competing powers of the Swedish kingdom and the semi-independent state and military power of Novgorod, near the modern-day city of Zvyagel in northern Ukraine.¹⁶ To counter the growing Swedish power, Danish King Hans allied with Russian Grand Prince Ivan III, who ruled Novgorod. Due to this alliance, in 1497, Russia launched a large invasion of Finnish lands, nearly reaching the city of Viborg.¹⁷ Although ultimately unsuccessful, this invasion marked one of the earliest conflicts between Eastern and Western powers, with the Finnish people caught in the middle.

Finland became an integral part of the Swedish empire incorporating Swedish legal and social systems. Swedish rule remained mostly uneven until the seventeenth century, and Finland

¹⁰ Ibid., 38.

¹¹ William Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland in Our Time* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), 300; Bagge, *Cross and Scepter*, 46.

¹² *The Chronicle of Duke Erik*, translated by Erik Carlquist and Peter C. Hogg (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), 103.

¹³ Viborg (*Viipuri*) is the modern-day Russian city of Vyborg. Bagge, *Cross and Scepter*, 47.

¹⁴ Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 19.

¹⁵ Bagge, *Cross and Scepter*, 47.

¹⁶ Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 18.

¹⁷ Bagge, *Cross and Scepter*, 265.

became a province of Sweden in 1632.¹⁸ While there was not an officially autonomous entity of Finland under Swedish rule, Finns experienced considerable freedom. Except for the continuous wars of the Swedish Empire, the Swedish “yoke had been both loose and benign.”¹⁹

Additionally, Finns could send delegations to the Swedish capital, but ultimately, they had little control over foreign involvement and how Swedish monarchs ruled.²⁰ Finnish historian Nils Erik Villstrand describes this period in Finnish history that “There was no Finland, there was a Finland, there were two [Finlands], and there were many [Finlands].”²¹ As an integral part of the Swedish empire, several rulers of Sweden and their involvement in larger European events impacted the development of Finland.

During the reign of Gustav Vasa (Gustav I) from 1523-1560, Sweden and Finland, like much of Europe, underwent significant changes due to the growth of states and religiously due to the Reformation.²² Gustav I helped bring his kingdom into the early modern age, and in 1550, he established the city of Helsingfors (Helsinki).²³ Also, under his rule, Sweden began to transition from being predominately Roman Catholic to Lutheran. In 1539, Gustav I wrote to Martin Luther seeking a tutor for his son. Luther recommended the Finn, Mikael Agricola, as someone who could aid the Swedish kingdom by the further spreading of Lutheranism.²⁴ For Finland, this period coincided with the development of Finnish literary traditions when in 1548, Agricola published the New Testament in Finnish. This marked the “origin of Finnish as a written

¹⁸ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 32.

¹⁹ William R. Trotter, *A Frozen Hell: The Russo-Finnish War of 1939-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1991), 4.

²⁰ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 301.

²¹ Nils Erik Villstrand quoted in Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 32.

²² Jason Lavery, *Reforming Finland: The Diocese of Turku in the Age of Gustav Vasa 1523-1560* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2018), xi.

²³ Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 36.

²⁴ “Martin Luther to Gustav Vasa, April 20, 1539,” *History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*, https://histdoc.net/pdf/Martinus_Luther_1539.pdf.

language” and a key step in developing a distinct Finnish culture separate from Swedish culture.²⁵

Expansionist tendencies of various monarchs after Gustav I’s reign resulted in nearly constant war with Russia from 1550-1650.²⁶ Historian Jason Lavery observes that in this period of Finnish history, Sweden and Russia each desired a buffer zone between their respective empires, and several of their rulers fought over the territories of Finland and other regions in the Baltic.²⁷ Finally, the Peace of Täysinä (*Teusina*), signed May 18, 1595, resulted in a brief respite from fighting and defined the eastern border of Sweden with Russia.²⁸ Thus, Sweden bordered Russia in the East, not Finland. However, the treaty did not resolve all the issues. Thankfully for the Finnish people, the internal chaos within Russia with the end of the Rurikid dynasty and the beginning of the Romanov dynasty preoccupied the Russians with internal affairs.²⁹ However, due to events in mainland Europe, the Finns would not long enjoy this peace.

During the reign of Gustavus Adolphus, Sweden engaged in wars against Denmark, Poland, and Russia, including religious wars such as the Thirty Years’ War. As one of the prominent Protestant powers, Sweden, in 1630, became involved in the continental war against the Holy Roman Empire. Often referred to as the “father of modern warfare,” Adolphus transformed the battlefield and the course of the Thirty Years’ War.³⁰ Finns accounted for approximately one-third of his army,³¹ with Finnish troops composing a disproportionately high

²⁵ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 40.

²⁶ Nordstrom, *Scandinavia Since 1500*, 141.

²⁷ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 1.

²⁸ “Treaty of Täysinä, May 18, 1595,” *History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*, <https://histdoc.net/history/teusina.html>.

²⁹ Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 38.

³⁰ Known as the “Lion of the North,” Gustavus Adolphus reigned from 1611-1632. Peter Paret, ed. *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 48.

³¹ The Swedish army that landed in continental Europe in July 1630 contained many foreign mercenaries. Lavery, *A History of Finland*, 43.

number of troops compared to their population.³² Thus, Finns often paid dearly for Adolphus' many wars.³³ Adolphus believed the force he was facing was "weak in infantry, a match for us in cavalry, and has great advantage with regard to supplies."³⁴ However, the forces of the Holy Roman Empire could not counter and defeat him due to his reform of the Swedish army and the tactics he employed.

With a considerable number of their troops fighting, Finland, despite being on the periphery, played a significant role in continental Europe. One particular unit of Finnish cavalry, the *Hakkapeliitta*, became renowned as elite fighters.³⁵ Their battle cry of "*hakkaa paalle*" (cut them down) and rapid movement often proved decisive.³⁶ The *Hakkapeliitta* and other Finnish infantry regiments played key roles in Adolphus' victories at Breitenfeld in September 1631 and at Lützen in November 1632.³⁷ The feats of this unit are memorialized in reenactments nearly every year, and modern companies such as Nokian Tyres "inspired by our Scandinavian heritage" craft a specialty winter tire named *Hakkapeliitta*.³⁸ During the Battle of Lützen, however, Adolphus was killed, and although it is difficult to ascertain how this impacted the course of the Thirty Years' War, it is clear his death was a severe blow to Sweden. Regardless,

³² According to Historian P. Viirankoski, approximately fifteen percent of the adult male population in Finland served in the army. P. Viirankoski, "The Impact of Military Service on Finnish Rural Society in the 17th Century," *Turun Historiallinen Arkisto* 38 (Turku, 1982): 118-119.

³³ Sweden utilized a system called military tenure establishment. "Farmers formed a group of two or more farms with the obligation to provide... and equipped soldier for the military units established in the area." Jaakko Valtanen, "The Finnish Defense Forces as Part of a Democratic Society," *National Defense University: Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy* 3, no. 2 (2017):1.

³⁴ "Gustavus Adolphus, December 4, 1630," C.G Styffe ed. *Konung Gustaf II Adolfs skrifter* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Stoner, 1861), 545-546.

³⁵ While lightly armored, the cavalry utilized speed. They charged infantry at full gallop and fired the first pistol at twenty paces. Then they would fire their second pistol at five paces before drawing their sword and using their horse, a unique breed known as the Finn Horse, to trample the enemy. Michael Fredholm von Essen, *The Lion from the North: The Swedish Army During the Thirty Years' War: Volume 1, 1618-1632* (Warwick, UK: Helion & Company, 2020), 86, 92.

³⁶ Also translated "beat on," or "strike them." Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 41.

³⁷ Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 48.

³⁸ "Nokian Tyres in Brief," *Nokian Tyres*, <https://www.nokiantires.com/company/about-us/>.

Sweden, with a population of one-and-a-half million and devastated by decades of fighting and campaigns abroad, could not maintain its great power status for long.³⁹ Furthermore, the disastrous wars of later monarchs doomed the Swedish Empire to a rising imperial power in the East, Russia, and an increasingly unique Finland and Finnish culture emerged between these two rival powers.

As the Swedish empire began to decline, others in Europe such as Russia, Prussia, and France began to rise. The Great Northern War from 1700-1721, primarily between Swedish King Charles XII and Russian Czar Peter the Great, devastated Finland. Persuaded by Denmark to attempt to end Swedish hegemony in the Baltic, Peter the Great joined an alliance with Denmark and King Augustus II of Poland and Saxony.⁴⁰ While Charles XII won several impressive battles, such as defeating the much larger Russian army at the first battle of Narva in November 1700, the Swedes could not achieve an overall victory.⁴¹ Additionally, as a result of this war in 1702, forces under Peter the Great conquered the Swedish forts of Nöteborg and Nyenskans. In 1703, he ordered the construction of the city that would become not only the capital but also his namesake—St. Petersburg.⁴² Thus driven by the need to protect this new city, Peter the Great and future Russian and Soviet leaders would use its defense to justify their demands and invasions of Finnish territory.

Then Charles made the ill-fated decision to invade Russia crossing the Vistula River on January 1, 1708.⁴³ He was decisively defeated at the Battle of Poltava in July 1709, and the

³⁹ John Matusiak, *Europe in Flames: The Crisis of the Thirty Years' War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2018), 143.

⁴⁰ Frederick Kagan and Robin Higham eds., *The Military History of Tsarist Russia* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 36-37.

⁴¹ Leonard Cooper, *Many Roads to Moscow: Three Historic Invasions* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1968), 3.

⁴² Kagan and Higham, *The Military History of Tsarist Russia*, 37.

⁴³ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 43.

Russians were able to retake Narva shortly thereafter.⁴⁴ The war continued as Charles XII refused to capitulate, resulting in more Finnish cities, such as Vyborg, and territory along the Baltic falling into Russian hands.⁴⁵ The Russians thus occupied Finland from 1713-1721 and utilized Finland as a bargaining chip until the Peace of Nystad (*Uusikaupunki*) was signed on August 30, 1721, by Charles XII's successor.⁴⁶ In essence, this treaty ended Sweden's dominance in the Baltic region and set the borders with Russia similar to modern day. While costly to the Russians, Peter the Great was able to secure St. Petersburg and the Baltic Coast. Many Finns began referring to this period as "the Great Wrath," as the Finnish economy, lands, and population, which fell under 400,000 during the years of the occupation, were devastated.⁴⁷

While conducting his research on the Swedish empire, historian Michael Roberts observes, "When an empire no longer serves the purposes for which it was created, and has in the meantime discovered no new justification for its existence, it is ripe for its fall."⁴⁸ His description perfectly encapsulates this period in Swedish history, as various kings continued to rule as if Sweden remained at its height of power and influence. In an attempt to stop the decline, Swedish leaders refused to remove their country from the great stage of power politics and continued to engage in disastrous wars.

Although no longer a major European power, many in the Swedish empire, in particular the political party known as the "Hats," advocated for another attempt to counter the growing Russian empire through an alliance with France and by invading Russia to move the Finnish

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Kagan and Highan, *The Military History of Tsarist Russia*, 40.

⁴⁶ "The Nystad Peace Treaty, August 30, 1721," *The History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*. https://histdoc.net/history/nystad_1721.html.

⁴⁷ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 302.

⁴⁸ Michael Roberts, *The Swedish Imperial Experience 1560-1718* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 123.

border east and recover the territory lost during the Great Northern War.⁴⁹ On July 28, 1741, Sweden declared war on Russia, but the only major battle of the war, the Battle of Lappeenranta, resulted in defeat, and Finland was once again occupied.⁵⁰ Known as the “Lesser Wrath,” Finns experienced another period of Russian occupation due to the actions of Swedish leaders. The Russo-Swedish War of 1741-1743 (or the “War of the Hats”) ended with the Peace Treaty of Turku (*Åbo*) that established the border along the Kymi (*Kyumen*) River with significant territorial loss in eastern Finland.⁵¹

While another devastating defeat for Sweden, many historians refer to this period as one in which there was an awakening of a Finnish national identity.⁵² There are several features of this growing sense of unique Finnish culture. With the loss of most of its eastern fortresses, the Swedish Parliament ordered the construction of a fortress on Susiluodot Island near Helsinki.⁵³ Named Sveaborg (*Viapori*) in 1750, construction began but was never fully completed due to several more conflicts with Russia.⁵⁴ Although surrendered to the Russians in 1808, the fortress, renamed Suomenlinna (Castle of Finland) after Finnish independence, became a symbol of Finnish independence and determination.⁵⁵ The builder of the fortress, Augustin Eherensvard, carved this message into the rock of the fortress wall extolling the “coming generations, stand here upon your own ground and never rely on outside help.”⁵⁶ This encapsulates the fort’s role

⁴⁹ Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 49.

⁵⁰ Kagan and Higham, *The Military History of Tsarists Russia*, 58.

⁵¹ “The Peace Treaty of Turku, June 16, 1743,” *History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*, <https://histdoc.net/history/abo1743.html>.

⁵² Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 51.

⁵³ “Fortress and History: The Swedish Era,” *Suomenlinna Sveborg*, <https://www.suomenlinna.fi/en/fortress/swedisher/>.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ “Fortress and History: The Finnish Era,” *Suomenlinna Sveborg*, <https://www.suomenlinna.fi/en/fortress/finnisher/>.

⁵⁶ Klaus Tornudd, “Finnish Neutrality Policy During the Cold War,” *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* 25, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 2005): 48.

as a symbol of Finnish determination that would become known as *sisu*, or the Finnish trait of “stoic determination, hardiness, courage, bravery, willpower, tenacity and resilience” that has become ingrained in the Finnish national identity.⁵⁷

It was also during this time that an appreciation of the Finnish language and culture began to emerge, especially among young students in Finnish universities. Universities became bastions of culture, with students attempting to revitalize and define what it meant to be a Finn. A minority also began postulating the idea of an independent Finland. Those who grew to love Finnish culture became known as Fennophiles, and although initially a minority, this developing sense of a Finnish national identity grew even as the conflict resumed between Sweden and Russia.⁵⁸

In an attempt to once again retake the territory lost in previous wars, the Swedish king, Gustav III, invaded Russia through the recently annexed portions of Finland in the summer of 1788.⁵⁹ This was the Third Russo-Swedish War (or Gustav III’s War) of the eighteenth century, and it was equally as disastrous as previous attempts to regain Swedish dominance in the Baltic.⁶⁰ Defeated on land in Finland and at sea in the Gulf of Finland, this war ended any Swedish hopes of restoring hegemony in the Baltic.⁶¹ Many within Finland began to doubt that Swedish leaders had their best interests in mind as they were constantly bearing the brunt of these unsuccessful wars. The war ended with the Peace Treaty of Värälä in August 1790 and a return to the *status quo ante bellum*.⁶²

⁵⁷ “The Sisu Within You: The Finnish Key to Life, Love, and Success,” *This is Finland: Ministry for Foreign Affairs*, <https://finland.fi/arts-culture/sisu-within-finnish-key-life-love-success/>.

⁵⁸ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 46.

⁵⁹ “The Third Russo-Swedish War,” *The Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library*, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/history/619352>.

⁶⁰ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 45.

⁶¹ Kagan and Higham, *The Military History of Tsarist Russia*, 97.

⁶² “The Third Russo-Swedish War,” *The Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library*, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/history/619456>.

However, the era of the Swedish empire in Finland did not end until several years into the Napoleonic period. Under Czar Alexander I, Russia signed a secret treaty with Napoleon on June 7, 1807, that declared any nation not a part of the Continental System, an enemy.⁶³ Thus, in an attempt to persuade Sweden to join the Continental System, Russia declared war on Sweden on February 10, 1808 and invaded Finland twelve days later.⁶⁴ By November 1808, with much of Finland occupied, Swedish forces reached an armistice.⁶⁵ This time, the occupation of Finland would not end with a treaty but with complete annexation into the Russian Empire. As noted by historian William Shirer, with four centuries of fighting and five wars with Russia totaling over sixty years, “No wonder that war with Russia became ingrained in the Finnish people.... This bitter fact of their existence must be taken into account when [one] considers their feelings during the Winter War...and their motives in joining Nazi Germany in war on Russia two years later.”⁶⁶ In many ways, Sweden’s fall from a position of power doomed Finnish ascendancy in the region.

The Imperial Era

Jason Lavery observes this important shift, writing that “the struggle between East and West on the Finnish Peninsula had gone in favor of the Swedish kingdom. For the next two centuries, Russia would hold the momentum.”⁶⁷ Through a treaty signed on September 17, 1809, Sweden ceded Finland to Russia, and Finland officially became an autonomous Grand Duchy in

⁶³ “Secret Treaty at Tilsit, June 7, 1807,” *History of Finland, A Selection of Documents and Events*, <https://histdoc.net/history/fr/tilsit.html>.

⁶⁴ “Russian Declaration of War, February 10, 1808,” *History of Finland, A Selection of Documents and Events*,” https://histdoc.net/pdf/Russie_contre_Suede_du_10_Fevrier_1808.pdf.

⁶⁵ “Armistice at Olkijoki, November 7/19, 1808,” *History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, https://histdoc.net/pdf/Olkijoen_sopimus_19.11.1808.pdf.

⁶⁶ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 302.

⁶⁷ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 44.

the Russian Empire.⁶⁸ While historians cannot fully determine Alexander I's motives for annexing Finland, it likely stemmed from the desire to create a more permanent buffer zone between Sweden and St. Petersburg.⁶⁹ Comprehending the Russian view of Finland as a defensive region for the protection of St. Petersburg, Lavery notes, "this understanding of Finland in defensive terms has framed Russian policy ever since."⁷⁰

Initially, Czar Alexander I recognized the sovereignty of Finland and, in a document signed on March 27, 1809, assured the Finnish people that he would continue to recognize their constitutional rights.⁷¹ Furthermore, he promised to allow the continuance of Finnish laws and institutions, promising to "maintain all these benefits and law as firm and unshakeable in their full force."⁷² Alexander I became the Grand Duke of Finland, and the highest Russian official, and his representative in Finland, took the title of Governor-General.⁷³ The Finnish Senate focused on the daily administration of law and order.⁷⁴ However, in his "Solemn Assurance of the Sovereign," Alexander's use of vaguely defined terms, such as "the Fundamental Laws of the Land" and the undefined term of recognizing the rights of the "Constitution," later left subsequent czars' methods of dubious legality to enforce restrictions.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, by maintaining the *status quo*, Alexander I had solved his security issues with St. Petersburg, and he had neutralized any threats from the north. As long as the czars followed his approach to

⁶⁸ "The Treaty of Peace between Russia and Sweden," *History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*, <https://histdoc.net/history/frhamn.html>.

⁶⁹ Kagen and Higham, *The Military History of Tsarist Russia*, 5.

⁷⁰ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 52.

⁷¹ "The Solemn Assurance of the Sovereign," *History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*, <https://histdoc.net/history/alex1.html>.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 52.

⁷⁴ Nordstrom, *Scandinavia Since 1500*, 176.

⁷⁵ "The Solemn Assurance of the Sovereign," *History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*, <https://histdoc.net/history/alex1.html>.

Finland, conflict remained unlikely. However, neither he nor other Russian leaders anticipated the growing and changing Europe with the rise of nationalism.

While now under the control of an Eastern European power like Russia, Finland remained firmly entrenched in western culture.⁷⁶ Due to the level of autonomy initially granted, a unique Finnish culture continued to flourish with little to no opposition from Russia. As evidenced by the first official publication of *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, in 1835, Finnish culture and institutions thrived and grew in popularity.⁷⁷ The work of Elias Lönnrot, *Kalevala* became “an essential part of the emerging national mythology” and the foundation for much Finnish literature and art into the modern age.⁷⁸ *Kalevala*, a collection of folk ballads passed down orally for centuries, reflects a similar cultural phenomenon taking place in Europe, and Lönnrot, much like the brothers Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm in Germany, was inspired to promote a national epic in line with the tenets of national romanticism of the early to mid-eighteenth century.⁷⁹ Initially, *Kalevala* served primarily as a literary and linguistic achievement; however, it would soon have vast national and political ramifications.

In a speech before the Finnish Literature Society, founded in part by Lönnrot in 1831, Johan Gabriel Linsen observed the potential impact of a publication like *Kalevala*, stating, “with these epic poems in one’s possession, Finland may, with an elevating self-awareness, learn to rightly understand its ancient times, and along with that, also its future...Finland may tell itself: I, too, have a history.”⁸⁰ Inspired by the Finnish national epic, J.R.R. Tolkien revealed in a letter

⁷⁶ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 303.

⁷⁷ Elias Lönnrot eds., *Kalevala*, translated by Keith Bosley (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

⁷⁸ Nordstrom, *Scandinavia Since 1500*, 190.

⁷⁹ Lotte Tarkka, Ela Stepanova, and Heidi Haapoja-Makela, “The Kalevala’s Languages: Receptions, Myths, and Ideologies,” *Journal of Finnish Studies* (2018): 23.

⁸⁰ “Johan Gabriel Linsen’s speech at the annual meeting of the Finnish Literature Society, March 16, 1836,” *The Finnish Literature Society (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) SKS KIA 1836*, 1 SKS KIA Protocoller March 16, 1834-March 7, 1838.

to Christopher Tolkien that within the *Kalevala* was “the original germ of the *Silmarillion*,” and later in 1955, he explained the Finnish epic “set the rocket off in my story.”⁸¹ Tolkien was enamored with the stories of the ballads within the *Kalevala* and the language itself to provide “a glimpse of an entirely different mythological world.”⁸² Understanding its impact on Finnish culture, he desired to create a similar work that would hold the same place in the hearts of Britons as *Kalevala* in the hearts of Finns. Tolkien explained, “I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own...not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands.... [the] Finnish [*Kalevala*]...greatly affected me.”⁸³ *Kalevala* and other works in the Finnish language helped create a national consensus of the remembered past, contributing to the idea of a shared history unique from that of Sweden or Russia.

In the decades following its publication and, in particular, the 1860s, organizations such as the Finnish Literature Society and universities such as the University of Helsinki promoted the standardization of the Finnish language, a vital step in unifying the people of Finland.⁸⁴ Other works such as Johan Ludvig Runeberg’s *Fänrik Ståls sägner* (*The Tales of Ensign Stål*), published in 1848, and Zachris Topelius’ *Boken om vårt land/Maamme kirja* (*The Book of Our Country*) finally published in 1875, helped establish a shared literary foundation.⁸⁵ With the exception of the Finnish Bible, all these foundational literary works were produced in the nineteenth century when the early beginnings of a cultural awakening began to dawn within

⁸¹ “J.R.R. Tolkien to Christopher Tolkien, September 7, 1944,” *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000). 87; “J.R.R. Tolkien to Rayner Unwin, April 14, 1955,” *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 214.

⁸² “J.R.R. Tolkien to Christopher Bretherton, July 16, 1964,” *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 345.

⁸³ He continued to be inspired by the complexities of the Finnish language, basing his language for elves on the Finnish and Greek languages. “J.R.R. Tolkien to Sir Stanley Unwin, September 14, 1950,” *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 144; “J.R.R. Tolkien to Naomi Mitchison, April 25, 1954,” *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 176.

⁸⁴ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 60.

⁸⁵ Johan Ludvig Runeberg, *Fänrik Ståls sägner*, <http://runeberg.org/fstal/>.

Finland.⁸⁶ This emergence of a national Finnish identity unique from both that of Sweden and Russia continued to develop, culminating in the “Golden Age of Finnish Culture” that began in the 1870s.

Throughout Europe in the latter half of the eighteenth century, there was a growing sense of nationalism and national identity.⁸⁷ Finland was not an exception. Coinciding with increasing Russian interference, although preceding it among a minority, Finns began to consider the possibility of independence in the future. Due to uniting factors such as language, religion, and shared political and academic institutions, Finland became fertile ground for the development of a growing nationalist movement perpetuated by failed Russian attempts at control.⁸⁸ The now famous Finnish slogan, attributed to A. I. Arwidsson, “Swedes we are no longer, Russians we shall never be, therefore let us be Finns,” began to reflect a slowly expanding sentiment among Finns.⁸⁹ As renowned historian William Shirer observed, “Thanks first to the blind Russification policies of the last of the Czars and then to the revolution which overthrew him, Arwidsson’s exhortation was soon to become a reality.”⁹⁰

The Age of Oppression

In advice to his son and advisors, Czar Nicholas I stated, “Leave the Finns alone. It is my large empire’s only province that has not caused me a minute of worry or dismay during my reign.”⁹¹ Unfortunately for Finns, his advice was not heeded. While the initial years of Russian control were characterized by considerable autonomy, it is vital to understand that autonomy

⁸⁶ Goss, *Sibelius: A Composer’s Life*, 25.

⁸⁷ H. Arnold Barton, “Scandinavianism, Fennomania, and the Crimean War,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 36, 2 (Summer 2005): 135.

⁸⁸ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 56-57.

⁸⁹ Carl von Bonsdorff, *Opinioner och stamningar I Finland 1804-1814: Skrifter utgivna av Svenska litteratursallskapet I Finland* (Helsingfors, 1918), 224.

⁹⁰ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 304.

⁹¹ Toivo Nygard and Veikko Kallio, “*Rajamaa*,” *Suomen Historian Pikkujattilainen*, edited by Seppo Zetterberg (Porvoo: WSOY, 1987), 546.

does not equate to independence. Throughout this era, Finnish political decisions required Russian approval or support. However, the latter half of the nineteenth century reveals a clear shift in Russian attitudes and policies towards Finland. This period in Finnish history, beginning around 1890, is often called the “Age of Oppression.”⁹²

Following events in Europe, such as the Wars of German Unification from 1864-1871, Russia faced a growing threat in the West—Germany. Various czars attempted to reform the Russian military and centralize power within their vast empire.⁹³ An empire-wide policy based on *Rossiia yedina I nedelima* (Russia one and indivisible) resulted in increasing restrictions and abolishment of any elements deemed not Russian.⁹⁴ This resulted in “Russian imperial power begin[ing] to see its autonomous creation [Finland] not as an achievement but, rather, as a threat.”⁹⁵ Czar Alexander III and the Governor-General during his reign, F. L. Heiden began some restrictions on Finnish autonomy, such as the Postal Manifesto of 1890 that placed the Finnish postal system (mail, telephone, and telegraph) under the Russian Ministry of the Interior.⁹⁶ However, the process, known as Russification, did not reach its apex until the reign of Czar Nicholas II and his Governor-General, Nikolai Bobrikov.⁹⁷

When Czar Nicholas II came to the throne in 1894, he saw his new appointment for the vacant Governor-General of Finland as an opportunity to increase Russian ties with Finland, limit its autonomy, and to strengthen an imperial empire beginning to crack.⁹⁸ Additionally, for Russia, Finland possessed strategic significance because of its proximity to the border of the

⁹² Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 71.

⁹³ Kagan and Higham, *A Military History of Tsarist Russia*, 5.

⁹⁴ Tuomo Polvinen, *Imperial Borderland: Bobrikov and the Attempted Russification of Finland* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 19.

⁹⁵ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 67.

⁹⁶ “Carl Hjalmar Lagerborg, Postmaster 1887-1903,” *Postmasters General*, <https://www.postimuseo.fi/postin-paajohtajat/en/5.html>.

⁹⁷ Polvinen, *Imperial Borderland*, 10

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

Imperial Capital, St. Petersburg later Leningrad.⁹⁹ Early czars expressed this concern. Peter the Great wrote, “the ladies of St. Petersburg could not sleep peacefully as long as the Finnish frontier ran so close to our capital.”¹⁰⁰ A former chief of staff of the military district of St. Petersburg and now the new Governor-General, Nikolai Bobrikov, feared the level of autonomy of the Finnish army. He was especially concerned that if the Finnish military acquired artillery, it would be in range of St. Petersburg, and as a result, he heavily enforced the process of Russification.¹⁰¹

The process of Russification spread empire-wide and involved attempts by the czar, his advisors, and the Duma to enforce what were considered the tenants of Russian culture: the Russian language, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the rulings of the czar. One article in a March 1899 magazine described the policy as “all who owe loyalty to the Emperor are to be forced into a single mould [*sic*], ... to speak the same tongue, to respect outwardly the same Church, and, so far is possible to think the same thoughts.”¹⁰² Specifically, led by Bobrikov, Russification took place in acts such as the February Manifesto of 1899. Nicholas II proclaimed because decisions declared by the Finnish Diet “on account of their intimate connection with the general interests of the Empire, cannot be exclusively treated and decided by the institutions of the Grand Duchy.... We have found it necessary to reserve Ourselves the ultimate decision as to which laws come within the scope of the general legislation of the Empire.”¹⁰³ Therefore, all laws that affected the empire would now have to go through the imperial process, severely

⁹⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁰ Peter H. Krosby, *Finland, Germany, and the Soviet Union, 1940-1941: The Petsamo Dispute* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 14.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² “The Russification of Finland,” *The Spectator*, March 25, 1899, 405-406.

¹⁰³ “The Gracious Manifesto of the Imperial Manifesto, February 3/15, 1899,” *The Collection of Decrees of the Grand Duchy of Finland No 3*, <https://histdoc.net/history/keisarik.html>.

limiting the legislative abilities of the Finnish Diet.¹⁰⁴ The Russians argued this ability of the czar had always been in place, and most laws issued by the Diet could be argued as affecting the empire as a whole. However, after centuries of little oversight under Swedish rule and nearly eighty years of little to no restrictions on Finnish autonomy by the Russians, the February Manifesto was ill-timed, resulting in resistance within Finland.¹⁰⁵

Failing to understand the reasons for Finnish opposition to this policy and the growing resistance, Russification continued with the Language Manifesto of 1900. “In the interest of strengthening unity within the Empire,” this manifesto proclaimed that “the Russian language should after gradual steps be adopted as the principal language in matters concerning the administration of the region.”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, within this decree, members of the Finnish government were given five years before all communication within the Finnish Diet had to be conducted in Russian.¹⁰⁷ Many Finnish intellectuals and leaders, such as Leo Mechelin in his *A Precis of the Public Law of Finland*, feared the implications and the increasing Russian neglect of Finnish laws.¹⁰⁸ While reasonable in the eyes of many Russian leaders, Finns feared the Russian minority within Finland would gain power, and their autonomy would continue to decline.

Believing the actions of the czar originated with his advisors and not Nicholas II himself, a petition, known as the “Great Petition,” was sent to him in March 1899. Organized by Finnish Senator Leo Mechelin, it contained 522,931 signatures representing approximately twenty

¹⁰⁴ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 73.

¹⁰⁵ Osmo Jussila, “The Historical Background of the February Manifesto of 1899,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 15, no. 2/3 (Special Issue, Summer-Fall 1984): 142.

¹⁰⁶ “The Gracious Manifesto of His Imperial Majesty Concerning the Introduction of the Russian Language, June 7/20, 1900,” *The Collection of Decrees for the Grand Duchy of Finland*, No. 22, <https://histdoc.net/history/kieli1900.html>.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Leo Mechelin, *A Precis of the Public Law of Finland* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889), 95.

percent of the population. It was then transported to the czar in St. Petersburg by a delegation of 500 men.¹⁰⁹ The petition stated the czar, addressed as “most merciful Emperor and Grand Duke,” had, with his February Manifesto, “aroused astonishment and sadness all over Finland” with his violation of the Finnish Constitution.¹¹⁰ Stina Katchadourian recalled her grandmother, whose husband was one of the delegation members, saying, “we were only asking for our rights, and the czar treated us as children.”¹¹¹ However, Nicholas II refused to meet with any of the delegation, resulting in a key turning point in Finnish-Russian relations and an unfavorable change in the perception of the czar.

Not truly understanding the reactions of his subjects, Nicholas II continued policies restricting Finnish autonomy. Governor-General Bobrikov, fulfilling one of his goals to enhance the security of St. Petersburg, implemented a new conscription law, the Finnish Military Service Law of 1901, that ended the separate Finnish military.¹¹² Conscription had existed in Finland since Czar Alexander II approved the Finnish Military Service Law on December 18, 1878.¹¹³ This former law created a separate Finnish army which officially began on January 1, 1881.¹¹⁴ Although a small force, composed of nine infantry battalions and one dragoon regiment, and inadequate even for the defense of Finland, Russian military officials increasingly viewed the Finnish army as a threat as it might aid a potential invasion through Finnish territory by other nations such as Britain or the rising Germany.¹¹⁵ With the new conscription law, Finnish men

¹⁰⁹ “The Great Petition,” *Karhiniemen Kylaseura Ry*, <https://www.karhiniemi.fi/suuri-adressi/suuri-adressi.html>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Stina Katchadourian, *The Lapp King’s Daughter: A Family’s Journey Through Finland’s Wars* (McKinleyville, CA: Fifthian Press, 2010), 18.

¹¹² K. W. Rauhala, *Keisarillinen Suomen Senaatti 1809-1909* (Helsinki: 1921), 389-90, 494-95, 517-21.

¹¹³ J.E.O. Screen, “The Finnish Army, 1881-1901: A National Force in a Russian Context,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 70, no. 3 (July 1992): 454.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 455.

could be conscripted and sent anywhere within the Russian Empire.¹¹⁶ Finns were naturally concerned with the disbandment of their army and the conscription of their men abroad. General Vikoto Procopé, who served as the Finnish Minister of State, bemoaned, “the poor Finnish army! In the course of ninety years, this is the third time it has been disembodied, disbanded, to be reformed again 15-20 years later.”¹¹⁷ The next time the Finnish army formed, it would be for the independent nation of Finland.

Governor-General Bobrikov, in retaliation for the growing opposition through civil disobedience to the new policies, was authorized to place Finland under martial law in 1903.¹¹⁸ Additionally, censorship of the press and other printed material, which had always been a feature of czarist rule, intensified.¹¹⁹ However, with continued infringements on what Finns viewed as their constitutional rights and fearful of more Russian control, the passive resistance transitioned to more overt and often violent opposition. Centralized in the younger generation, some Finns became more willing to engage in violent means. One Finn in particular, Eugen Schauman, targeted the symbol of Russian oppression, Bobrikov, and on June 16, 1904, shot and killed the governor-general before killing himself.¹²⁰ The note found in his pocket stated the fact that he acted alone, and he “pray[ed] that Your Majesty will simply look into the true situation in the Empire—including Finland, Poland, and the Baltic Provinces.”¹²¹ Reactions within Russia perhaps would have been stronger if not for events outside of Finland.

¹¹⁶ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 74.

¹¹⁷ V. Procope, *Min verksamhet sasom t.f. ministeratssekreterar for Finland 1898-1899* (Helsinki, 1923), 31.

¹¹⁸ “Nicholas’ Decree Limiting Finnish Autonomy, March 20, 1903,” University of Toronto Libraries Digital Collection. <http://wayback.archive-it.org/6473/20160819151144/https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/citd/RussianHeritage/10.EMP/10.L/XVI.21.html>.

¹¹⁹ Gross, *Sibelius: A Composer’s Life*, 246.

¹²⁰ Polivnen, *Imperial Borderland*, 257-258.

¹²¹ “Letter,” *Estlander*, 1924, 128-130.

The policy of Russification paused temporarily during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Russian leaders focused on internal issues and the violence of January 23, 1905, “Bloody Sunday,” and the other revolutionary violence centered in St. Petersburg as a part of the protest against the war.¹²² As a result, Nicholas II agreed that Finland could re-establish a constitutional form of government in the autumn of 1905. The Grand Duchy of Finland’s Diet of the Four Estates was abolished, voting for the creation of a unicameral parliament, elected by popular vote by all citizens, male and female, twenty-four and above.¹²³ Thus the Finnish government became the first to not only allow women the right to vote but also the ability to run for office.¹²⁴ With absolute veto power lying with the czar, Nicholas II approved the reforms within the Finnish parliamentary system and the new constitution in 1906. However, later alarmed by the steps taken by the new Finnish parliament, the process of Russification resumed in 1907, and the February Manifesto was reinstated.¹²⁵ The Russian State Council and the Duma passed the Equality Law that declared Russian citizens no longer alien and enabled non-native-born Finns to hold political office by 1913. Instead of inspiring unity within the Russian empire, the “series of repressive and heavy-handed tsars, however, ignited the nascent fires of Finnish nationalism.”¹²⁶

There are many factors contributing to the failure of Russification within Finland. One stemmed from the two opposing views of Finland. As Jason Lavery notes, “the Russians viewed Finland in terms of security, while the Finns understood their relationship with Russia in terms of law and morality.”¹²⁷ As a result, when the Russians began to restrict Finnish autonomy, many

¹²² Leon Trotsky, *1905* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), xi.

¹²³ “A Brief History of the Parliament: From Autonomy to EU Finland,” *Parliament of Finland*, <https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/naineduskuntatoimii/historia/Pages/default.aspx>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 77, 78.

¹²⁶ Trotter, *A Frozen Hell*, 4.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 74.

saw it as illegal based on the laws and institutions within Finland. Russian motives went well beyond the security of St. Petersburg. Nicholas II and his advisors, along with the Duma, saw Russification as a part of a larger movement to promote unity within their crumbling empire. An article in *The Spectator*, published on March 25, 1899, observed this motivation that the czar had “evidently decided that the system of Russifying Russia must be continued until the Empire presents to the eye a single and harmonious whole.”¹²⁸

However, the Grand Duchy of Finland had, through its autonomy, become too unique by the 1890s resulting in any Russian attempt at control meeting resistance. Finnish culture, rooted in many of the tenants of Western thought from the era of Swedish rule along with their own era of autonomy, could not coexist with Russian views, and many Finns would not concede to becoming more a part of the Russian empire.¹²⁹ Naturally, Russian attempts at control earned Finland much sympathy from nations of the West, such as Great Britain and the United States. *The New York Times* reported the story of a native-born Finn, H. Montague-Donner, who then lived and taught in the United States. He believed “the Czar has abandoned the long-established policy of his predecessors, and now attempts the complete obliteration of all things Finnish.”¹³⁰ As a result, Donner was preparing a demonstration to protest Nicholas II’s actions. This would not be the first time the Western world expressed sympathy for Finland and the plight of its people.

Furthermore, the policy of Russification ultimately failed because it coincided with the “Golden Age of Finnish Culture.” From around the mid-1870s until the 1920s, the Golden Age of Finnish Culture not only produced some of the most well-known Finnish artists, composers,

¹²⁸ “The Russification of Finland,” *The Spectator*, March 25, 1899, 405-406.

¹²⁹ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 78.

¹³⁰ “Russification of Finland: Finns Preparing for a Demonstration against the Czar’s Degree,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1899.

and authors, but it also helped, in many ways, create the Finnish national identity at a time when it was often illegal and served as a form of protest. Through the work of artists such as Edward Isto, specifically his 1899 painting *Attack*, an even more distinct Finnish culture and the idea of Finnishness emerged.¹³¹ Soon united in language, culture, and institutions, Finnish history was further homogenized through the musical works of composer Jean Sibelius.

Arguably the most well-known Finnish composer, Sibelius, played an integral role in developing the Finnish national identity. Glenda Goss notes, “incited by the push-pull of the giants on either side of Finland, Sibelius and a handful of his predecessors and contemporaries set out to compose, draw, paint, poetize, sculpt, and versify what it meant to be Finnish, to inculcate a sense of pride in being Finnish, and through these activities to awaken their fellow Finns to their uniqueness, their separateness, and ultimately the possibilities of nationhood.”¹³² Integrating the religious, linguistic, and literary foundations of Finnish culture into his music, Sibelius’ music often served as a less overt form of protest to the policies of Russification.

His most famous piece, what would become *Finlandia*, *Op. 26*, debuted in Helsinki as part of a benefit concert on November 4, 1899, for the beleaguered members of the press whom Bobrikov had targeted the most.¹³³ This nationwide event occurred in the major cities throughout Finland and was advertised discretely as “Press Days.” After the prologue piece, Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*, and poems, Sibelius’ set of six *Tablåer från forntiden* (*Tableaux from Ancient History*) was performed.¹³⁴ Each tableau corresponded with a particular period of history, beginning with the legends of *Kalevala*. However, the final tableau, “*Herää Suomi*”

¹³¹ “The Attack, 1899” Edward Isto, <https://www.meisterdrucke.uk/fine-art-prints/Edvard-Isto/712136/The-Attack,-1899.html>.

¹³² Goss, *Sibelius: A Composer’s Life*, 5.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 255-256.

(*Finland Awake*), had the most far-reaching political and national ramifications.¹³⁵ Utilizing powerful natural symbols, “the awakening spring reinforced a metaphorically awakening Finland.... Echoes of springtime and veiled references to Russian oppression—the frost—filled the tableau.”¹³⁶

The music’s message was not lost on its Finnish audience. Sibelius would later expand the *Finale* in 1900 into the symphonic poem *Finlandia Op. 26*.¹³⁷ Goss concludes that “at the conquering age of thirty-three, Sibelius achieved the most convincing synthesis of Finnishness that would ever be written.”¹³⁸ The Russians soon realized the nature of this protest song and its morale-boosting influence on Finnish nationalism, and as a result, it was banned. According to Finnish music historian Tomi Mäkelä, “*Finlandia* [has] conquered the world in a more lasting way than anything else from Finland (including Nokia).”¹³⁹ Thus despite the efforts of Nicholas II and the various Governor-Generals of the Grand-Duchy of Finland, the movement for an independent Finland grew and would soon be achieved, aided by events in Europe.

As the policies of Russification continued, an author for the *New York Times* predicted that Finland would “become a new Poland, that is to say, a perpetual element of discord in the empire. Should the Czars’ government persist in its present attitude, the final outcome will be an open rebellion.”¹⁴⁰ While it did not occur in quite the way that this article predicted, Finnish independence occurred less than twenty years after its publication.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Tomi Mäkelä, *Jean Sibelius*, translated by Steven Lindberg (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2011), 211.

¹³⁸ Goss, *Sibelius: A Composers Life*, 272.

¹³⁹ Mäkelä, *Jean Sibelius*, 211.

¹⁴⁰ “St. Petersburg Topics: Growing Movement in Finland Against Russification,” *New York Times*, September 9, 1900, 19.

When World War I commenced, Finland remained a part of the Russian Empire. As a result, the Grand Duchy of Finland declared a state of war on July 31, 1914.¹⁴¹ With the abolishment of the Finnish military a decade earlier, Finnish soldiers now served throughout the Russian army. However, most of the strain of the war would be felt economically. Finland's economy, heavily dependent on imports and reliant on the export of its timber, faltered. By 1917, thirty percent of the industrial workforce was unemployed.¹⁴² Metalworking and other wartime industries became almost exclusively dedicated to the Russian war effort. Finland also relied on Russian grain, and all trade between the nations was significantly hindered by the 1917 Revolution in Russia, with deadly results for the starving Finnish people.¹⁴³

After the March Revolution, which resulted in the overthrowing of Nicholas II, the Provisional Government restored Finland's constitutional rights on March 20, 1917.¹⁴⁴ Through this act, important Finnish leaders who had been exiled or political deportees, such as Pehr Evind Svinhufvud, could return to Finland.¹⁴⁵ However, the Finnish Diet faced a difficult situation with severe food shortages, internal disputes, and increasingly difficult relations with the Russian Provisional Government. On July 18, 1917, the Finnish Diet declared executive power to act on all issues, foreign and domestic.¹⁴⁶ The Provisional Government, in chaos itself, reactionarily dissolved the Finnish Diet on July 31, 1917, and called for a new election.¹⁴⁷ However, the new

¹⁴¹ "Declaration of a State of War, July 31, 1914," *History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, <https://histdoc.net/history/statewar1914.html>.

¹⁴² Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 103.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ "Manifesto by the Provisional Government of Russia, March 7/20, 1917," *A History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, <https://histdoc.net/history/julistus.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 305.

¹⁴⁷ "Manifesto of the Russian Provisional Government, July 31, 1917," *The Collection of Decrees of the Grand Duchy of Finland, No. 3*, <https://histdoc.net/pdf/1917-07-31.pdf>.

elections and the October Revolution doomed the continued existence of Finland as an autonomous Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire.

The Age of Independence

Led by former exile Svinhufvud, the newly elected assembly met in November 1917. Seizing on the chaos from the collapse of the Russian Empire, the Finnish Diet declared its independence on December 6, 1917.¹⁴⁸ Although now independent, both the Finnish people and the Finnish Diet were deeply divided, and many held conflicting visions of the future of the new nation. Additionally, the new government had to solve the problem of the approximately 40,000 Russian troops that remained in Finland.¹⁴⁹ To combat these Russian soldiers, who were often looting and even killing Finnish citizens, the Finnish government formed the Paramilitary Civil Guard (the White Guard).¹⁵⁰ The Svinhufvud government also struggled to gain official recognition from other nations, such as Great Britain, who feared that Finland's growing friendly relations with Germany could be used to invade their then-still ally, Russia.¹⁵¹ Ironically, the first to recognize Finnish independence was the Soviet of People's Commissars on December 18, 1917.¹⁵² Confident that the instability in Finland would lead to the spread of communism, Lenin's decision was based on his belief in "unity of separation."¹⁵³ Subsequent events seemingly proved him right when a short but brutal civil war broke out. The war, in many ways, was both a civil war and a war for independence. It deeply divided Finland and further solidified anti-communism as a part of Finnish culture.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ "Declaration of Independence," *A History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, <https://histdoc.net/history/itsjul.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Singleton, *A Short History of Finland*, 108.

¹⁵⁰ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 306.

¹⁵¹ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 84.

¹⁵² "Recognition of Finland's Independence," *A History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, <https://histdoc.net/history/itsen2.html>.

¹⁵³ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 85.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

The Finnish Civil War

Tensions had been growing since independence was declared. Two primary sides, each with their own vision for Finland: the Social Democrats, who became known as the Whites, and the Communists, who became known as the Reds, vied for control. The Reds captured Helsinki on January 28, 1918, and declared a new communist government, the People's Commission.¹⁵⁵ The leaders of the Social Democrats, who fled Helsinki after the Finnish communists seized power, had recently appointed Field Marshal and later President Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim to command the White Guard.¹⁵⁶ A complex, enigmatic individual, Mannerheim earned the respect of both the Soviets and the Germans. Understanding Mannerheim's views are essential to understanding Finnish actions during World War II. As a witness to the early violence of the revolution in St. Petersburg and the fall of Nicholas II, whom he personally knew, Mannerheim developed strong anti-communist views. He believed the Bolshevik Revolution caused the Russian people to sink "back into a slavery [that would] develop into a world menace."¹⁵⁷ Mannerheim realized Finland's precarious situation in December 1917. Once again, because of Finland's proximity to St. Petersburg, the "hearth of the revolution," he believed that "it was not a question whether or not Finland would be dragged into the revolution, but when."¹⁵⁸

The Bolsheviks supported the Finnish Reds, but German troops reinforced the Whites. The White Guard soldiers benefited from numerical superiority, and many of the officers had trained in Germany as part of the 27th Jäger Battalion (light infantry).¹⁵⁹ From 1915-1918, roughly 2,000 Finns secretly trained in Germany.¹⁶⁰ Under a unique agreement facilitated by a

¹⁵⁵ "The Revolutionary Government of Finland, January 29, 1918," *A History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, https://histdoc.net/history/kv10_e.html.

¹⁵⁶ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 307.

¹⁵⁷ Mannerheim, *The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim*, 129.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁶⁰ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 86.

Finn living in Germany, Vetter Hoth, and demonstrating their support for Finnish independence, Germany allowed Finnish volunteers to travel to Germany and undergo “pathfinder” training in Lockstedt. While not officially apart of the German military, the Kaiser changed his views, and on May 1, 1916, they were incorporated into the Imperial German Army as the 27th Royal Prussian Jäger (hunter) Battalion and deployed against the Russians near Riga.¹⁶¹ However, due to events within Finland and the larger Russian empire, the battalion returned to Finland in February 1918.¹⁶² Historian William Trotter observes that “almost every successful Finnish field commander in both the Civil War and the Winter War received his basic training in the Twenty-seventh Jägers; veterans of the unit became, for all practical purposes, an elite professional caste.”¹⁶³ Aided by the legal ability to conscript soldiers, and led by a well-trained officer corps, the Whites had distinct advantages when full-scale war broke out in February 1918.¹⁶⁴ The Battle of Tampere, from April 4-6, 1918, proved decisive, and combined with the 9,500 German troops that landed in Hanko on April 7, the Red Guards fell.¹⁶⁵ With the Bolsheviks focused on internal issues and negotiating the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty with the Central Powers, their aid was less substantial than Germany’s aid.¹⁶⁶ After the battle, the White Guard and their German allies marched on Helsinki and recaptured the city on April 14, 1918.¹⁶⁷ The last Red troops surrendered on May 5, 1918.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ Composed mostly of students, the volunteers were instructed to speak only in German to not arouse suspicion. Chris Mann and Christer Jorgensen, *Hitler’s Arctic War: The German Campaigns in Norway, Finland, and the USSR 1940-1945*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 17.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Trotter, *A Frozen Hell*, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 86.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 87.

¹⁶⁶ “The Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, March 3, 1918,” *Brigham Young University Library: World War I Document Archive*, https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Peace_Treaty_of_Brest-Litovsk.

¹⁶⁷ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 87.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Those who had supported the Reds were viewed as traitors, and the aid provided by the Soviet Union left a lasting animosity between the two nations that would hamper future relations.¹⁶⁹ While cruelties were perpetrated by both the Reds and Whites, an estimated 31,000 were killed, of which nearly 27,000 were Red Guard soldiers. Many of them died of malnutrition and disease in prison camps or were executed during the “White Terror.”¹⁷⁰ William Trotter comments about Mannerheim, “While his only hatred was of Bolshevism, an abstraction; wholesale vindictive retribution was a tactic that fit neither his character nor his plans for Finland,” however, “If Mannerheim did not order these killings, he surely did little to stop them.”¹⁷¹ While only lasting four months, the Civil War left deep scars in Finland that would not be resolved until the Finnish people were united in a common cause during the Winter War. Many Finns would not forget that Germany was the only nation that helped it become independent.¹⁷²

The close association with Germany continued in the immediate aftermath of the Finnish Civil War. The monarchist majority in the Finnish Senate following independence on October 9, 1918, elected the German Prince Friedrich Karl of Hesse as King of Finland.¹⁷³ Upon ascension to the throne, he would take the Finnish name, Väinö I. However, as Jason Lavery observes, “Germany’s capitulation [at the end of World War I] meant the end of the Finnish monarch,” and the Finnish government made immediate efforts to reorientate to a democratic republic to gain favor with the victors of the Great War.¹⁷⁴ Finnish historian Olli Vehviläinen also observes that

¹⁶⁹ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 309.

¹⁷⁰ Nordstrom, *Scandinavia Since 1500*, 203; Lavery, *the History of Finland*, 87.

¹⁷¹ Trotter, *A Frozen Hell*, 26-27.

¹⁷² John Taylor, “Mannerheim Draws a Line in the Snow,” *The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 22, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 58.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

following the defeat of Germany, “the German orientation in Finland ended.”¹⁷⁵ With more moderates in the Finnish senate, Kaarlo Juho Stahlberg became the first president and the chief architect of the new constitution ratified in July 1919.¹⁷⁶ William Shirer described this transition in Finnish history, writing that now, “Finland settled down to the immense task of constructing a democratic nation.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, the now independent, deeply divided Finland struggled to find a place in a vastly different post-World War I Europe.

After centuries under the rule of either the Swedes or the Russians, Finland finally emerged as an independent nation. Nevertheless, there was no national consensus on what it meant to be Finnish. It would take a few more decades and another brutal war with Russia, now the Soviet Union, to firmly establish the accepted values and traits of a national Finnish identity. Furthermore, independence did not end Finland’s geopolitical position as a strategic gate between the East and West. As Europe recovered from the cataclysmic events of the Great War, Finland now bordered an aggressive and revolutionary Soviet Union. The next decades would be characterized by Finnish attempts to develop internally and to coexist with the Soviet Union. Ultimately, the centuries-old problem of the security of St. Petersburg and Russian attempts to create a buffer zone overruled any Finnish attempts at diplomacy. Finnish leaders during World War II made decisions based on both their remembered past, the violence of the Russo-Swedish wars, and their experienced past, the Finnish Civil War. Thus, shaped by their history, Finnish leaders attempted to navigate the ever-changing geopolitical landscape of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.

¹⁷⁵ Olli Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War: Between Germany and Russia*, Translated by Gerard McAlistar, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 8.

¹⁷⁶ “The Constitution Act of Finland, July 17, 1919,” *UNHCR: UN Refugee Agency*, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b53418.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 311.

CHAPTER TWO: “THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT”: FINLAND AND THE WINTER WAR

Near the end of Robert Sherwood’s 1940 Broadway play about the Winter War, the character Dr. Kaarlo Valkonen reads a passage from Revelation 22:5, “And there shall be no night there...for the Lord giveth them light; and they shall reign forever and ever. How long, O Lord, before we shall be given to see the true revelation?” While another character questions the meaning of this verse, Dr. Valkonen answers that he believes this war will result in the true revelation as “it’s the revealing to us of ourselves—of what we are—and what we may be.”¹ The Winter War and the months following the Soviet Union’s November 1939 invasion of Finland were dark and trying times in Finnish history. While Joseph Stalin and his advisors “expected [a] triumphal parade,” the dogged resistance of the Finnish Army and people “turned [that parade] into a bloody three-month war.”² Furnished in the crucible of conflict, the Winter War united a previously divided people battling for their very existence as a nation and forged a united Finnish national identity.

Reeling from the destructive war, Finnish leaders strove not to fall prey to Soviet aggression again. This sentiment spread to the Finnish people, who believed with a growing consensus that the war with the Soviets was not over and that Finland could ill afford to fight another war alone. Stina Katchadourian recalled that her parents believed the Finnish government, “reasoning that the enemy of your enemy is my friend, hoped to counter the renewed Soviet threat by accepting military help from Germany...It was a terrible dilemma.”³

¹ Robert Sherwood, “There Shall Be No Night,” https://search-alexanderstreet-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3608805#page/151/mode/1/chapter/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C3851162.

² Gordon Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War 1939-1945* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1997), 20.

³ Stina Katchadourian, *The Lapp King’s Daughter: A Family’s Journey Through Finland’s Wars* (McKinleyville, CA: Fithian Press, 2010), 19.

As a result, the Finnish government pondered various alliances to neutralize what they viewed as the greatest threat to the sovereignty of Finland—the Soviet Union. Shaped by years of conflict with the Russian Empire and the near defeat by the Soviet Union during the Winter War, President Risto Ryti and Commander-in-Chief Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim led Finland to join Nazi Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union. Much of the Finnish population supported this position. Finnish soldier Erkki Heinmolainen, who later volunteered to join the Waffen SS, recalled hearing “about the possibility to enlist for Germany. We were naturally very excited, for we were more than sure that the recent war against the Soviet Union was not the last one. But now we did not have to fight alone.”⁴ However, the Finns failed to understand the nature of the war on the Eastern Front and their new ally. With conflicting war aims, the co-belligerency was doomed to fail. This decision must be placed within its immediate context—the decades preceding the outbreak of World War II and the Winter War.

Finnish Foreign Policy During the 1920s and 1930s

The recently independent Finland struggled to navigate a complex world stage in the decades preceding the outbreak of World War II and remain sovereign in a vastly different Europe. First, Finland attempted to gain security through alliances, then intergovernmental organizations, and finally, a policy of neutrality. Furthermore, Finland’s location within what Czech President Thomas Masaryk deemed “Europe’s danger zone” and its status as a part of a former empire made diplomatic interactions even more precarious.⁵ Ultimately, Jason Lavery observes, “like other nations in this danger zone, Finland failed to find an effective formula for national security before the outbreak of World War II.”⁶ As the storm clouds of World War II

⁴ Lars Westerlund, *The Finnish SS-Volunteers and Atrocities 1941-1943* (Helsinki, FI: National Archives of Finland and Finnish Literary Society, 2019), 40.

⁵ Thomas Masaryk quoted in Jason Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 106.

⁶ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 106.

approached, Finnish leaders hoped to rely on alliances with other nations, international cooperation through the League of Nations, and the soon-to-be clearly defined Nordic neutrality policy to avoid a confrontation with either the Soviet Union or Germany.

As Finland emerged as an independent nation in the early 1920s, its foreign policy was dominated by dealings with the Soviet Union. Finnish politician and later long-time president Urho Kekkonen summarized Finland's pre-war approach to foreign policy:

It was natural that Finland should seek to find a system of foreign relations that would affirm, strengthen, and safeguard the country's newly-won independence. For every state, the object of foreign policy is, of course, [the] protection of the country's independence, but a country in the position of Finland must approach this question with quite exceptional care.... Finland's position as a neighbor of the Bolshevik Soviet Union made the country's security the object of special concern to the state organs responsible for foreign policy. There was no lack of idealism, and indeed the people had confidence in the stability of our independence. But the programme [*sic*]of world revolution proclaimed by the Soviet Union forced us, idealism notwithstanding, to act as realists and allow for the worst.⁷

He further outlined two alternatives that Finland had in foreign policy: an anti-Russian approach or neutrality towards Russia.⁸ Kaarlo J. Ståhlberg, who served as president from 1919-1925, directed the Finnish parliament to choose the second policy, but they also pursued close relations with many nations of the West. Demonstrating their commitment to the second option on October 14, 1920, representatives from the Soviet and Finnish governments signed the Peace of Tartu, which declared peace and established the borders between the two nations that would remain until 1939.⁹ Finland and the Soviet Union then signed a Treaty of Non-Aggression on January 21, 1932.¹⁰ Furthermore, once it became clear that the Soviet system of government was

⁷ Kekkonen provided this overview in a speech before Swedish Agrarian Union in Stockholm on December 7, 1943. Urho Kekkonen, *Neutrality: The Finnish Position*, Translated by P. Ojansuu and L.E. Keyworth and edited by Tuomas Vilkuna (London, UK: Heinemann, 1970), 18.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "The Peace Treaty between Finland and the Federal Socialist Republic of Soviet Russia, October 14, 1920," *League of Nations Treaty Series* 65, https://histdoc.net/history/ru/dorpat1920_ru.htm.

¹⁰ This treaty was negotiated by Aarno S. Yrjö-Koskinen and Ivan Maiski. "Treaty of Non-Aggression, January 21, 1932," *A History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, <https://histdoc.net/pdf/nonaggr.pdf>.

now the government of Russia, the negotiation of this treaty between Finland and the Soviet Union signaled “a turning point in the relations between the two countries. It signified the emergence of the idea of neutrality in Finland’s Eastern policy.”¹¹ In 1934, the treaty was renewed until 1945.

Although this treaty was in place, Anthony Upton observes, “no mutual trust developed from this.”¹² Contradicting the usual proceedings following a treaty of this nature, the Russians ended their trade with Finland in 1934. Not only was Finland an obvious trade partner, but through trade, an increase in interaction and cooperation may have prevailed. However, many Finns were also still wary of their neighbor, and the old Finnish saying “Ryssä on ryssä vaikka voissa paistaisi” (a Russian is a Russian, even if you fry him in butter) was the guiding assumption of Finnish foreign policy.¹³ Kekkonen observed, “Finnish foreign policy was stamped with a distinctly mistrustful anti-Russian tendency, especially in the early 1920s. [However,] Finnish foreign policy rejected many plans that favoured [*sic*] aggressive conduct.”¹⁴

Despite this history, there were periods of less tension, as demonstrated by events in April 1938, when an official at the Soviet embassy, Boris Jartsev, met with Finnish Foreign Minister Rudolf Holsti.¹⁵ Jartsev expressed the Soviet’s concern with the growing German power, and he suggested formal military ties between Finland and the Soviet Union. While the discussions continued for several months, ultimately, they ended because Holsti and the new Finnish Foreign Minister, Eljas Erkko, were not convinced this relatively low-ranking Soviet

¹¹ Kekkonen, *Neutrality*, 20.

¹² Anthony Upton, *Finland 1939-1940: The Politics and Strategy of the Second World War* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1974), 16.

¹³ “How Moscow’s War in Ukraine Sparked a Seismic Shift in Finland,” *Euro News*, March 10, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/03/10/living-next-door-to-russia-how-moscow-s-war-in-ukraine-sparked-a-seismic-shift-in-finland>.

¹⁴ Kekkonen, *Neutrality*, 19.

¹⁵ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 114.

official had the authority. Furthermore, the Finnish government believed a Mutual Assistance Treaty would violate their strict definition of neutrality.¹⁶ Erkkö later defended his belief that the Soviet offer for automatic aid was “incompatible with the autonomy and sovereignty of Finland,” and such aid would be seen as “such a measure of aggression.”¹⁷ The talks officially ended in November 1938.¹⁸ Additionally, as Jason Lavery notes, Finnish foreign policy was guided by the principle of “security as protection from rather than cooperation with the eastern neighbor.”¹⁹ Based on centuries of fighting and now heightened with the expansionist ideology of communism, Finnish mistrust never waned, and Russia loomed large in the minds of Finnish leaders.

Given that many Finns believed that the “threat from the East was both great and eternal,” Finnish politicians attempted to neutralize the threat of the Soviet Union through various means, such as alliances.²⁰ In 1922, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland attempted to negotiate on a treaty of cooperation that included a military clause enabling support to be sent if one of the signatories was attacked.²¹ Fearful of being drawn into a war in central Europe, the Finnish parliament failed to ratify the treaty. Alliances with other Nordic nations proved equally challenging. Due to their complicated history, cooperation with Sweden proved difficult.²² Politicians within Norway and Denmark feared German aggression more than the Soviet Union. Thus, the foreign policy of Finland during the late 1920s and 1930s was characterized by a lack of suitable allies.²³

¹⁶ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 24.

¹⁷ “Eljas Erkkö interview,” *Eduskunta*, June 6, 1939.

¹⁸ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 114.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Marjatta Palander, Helka Riionheimo and Vesa Koivisto, *On the Border of Language and Dialect* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2018), 9.

²³ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 109.

Although failing to establish alliances, on December 16, 1920, Finland did join the League of Nations.²⁴ Because it was a decision “dictated by our security requirements in the East,” Kekkonen and other Finnish leaders favored the French approach to the League of Nations.²⁵ France desired the League to serve more as a military alliance. Noting their more vulnerable position as a continental power, French diplomat Louis F. Aubert and others advocated for the League of Nations to add two amendments that would give the League more “power and authority...by preparing for the organizing of an international force.”²⁶ However, the lack of support from Britain, compounded by the United States’ decision not to join, ended any hope for this approach. As historian Franklin Scott observes, the League of Nations ultimately failed: “the jealousy of the great powers, the absence of the United States, and the shortsightedness of weak statesmen...made the League a feeble instrument.”²⁷ Yet, because of the successful negotiation between Sweden and Finland over the strategically vital Åland Islands mediated by the League of Nations, many Finns were optimistic about its capabilities in the 1920s.²⁸ However, failed interventions in Japan in 1931 and Ethiopia in 1935 resulted in European nations having an increasing lack of faith in the League itself and the principles of collective security.²⁹

As a result, Finnish leaders clarified their official policy of neutrality. In December 1935, the Finnish parliament declared that Finland would follow the other Nordic nations’ policy

²⁴ Vesa Nenye, Peter Munter and Toni Wirtanen, *Finland at War: The Winter War 1939-1940* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2015), 13.

²⁵ Kekkonen, *Finnish Neutrality*, 19.

²⁶ The French wanted a similar approach to how the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would operate after World War II. Louis F. Aubert, “France and the League of Nations,” *Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 4 (July 1925): 645.

²⁷ Franklin Scott, *Scandinavia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 209.

²⁸ “Sub-sub-series R591-R592/11/13836 - Neutralisation des Iles d’ Åland,” *United Nations Library and Archives Geneva*, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/neutralisation-des-iles-daland>.

²⁹ G. Bruce Strang ed., *Collision of Empires: Italy’s Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6.

of neutrality.³⁰ Thus, they joined the Scandinavian neutrality bloc, which included Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Kekkonen noted that “Finland’s Scandinavian orientation must be regarded as a manifestation of the idea of neutrality that Finland had adopted towards the Soviet Union.”³¹ Once again, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, joined by Iceland, signed a new statement of neutrality in Stockholm on May 27, 1938, which clarified their policy of neutrality in a naval war, rules regarding aircraft, and the denial of the use of their territory for aggressive attacks against belligerents.³² However, the Nordic nations failed to author a common policy if one of the nations was threatened, and this policy of neutrality failed to be a convincing deterrent.³³

As the decade of the 1930s progressed, President Kyösti Kallio, elected in 1937, endeavored to work along the neutrality line with the Soviet Union. The visit of the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs to Moscow in early 1937 and trade negotiations during the late 1930s demonstrated Finland’s commitment to both neutrality and good relations with the Soviet Union. According to Kekkonen, “Finland guarded her neutrality jealously and desired to prevent any act that would have given the Soviet Union cause to doubt our firm will for neutrality and our ability to keep neutral.”³⁴ Following the start of World War II in Europe, on September 19, 1939, Finland, along with other Nordic nations, officially declared neutrality.³⁵ While many were optimistic, neutrality would ultimately fail Finland and many other nations during World War II.

³⁰ John H. Wuorinen, “Continuing Finnish Neutrality,” *Current History* 36, no. 212 (April 1959): 224.

³¹ Kekkonen, *Neutrality*, 21.

³² “Declaration Between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden For the Purpose of Establishing Similar Rules of Neutrality, May 27, 1938,” *Treaty Section, Office of Legal Affairs, United Nations*, New York, https://histdoc.net/pdf/nordic1938_en.pdf.

³³ Henrik O. Lunde, *Finland’s War of Choice: The Troubled German-Finnish War Coalition* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2011), 9.

³⁴ Kekkonen, *Neutrality*, 20-21.

³⁵ Nenye, *Finland at War: The Winter War*, 15.

Neutrality was unsuccessful because of several factors. These policies failed Finland and most Baltic states because of how the Soviet Union viewed them. The Soviet Union did not see Finland as a neutral Scandinavian nation but as a “border area in which the Soviet Union had important strategic interests to protect.”³⁶ Vyacheslav Molotov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, told the Latvian Foreign Minister that “we cannot allow small states to be used against the Soviet Union. Neutral Baltic states are too risky.”³⁷ Thus, their location as a strategic gateway between Eastern and Western Europe hindered Finnish maneuverability in foreign affairs. Once again, in the name of the security of Leningrad and driven by the fear of Finnish territory used by a foreign power, Stalin desired a buffer zone between the city and Finland. While he initially attempted to create such a zone through negotiations, he would soon resort to force. Furthermore, advances in mechanized warfare resulted in a higher dependence on natural resources such as iron ore and nickel which Sweden and Finland possessed. Their geopolitical location, now compounded by their resources, made neutrality a virtually impossible position to hold. Thus, as historian Franklin Scott observes, “Scandinavia was in the maelstrom of the new *Geopolitik*.”³⁸

Neutrality also failed because of the nature of the belligerents in World War II. While superficially similar to the Great War, World War II was considerably different. The belligerents were no longer imperial powers guided by the legality or chivalry of past wars but were ideologically driven and less likely to follow the understood rules of war and diplomacy.³⁹ As noted by historians Chris Mann and Christer Jorgenen, “declarations of neutrality counted for

³⁶Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 19.

³⁷ Jane Degras, ed. *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy* vol 3 (1933-1941) (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 57-58.

³⁸ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 216.

³⁹ Earl F. Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations 1940-1945* (Washington DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1959), 2.

little with Europe's dictators."⁴⁰ Additionally, Mannerheim explained, "Neutrality is in our days no magic formula which can prevent Great Powers from utilizing the weakness of small States for their own ends."⁴¹

The Buildup to the Winter War

Many in Finland remained optimistic about the future. Kekkonen firmly believed that "the neutral policy towards Russia pursued by Finland in the 1930s was seriously intended and would have continued whatever the vicissitudes of the World War."⁴² Understanding its own limitations, there was a widespread desire to avoid war, and as Kekkonen observed, although "naïve though it may now seem, we actually had a fairly general confidence that there would be no war."⁴³ The Minister of Finance Väinö Tanner told the Foreign Minister, J. K. Paasikivi, "I do not believe that there will be a war; the world cannot be so senseless."⁴⁴ Finnish optimism would be severely challenged over the next few years.

This optimism ended, however, with the signing of the Treaty of Non-Aggression between the Soviet Union and Germany on August 23, 1939.⁴⁵ As Finnish historian Olli Vehviläinen observes, this treaty "brought the Finns down to earth with a bump."⁴⁶ The most alarming portion of this agreement was the "secret protocol" that established Finland and the Baltic states in the Soviet sphere of influence.⁴⁷ This treaty also completely negated Finnish

⁴⁰ Chris Mann and Christer Jorgensen, *Hitler's Arctic War: The German Campaigns in Norway, Finland, and the USSR 1940-1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 13.

⁴¹ Mannerheim, *The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim*, 391.

⁴² Kekkonen, *Neutrality*, 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁴ "Tanner to Paasikivi, July 26, 1939," Väinö Tanner, *Kahden Maailmansodan Valissa* (Helsinki: Tammi, 1966), 241-248.

⁴⁵ "Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, August 23, 1939," *United States Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy: From the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry Series D* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1956).

⁴⁶ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 29.

⁴⁷ "Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" (August 23, 1939), *United States Department of State*.

ability to rely on the balance of power naturally created by the tension between the Soviet Union and Germany. Furthermore, a foreign policy of neutrality by small nations is dependent on the balance of power being maintained between great powers.⁴⁸ While this treaty shocked the world, it was especially detrimental to the nations between the two great powers.⁴⁹ Divided into respective spheres of influence and isolated from Western Europe, Finland, and other nations, such as Poland, were at the mercy of either Germany or the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ Thus, “Finland and the other countries in Eastern Europe were the losers in the deal.”⁵¹

With Finland in their sphere of influence, the Soviets had a free hand to pursue their regional goals without any interference from Germany.⁵² Shortly after signing the non-aggression pact, Stalin acted quickly, and the Soviets’ treatment of the Baltic states served as a stark warning to Finnish leaders. Estonia’s disposition concerned the Finnish Parliament because Estonia was forced to sign a Mutual Assistance Pact on September 28-29, 1939, and allow Russian troops to be stationed within Estonia.⁵³ Finland had close ties with Estonia, having helped Estonia gain its independence, as well as sharing both a closely linked language and border on the Gulf of Finland.⁵⁴ A month later, on October 5, 1939, Latvia signed a similar agreement with the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ Fearful of further Soviet aggression and attempts to acquire more territory, Finland was determined to avoid the fate of the Baltic states. On October 5,

⁴⁸ Mann and Jorgensen, *Hitler’s Arctic War*, 11.

⁴⁹ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 116.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 114.

⁵² Gerd R. Ueberschar, *Hitler and Finland 1939-1941* (Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1978), 42-45.

⁵³ “Mutual Assistance Treaty between the Republic of Estonia and the USSR, September 28, 1939,” *Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, <https://nakanune.rusarchives.ru/en/mutual-assistance-treaty-between-republic-estonia-and-ussr>; and Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*. (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 98.

⁵⁴ Prit Buttar, *Between Giants: The Battle for the Baltics in World War II* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2013), 15, 97.

⁵⁵ “Mutual Assistance Treaty between the Republic of Latvia and the USSR, October 5, 1939,” *Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, <https://nakanune.rusarchives.ru/en/mutual-assistance-treaty-between-republic-latvia-and-ussr>.

1939, Stalin requested that Finland send representatives to discuss “concrete political matters.”⁵⁶ In the name of security on land and sea for Leningrad, he produced a list of demands to the Finnish delegation of Finance Minister Tanner and Foreign Minister Paasikivi.⁵⁷ *The London Times* article on November 15, 1939, sarcastically reported, “it is hard to imagine that the Scandinavian states harbor plans that would stop Leningrad’s inhabitants from sleeping soundly in their beds.”⁵⁸

While similar to the mutual assistance pacts “offered” to the other Baltic States, there are several key differences between those pacts and what the Soviets demanded of Finland. Only one base was required within Finnish territory, and the territorial concessions in the Karelian Isthmus coincided with an offer of exchange of territory.⁵⁹ Specifically, the demands included a significant portion of the Karelian Isthmus along with the destruction of its fortifications, several islands in the Gulf of Finland, a thirty-year lease of the port of Hanko, and a portion of the Fisherman’s Peninsula (*Rybachii*).⁶⁰ In exchange, the Soviets offered a portion of Eastern Karelia twice the size of the territory they demanded.⁶¹ Regarding this territory, Eastern Karelia was a large but “useless tract of wilderness.”⁶² While the Soviets pitched this pact as a generous offer, it is vital to understand the geography of the territory they were demanding and the territory they proposed in exchange.

The Finns viewed each of these areas as vital to the defense of Finland; a loss of any would have crippled its defenses. As the “key to Finland,” the Karelian Isthmus, heavily

⁵⁶ Max Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War: An Account of the Russo-Finnish War, 1939-1940*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁵⁸ *The London Times*, November 15, 1939.

⁵⁹ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 101.

⁶⁰ “Soviet Territorial Demands, October 14, 1939,” *Documents on Finnish Soviet Relations* (Helsinki: F. Tilgmann, 1940), 46-49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

forested and full of rugged terrain, guards access to the vital cities of Viipuri and the capital Helsinki.

Understanding its natural

vulnerabilities, shortly after the

signing of the Peace of Tartu in

1920, the Finnish government

started to build a fortification

network that would stretch from the

Gulf of Finland to Lake Ladoga.⁶³

The Main Defense Line, as Finns

called it, would later be named the

Mannerheim Line by foreign war

correspondents.⁶⁴ If an invading

army breached the Mannerheim

Line, its forces would have a direct

path to the capital because of the

tank-friendly terrain. During the mid-1930s, these fortifications underwent modernization efforts

utilizing new bunker technology.⁶⁵

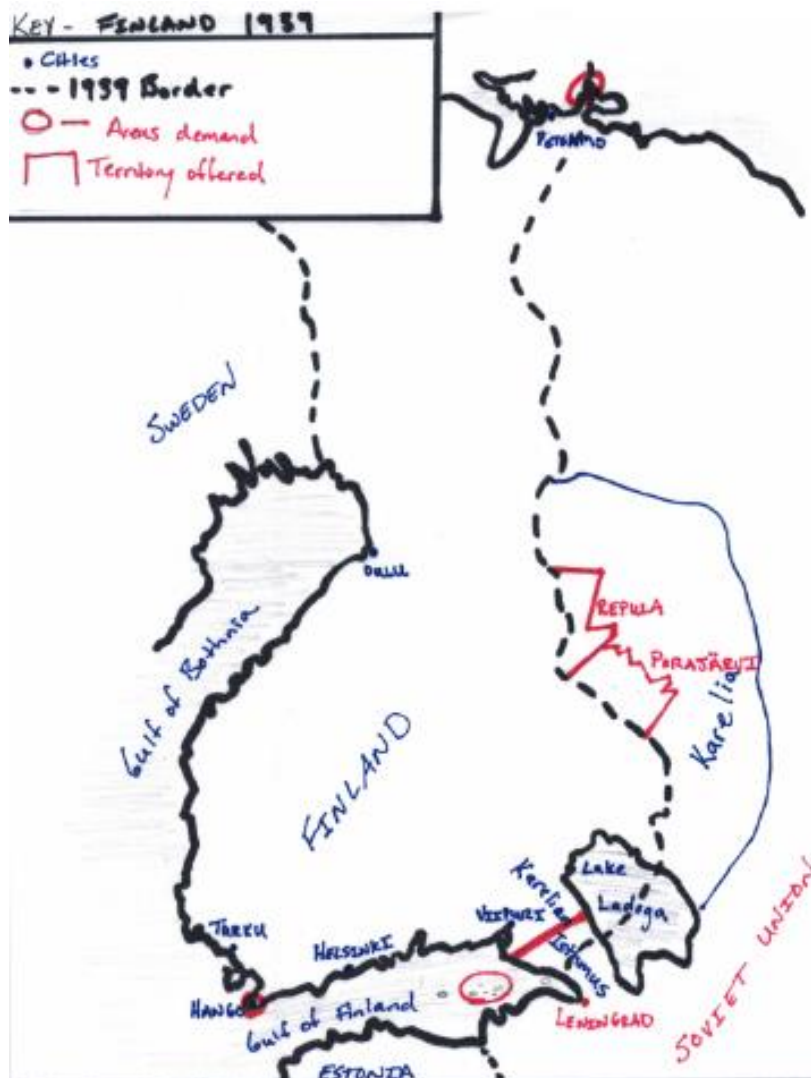


Figure 1: "Soviet Demands Fall 1939." Drawn by Author.

⁶³ Bair Irincheev, *The Mannerheim Line 1920-39: Finnish Fortifications of the Winter War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009), 5,

⁶⁴ Designed to blend into the surroundings, networks of bunkers and obstacles caught many Soviets unaware in kill zones with zeroed-in artillery and machine gun fire. Ibid.

⁶⁵ In 1937, construction began on the Sjs "Millionaire" machine gun bunker, which was sixty meters long and could house twenty to forty soldiers. Ibid., 11.

Other areas demanded by the Soviets were also vital to the defense of Finland. The Port of Hanko, which the Soviets wanted to use as a naval and air base, guards the entrance into the Gulf of Finland and is less than 100 miles from the capital via land. In the far north, the Fisherman's Peninsula dominates Finnish access to the Barents Sea and their vital nickel resources at Petsamo.⁶⁶ Military historians Philip Jowett and Brent Snodgrass observe, "by conceding the areas demanded, Finland would lose the ability to defend herself from future Soviet aggression, which was entirely predictable."⁶⁷

It is important to note that the Finnish government was willing to negotiate, but the Soviets' demands were unrealistic for any national government to accept. The Finnish parliament authorized Tanner and Paasikivi to discuss a small annexation of the Karelian Isthmus and some islands in the Gulf of Finland. However, the Finnish parliament would not allow the lease of territory within Finland to the Soviets under any circumstance.⁶⁸ As Kekkonen explained in the fall of 1939, "It is worth noting that we were ready for compromise to the extent that we felt we could make concessions without ruining our chances of defending ourselves."⁶⁹

However, Finland would not make the same concessions as other nations. If an agreement regarding territorial and border readjustments could not be negotiated, Finland mobilized its regular army and reservists on October 9, 1939. As a show of force to Moscow, the Finnish government authorized this mobilization under the guise of "Extraordinary Reserve Training."⁷⁰ The Red Army had been increasing its own troops on the border. Throughout the month, work increased on the fortifications of the Mannerheim Line, resulting in an increase of

⁶⁶ Vincent J. Esposito, *The West Point Atlas of War: World War II: European Theater* (New York: Tess Press, 1995), 8-9

⁶⁷ Philip Jowett and Brent Snodgrass, *Finland at War 1939-45* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2006), 5.

⁶⁸ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 115.

⁶⁹ Kekkonen, *Neutrality*, 24.

⁷⁰ Vehvilainen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 35-37.

bunkers from 168 to 221.⁷¹ Finnish aviator Ilmari Juutilainen recalled, in the wake of negotiations with Moscow, his squadron moved from Utti to Immola Air Base near Viipuri. This move was necessary to conduct surveillance flights along the Karelian Isthmus. However, they were “careful not to cross over the line close to the international boundary of the Soviet Union.”⁷² The young Stina Katchadourian recalled that even as small children, she and her sister knew “when our parents sat by the radio to listen to the news, ...we had to be quiet.”⁷³ Her family, like many in Finland, increasingly grew concerned about the Soviet Union’s intentions.

Initially, both sides were confident an agreement could be reached; however, negotiations ended on November 9, 1939. Molotov reflected, “Now the civilian officials have tried to solve this matter and failed. Therefore, it is time to hand the matter over to the military.”⁷⁴ Lale Lindfors, who was mobilized, wrote to his wife and family who were evacuated from Helsinki on November 13, 1939, “Well, now Tanner and Paasikivi have packed their bags and returned home. This was, of course, to be expected since the demands of the Russians were so unreasonable. Now we’ll have to stay put here since the Russians are practicing a war of nerves. No problem with nerves here—just let them try.”⁷⁵ Ilmari Juutilainen also recalled a similar sentiment among the aviators in his unit, writing, “Our *esprit de corps* was high despite the fact that we knew that war was imminent, and we would be up against heavy odds.”⁷⁶

After negotiations failed, the Soviets changed methods, and while it is unclear when the decision was made to invade Finland, Stalin likely ordered preparations to start in early

⁷¹ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 5-6.

⁷² Ilmari Juutilainen, *Double Fighter Knight* (Tampere: Apali, 1956), 22.

⁷³ Katchadourian, *The Lapp King’s Daughter*, 25.

⁷⁴ Ensio Siilasvuo, *Talvisto Kronikka* (Gummerus, 1989), 123.

⁷⁵ “Lale Lindfors to Nunni Lindfors, November 13, 1939,” in Katchadourian, *The Lapp King’s Daughter*,

⁷⁶ Juutilainen, *Double Fighter Knight*, 23.

November 1939.⁷⁷ As early as November 13, 1939, the Kremlin began to organize Finnish communists living in exile to lead a puppet government in Finland.⁷⁸ According to Arvo Tuominen, internal discussions concerning a possible invasion of Finland date back to the summer of 1939, and the Soviets had operational plans to invade Finland since the spring of 1936.⁷⁹ In June 1939, Chief of the Soviet General Staff B. M. Shaposhnikov drafted an operational plan to invade Finland. He recommended that the invasion force include at least fifty divisions with considerable artillery support. According to the memoirs of another member of the Soviet General Staff, Kirill Meretskov, Stalin laughed and said, “You’re asking for these huge forces and resources to take of a country like Finland! Such amounts are not needed.”⁸⁰ His plans were discarded, and General Meretskov had to form a plan with approximately sixty percent of the forces Shaposhnikov recommended.⁸¹

As plans were finalized in late November 1939, Chief Marshal of Artillery N. N. Voronov recalled a conversation with General Meretskov. When Meretskov asked Voronov how long the invasion would last, Voronov replied, “I will be happy if everything can be resolved within two to three months.”⁸² Meretskov laughed and ordered Voronov “to base all of your estimates on the assumption the operation will last twelve days.”⁸³ As with any memoirs, it is possible that the Soviet General Staff wanted to place all the blame on Stalin or other members of the staff; however, it is clear that overall, Stalin and his close advisors underestimated Finnish abilities to resist the invasion. Additionally, Andrew Zhdanov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet,

⁷⁷ Nenyé, *Finland at War: The Winter War*, 50.

⁷⁸ Arvo Tuominen, *The Bells of the Kremlin* (Hanover NH University Press of New England, 1983), 315-317.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ K. A. Meretskov, *Na sluzhbe narodu: stranitsy vospominaniya* (Moscow, 1968), 177.

⁸¹ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 43.

⁸² N. N. Voronov, *Na Sluzhbe Voennoi* (Moscow, 1963), 136-137.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

commissioned composer Dmitri Shostakovich to write a piece that would be played in Helsinki by the Red Army marching band to celebrate Stalin's sixtieth birthday on December 21, a mere three weeks after the start of the invasion.⁸⁴

However, it is difficult to ascertain the full extent of Stalin's intentions. Historians have debated whether or not Stalin always desired the complete annexation of Finland or if he would have been satisfied with a more favorable change in the border with Finland for the security of Leningrad.⁸⁵ It is also possible that Stalin himself was not sure of his intentions for Finland. Regardless, as historian Gerhard Weinberg concludes, "the later annexation of the Baltic States, the nature of the Kuusinen government, and the basic thrust of the Nazi-Soviet Pact all point to the intent of eventual annexation."⁸⁶ Lulled into complacency and assured that the Finnish people would offer little resistance by Finnish communist-in-exile and future leader of the puppet Finnish communist government, Otto W. Kuusinen, it is clear that the Soviets expected an easy victory.⁸⁷ As observed by historian Olli Vehviläinen, both the Soviet and Finnish governments entered this war based on incorrect assumptions. The Soviets believed Finland would not offer significant resistance and that the puppet communist government would soon garner much support. Finnish leaders believed that the Soviet Union was bluffing and would not invade. Thus, Vehviläinen notes the irony of "after fearing a Russian attack for two decades, the Finns were taken by surprise when it finally came."⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Dmitri Shostakovich, "Suite on Finnish Themes," 1939.

⁸⁵ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 102.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Aino Kuusinen, *Before and After Stalin: A Personal Account of Soviet Russia from the 1920s to the 1960s* (London, 1974), 230-232.

⁸⁸ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 46.

The Winter War

After negotiations failed, the Soviets staged an inflammatory incident at the border on November 26, 1939.⁸⁹ Molotov claimed that Finnish artillery opened fire on the village of Mainila, killing three soldiers and wounding seven more. As a result of this incident, “the Government of the U.S.S.R., while protesting energetically against what has happened, propose that the Finnish government should, without delay, withdraw their troops...from the frontier.”⁹⁰ This incident on the border, organized by the Soviets to appear that Finland had attacked Soviet troops, was used to justify ending diplomatic relations on November 29, 1939.⁹¹ The next day, the Soviet Union invaded with over 450,000 troops in twenty-three divisions, and they bombed several cities, including Helsinki.⁹² Juutilainen recalled, “on the morning of 30 November 1939... the flight commander came out to inform me that the war had begun. At 9:25 a.m., our entire flight was airborne and speeding toward the town of Viipuri... when we arrived over Viipuri, we could see fires on the ground from the recent attack.”⁹³ This attack was the beginning of what later became known as the Winter War, and as Mannerheim observed, “now everyone understood that Finland’s people were faced with a battle for life.”⁹⁴

Additionally, on December 1, 1939, the Soviets established a new Finnish government led by communist Kuusinen in the city of Terijoki.⁹⁵ This government quickly signed a mutual assistance treaty and agreed to the border changes. Thus, when the Finnish government in Helsinki attempted to negotiate peace, the Soviet leaders did not recognize its legitimacy.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Shirer, *The Challenges of Scandinavia*, 328.

⁹⁰ “Molotov’s note of the alleged shelling of Soviet territory at Mainila village,” *History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*, <https://histdoc.net/pdf/molotov261139.pdf>.

⁹¹ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 101.

⁹² Tapio A. M. Saarelainen, *The White Sniper: Simo Hayha* (Philadelphia, Casemate, 2016), 21.

⁹³ Juutilainen, *Double Fighter Knight*, 23.

⁹⁴ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 321.

⁹⁵ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 117.

⁹⁶ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 101.

Furthermore, the Kuusinen government, instead of gaining support from the Finnish people, further incentivized them that they were fighting for not only their nation but their very way of life. The establishment of this government also confirmed that with the start of war, Stalin's aims changed from the demands of the earlier negotiations to the occupation of Finland.⁹⁷

The Red Army, hampered by Stalin's purges of the 1930s, failed to account for not only the terrain but also the determination of the Finnish defenders.⁹⁸ Beginning in 1937, Stalin had his secret police, the NKVD, purge the "pro-German" and independently-minded generals, resulting in approximately sixty percent of the officers at the division level and above being executed or silenced.⁹⁹ As a result, the experimentation with the new tactics and strategies of combined arms and operations-in-depth ceased.¹⁰⁰ Thus, for the invasion of Finland, the Red Army returned to the classic Russian strategies of relying on a mass onslaught across the entire border of Finland, "terror raids," aerial bombardment, and a Finnish communist uprising.¹⁰¹ The Soviets expected a short victorious campaign.¹⁰² Mannerheim, now the commander-in-chief of the Finnish Armed Forces, later noted in his memoirs that the first attacks of the Red Army could be summarized as "resemble[ing] a badly-directed orchestra with every instrument ignoring the beat.... Moreover, ...they were incapable of moving and fighting successfully in forests.... It was in the forests that the 'white death' prowled: the Finnish partisan in his winter equipment."¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 117.

⁹⁸ USMC Command and Staff College, "The Finnish Campaigns: Failure of Soviet Operational Art in World War II" (Quantico, VA: USMC Command and Staff College, 2015), 6.

⁹⁹ Peter Paret eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 668.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Esposito, *World War II: European Theater*, 8-9.

¹⁰² Voronov, *Na Sluzhbe Voennoi*, 136-137.

¹⁰³ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 368.

The Winter War November 1939-January 1940

During the opening phases of the Winter War, the Soviets launched major offensives along nearly the entire border of Finland with thrusts on the Karelian Isthmus, to the north of Lake Ladoga (East Karelia), in central Finland, and in the north near the Petsamo nickel mines.¹⁰⁴ Meretskov's quickly-formulated invasion plan, in line with Stalin's wishes, involved breaking through the Finnish lines on the frontier and then utilizing the internal road network to drive inland. While attacking across the entire border, the Soviets dedicated the largest segment of their forces to the Karelian Isthmus. Under the command of Vsevolod F. Yakovlev, the Soviet Seventh Army was to take the isthmus and capture Viipuri before attacking north towards the city of Lahti and then driving on to Helsinki.¹⁰⁵ However, Soviet intelligence had failed to gather much information on the Mannerheim Line.¹⁰⁶ Even without encountering resistance, the projected timeline of three weeks for reaching these objectives was unrealistic.

¹⁰⁴ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 102.

¹⁰⁵The Soviet Seventh Army comprised nine infantry divisions and four armored brigades. Nemye, *Finland at War: The Winter War*, 55-56; 63.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

Commanded by Ivan Khabarov, the Soviet Eighth Army attacked north of Lake Ladoga, and the Soviet Ninth Army under Michael P. Duhanov attempted to drive toward Kajaania with

the goal of capturing Oulu on the western coast of the Gulf of Bothnia. If

Duhanov's army could take the city, Finland would be cut in half.¹⁰⁷

The final Soviet thrust, with the Fourteenth Army,

was aimed at the Petsamo region in the north, which would not only provide it

with access to the vital nickel mines, but it would also prevent any Western aid from reaching

Finland.¹⁰⁸ They were

facing a regular Finnish Army that

only totaled 33,000 in nine

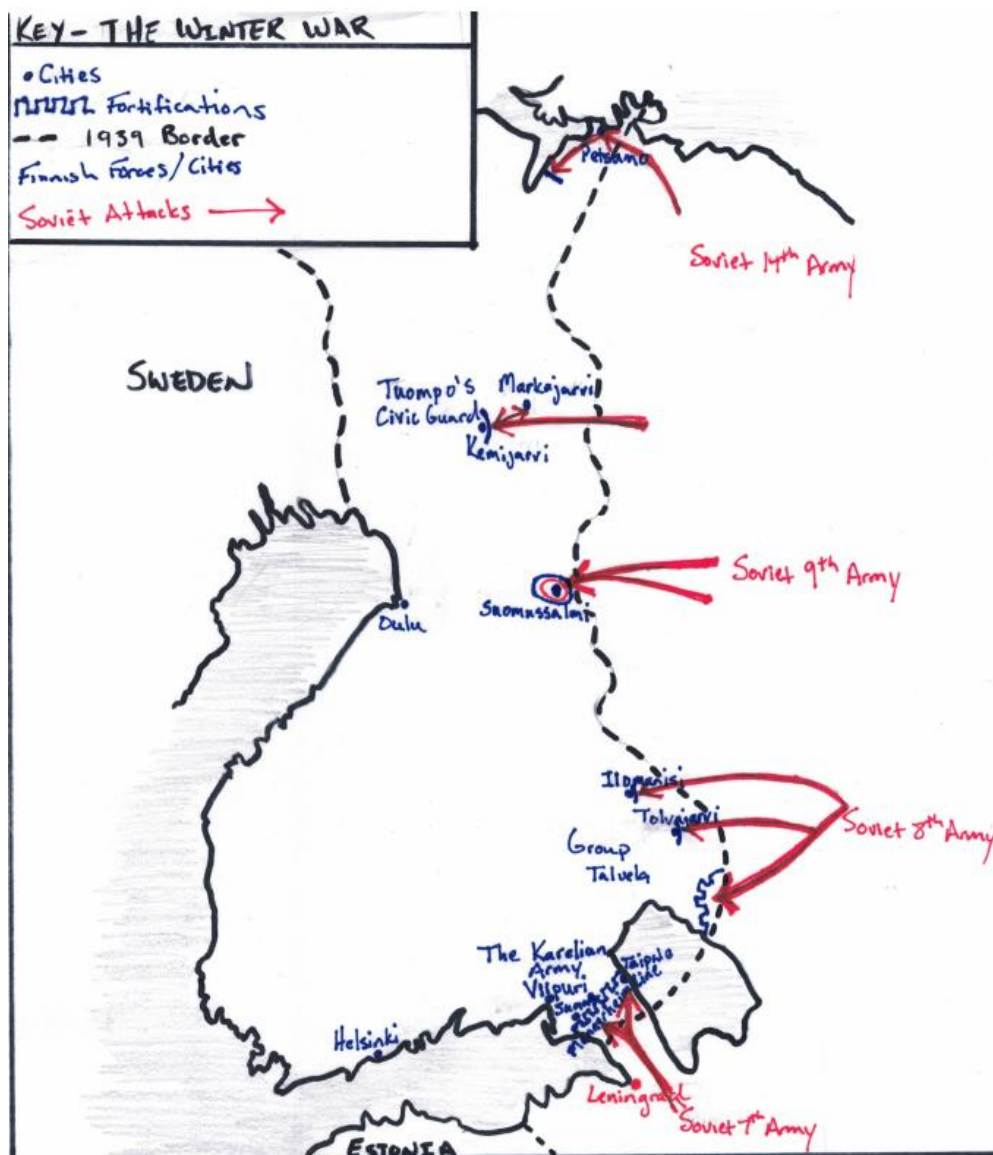


Figure 2: "The Winter War:" Drawn by Author.

¹⁰⁷ The Soviet Eighth Army comprised five infantry divisions and one light armored brigade. Duhanov's forces contained four infantry divisions, soon to be reinforced by the 44th Rifle Division. Nénye, *Finland at War*, 56.

¹⁰⁸ Soviet forces in the North were under the command of Valerian A. Frolov, and he had two infantry divisions and a mountain division. *Ibid.*

divisions and, when fully mobilized, numbered 265,000.¹⁰⁹ By 1939 what few tanks it had, along with its artillery, were hopelessly obsolete.¹¹⁰

The Finns also had a shortage of ammunition, both small arms and artillery, resulting in them perfecting an improvised weapon—the infamous Molotov Cocktail. While it was first used during the Spanish Civil War, it was the Finns who both perfected its use and gave the improvised device its name.¹¹¹ Filled with a lethal mixture, devised by the National State Liquor Board, the Molotov Cocktail, composed of a glass bottle, alcohol, resin, kerosene, and tar, proved an effective, cost-efficient weapon against Soviet tanks.¹¹² Two weapon platforms aided the Finns: the Suomi m/1931 submachine gun, which was accurate at a range of over 300 yards, and the Lahti 20mm anti-tank rifle.¹¹³ However, ultimately, as military historians, Peter Abbott and Nigel Thomas observe, “the Finns were only superior in warm winter clothing and their unrivaled fighting spirit.”¹¹⁴

To counter the Soviet threat, Mannerheim concentrated his forces on the isthmus and above Lake Ladoga, where the terrain meant that the Finns would have to face the Soviets conventionally, whereas the northern regions, less populated and heavily forested, were well suited for guerrilla warfare tactics. The Karelian Army, under the leadership of Lt. General Hugo Österman defended the Mannerheim Line using fighting withdrawals by the reservist and border guard of the Finnish 11th Division during the opening days.¹¹⁵ They held for seven days,

¹⁰⁹ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War 1939-1945*, 18.

¹¹⁰ The Finns possessed a few Vickers E Models and Renaults FT-17s. Peter Abbott and Nigel Thomas, *Germany's Eastern Front Allies, 1941-45* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing 2004), 9.

¹¹¹ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2006), 51.

¹¹² John Hughes-Wilson, “Snow and Slaughter at Suomussalmi,” *Military History* 22, no. 10 (January/February 2006): 49.

¹¹³ Chris Bishop, *Weapons of World War II: A Comprehensive Guide to Weapons Systems, Including Tanks, Small Arms, Warplanes, Artillery, Ships, and Submarines* (London, Amber Books, 2018), 266.

¹¹⁴ Abbott and Thomas, *Germany's Eastern Front Allies*, 9.

¹¹⁵ Nénye, *Finland at War: The Winter War*, 63.

buying precious time for more Finnish forces to deploy along the Mannerheim Line and for civilians to be evacuated. During the opening week, Österman's force of approximately 28,000 infantrymen successfully repelled Soviet forces numbering 200,000 men and 1,400 tanks.¹¹⁶ Finnish soldier Wolf Halsti, who participated in the delaying action, reflected, "If our positions were not surrounded on every occasion due to lack of troops, we would still be there... However, with their massed numbers, the Russians poured through and around the gaps in our lines."¹¹⁷ Continually pressured by Stalin and other Soviet leaders, the Russians often attacked with little to no reconnaissance resulting in thousands of soldiers' deaths by expertly camouflaged Finnish forces. M. I. Lukinov, whose regiment was tasked with breaking the Mannerheim Line, criticized his superior's tactics writing, "they chose to throw people chest first into the machine-gun and artillery fire of pillboxes, in bright sunny days with clear views."¹¹⁸

On the Soviet right of the isthmus, they had more initial success. However, these advances incurred heavy casualties, especially as the Soviets attempted to cross the Taipale River and attack the village on December 6, 1939. The Finnish commander, Colonel Viljo Kauppila, had his artillery zeroed in, devastating the Soviet advance and earning his battery the nickname the "Angel of Taipale."¹¹⁹ Soviet numbers eventually prevailed and established a beachhead on the Koukkuniemi Peninsula by December 12, 1939. This beachhead remained precarious, and eventually, the Battle of Taipale ended with the Soviets retreating across the river on December 28.¹²⁰ With each attack, the Karelian Isthmus was transformed into a hellscape with charred and burning tank hulls amongst the dead, frozen Soviet soldiers. One Finnish soldier recalled, "I

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 65.

¹¹⁷ Wolf H. Halsti, *Talvisota 1939-1940*, (Helsinki: 1957).

¹¹⁸ M. I. Lukinov, "Notes on the Polish Campaign (1939) and the War with Finland (1939-1940)," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 14, no. 3 (September 2001): 147.

¹¹⁹ Nenyé, *Finland at War: The Winter War*, 67.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 76.

never knew a tank could burn for quite that long.”¹²¹ Each advance proved costly in manpower and time for the Soviets because, as Jason Lavery observes, “what they [the Finns] lacked in manpower and material, they compensated for with strategic preparedness and tactical ingenuity.”¹²²

The Soviets advanced above Lake Ladoga, but it was in this region that Finnish forces launched their first successful counterattack at Tolvajärvi, followed by Alajärvi beginning December 12 and ending December 23, 1939. In the process, Finnish forces, under Colonel Paavo Talevela, nearly obliterated two Soviet divisions and captured valuable equipment.¹²³ Mannerheim recalled, in late December 1939, he “had to make some of the weightiest and most important decisions of the Winter War. Everything pointed to our main position on the isthmus soon becoming the object of a general attack...but the enemy’s unexpectedly rapid advance on this front [against the Finnish Army Group Talvela] had compelled me to alter my plans. Instead, I directed a large part of my meagre reserves eastwards to Tolvajärvi, Khumo, and Suomussalmi.”¹²⁴ The risk paid off, and the later Soviet counterattacks failed. Additionally, the Finnish infantry stopped the Soviet advance on Ilomantsi.¹²⁵

Farther north, Finnish General Wilijo Tuompo utilizing his force of mostly Civic Guard members and taking advantage of the terrain, defeated the Soviet 122nd Division’s advance at Kemijärvi. As the division retreated, it soon collided with its reserve force, the 88th Division, and the renewed and reinforced attack could not reach beyond the town of Markajärvi.¹²⁶ The

¹²¹ An interview shown for a documentary on Russian television in 2002 quoted in Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 51.

¹²² Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 118.

¹²³ Talevela’s men captured fifty-nine tanks, thirty-one artillery pieces, 220 machine guns, and hundreds of other small arms. Eloise Engle and Lauri Paananen, *The Winter War: The Soviet Attack on Finland 1939-1940* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1973), 92.

¹²⁴ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 332.

¹²⁵ Esposito, *World War II: The European Theater*, 8-9.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

world watched in amazement as a nation of fewer than four million people halted most of the advances of a nation of nearly 180 million.¹²⁷

Western nations reacted with genuine concern for Finland. In an official statement, President Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke of the “profound shock” of the Soviet invasion of Finland. Despite efforts utilizing peaceful methods, “one power has chosen to resort to force of arms.... [the United States] condemn[s] this new resort to military force as the arbiter of international differences.”¹²⁸ On January 20, 1940, Winston Churchill proclaimed to the world, “Only Finland—superb, nay, sublime...Finland shows what free men can do. The service rendered by Finland to mankind is magnificent.... If the light of freedom which still burns so brightly in the frozen North should be finally quenched, it might well herald a return to the Dark Ages.”¹²⁹ Also demonstrating a flare for the dramatic, a reporter for the *New York Times* wrote in November 1939, “in the smoking ruins of the damage wrought in Finland lies what remained of the world’s respect for the government of Russia.”¹³⁰ However, little of this concern and condemnation of Soviet actions resulted in substantial aid to thwart the Soviet Army.

On December 5, 1939, the Finnish government appealed to the League of Nations to respond to the invasion by another member.¹³¹ Considering that the “Soviet Union has been guilty against Finland in violation not only of the principles of the League of Nations but also of the most elementary dictates of justice and humanity. This violation, which is all the more

¹²⁷ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 211.

¹²⁸ “Franklin D. Roosevelt: Statement on the Conflict Between Russia and Finland, December 1, 1939,” The American Presidency Project: UC Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-conflict-between-russia-and-finland>.

¹²⁹ “Winston Churchill January 20, 1940, Broadcast, London,” <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour-the-war-situation-house-of-many-mansions/>.

¹³⁰ *New York Times*, November 30, 1939.

¹³¹ Item C-373-M-286-1939-VII_EN - APPEAL BY THE FINNISH GOVERNMENT. TELEGRAM FROM THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT, December 5, 1939,” *United Nations Library and Archives*, Geneva, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/appeal-by-the-finnish-government-telegram-from-the-argentine-government>.

odious in view of the enormous difference in material forces, justifies the immediate expulsion of the Soviet Union from the League.”¹³² The League of Nations condemned the Soviet Union and expelled it from the organization on December 14, 1939.¹³³ However, this had little effect on the war.

Fondly recalling their aid during the Finnish Civil War two decades prior, many Finnish leaders appealed to Germany. However, Germany did not want to violate the Treaty of Non-Aggression. In a memorandum to the German minister in Finland dated October 9, 1939, State Secretary Ernst von Weizsaecker stated the official position of Germany as such that while it desired to maintain some economic ties, because of the treaty, Germany “would hardly be in a position, in any case, to intervene in the Russian-Finnish conversations.”¹³⁴ Later after the war started, Weizsaecker defended the Soviet Union writing the “natural requirement of Russia for increased security of Leningrad and the entrance to the Gulf of Finland” made their invasion understandable.¹³⁵ He also chastised Finland “in spite of the debt of gratitude which she owed to Germany for the latter’s help in 1918, has never come out for German interests,” and he criticized the “platonic sympathy of England” shown by Foreign Minister Holsti in particular.¹³⁶ Thus, Finland did not receive any aid from Germany during the Winter War, and the Germans also stopped the shipment of German weapons from Italy.¹³⁷

Most of the serious discussions of aid involved the British and the French. They saw aid to Finland as a way to thwart Nazi aggression by hurting its ally, the Soviet Union, and by

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ “Document Pp 274/1/388-389 - 30 November 1939,” *United Nations Library and Archives*, Geneva, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/30-november-1939>.

¹³⁴ “The State Secretary in the German Foreign Office to the German Minister in Finland, October 9, 1939,” *Yale Law School: The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*.

¹³⁵ “The State Secretary in the German Foreign Office to the German Missions Abroad, December 2, 1939,” *Yale Law School: The Avalon Project documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 103.

cutting it off from its supply of iron ore from Swedish mines.¹³⁸ An operation was postulated for mid-March 1940, with a joint Anglo-French force of 150,000 landing at Narvik, Norway. This force would then march through Norway and Sweden and reinforce Finnish troops.¹³⁹ However, many flaws with this operation ensured it would never reach beyond the planning phase. The British and French never secured transit rights through both Norway and Sweden, and the Finns surrendered before it could be launched. Sweden denied the request for transit rights on March 3, 1940, and although the French proposed a “semi-peaceable invasion” of Norway and Sweden, by then, the Finnish government had signed the Treaty of Moscow.¹⁴⁰

Sweden provided the most substantial aid. However, the aid and troops came through private channels independent of the official Swedish government. The Swedish government was unwilling to risk a full-scale war with either Germany or the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, over 8,000 Swedes volunteered and joined the Finnish Army, and a separate unit, the Flight Regiment 19, with twenty-five aircraft, joined the Finnish Air Force.¹⁴¹ Volunteers also came from other nations such as Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, the United States, and Britain.¹⁴² However, the unofficial nature of these volunteers and their small numbers, compared to the growing number of Soviet troops transferred to Finland, did little to affect the eventual outcome of the war. Finland could not hope to win without significant foreign aid.

Nevertheless, throughout the early phase of the war, many Finns remained optimistic. Lale Lindfors wrote back home, “the mood here is tops, and Ivanoffs [the Russians] have gotten

¹³⁸ Ibid., 104.

¹³⁹ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 120

¹⁴⁰ Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 24.

¹⁴¹ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 22.

¹⁴² Norway (727), Denmark (1,000 under Col V. Tretow-Loof), Estonia (unknown number), Hungary (346), United States (350), the Finnish American Legion of two companies arrived at the front March 13, 1940), Britain (Only 13 arrived in time to fight, the remaining 214 arrived a week after the war was over), and 150 volunteered from Italy with one Italian pilot killed in action. Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 22.

what they deserve.... The quality of our troops is in all respects superior and well makes up for what we lack in numbers.”¹⁴³ The morale remained positive after one of the most important battles of the Winter War, which occurred from mid-December 1939 to January 1940, near Suomussalmi in central Finland. Had the Soviets successfully reached the larger city of Oulu, near the coast on the Gulf of Bothnia, they would have been able to effectively cut Finland in half, dividing the forces in the North from those in the South. The Soviet 163rd Division, followed by the 44th Rifle Division, advanced into central Finland at the start of the war.

Like most other Soviet divisions, the 163rd and the 44th were unprepared for Arctic warfare, and the terrain was unsuited for large-scale operations.¹⁴⁴ The Soviets were also hampered by weather, with the woods and roads buried in about four feet of snow, the temperature often dropping to negative forty degrees Fahrenheit, frequent blizzards, and limited hours of daylight. Stina Katchadourian, who spent most of the war with her mother near Petsamo, recalled that “the winter of 1939 was extraordinarily cold.... I remember thinking it was a natural thing for one’s breath to show up as a white cloud indoors.”¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the heavily forested central and northern Finland limited the Russian forces to the narrow roads. Throughout their advance on narrow Finnish roads, Soviet troops were continually harassed by local Civic Guard units that not only knew the territory but also were well camouflaged and maneuverable in their white overalls and on their skis.¹⁴⁶ The Finns had perfected the tactic they deemed *motti*. Historian Anthony Clayton explains, “the Finns called such an encircled Red Army column a *motti*, a Finnish word referring to a cubic meter cut of wood that could be

¹⁴³ “Lale Lindfors to Nunni Lindfors, December 1939,” in Katchadourian, *The Lapp King’s Daughter*, 33.

¹⁴⁴ Esposito, *World War II: The European Theater*, 10-11.

¹⁴⁵ Katchadourian, *The Lapp King’s Daughter*, 31.

¹⁴⁶ Anthony Clayton, *Warfare in the Woods and Forests* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 98.

chipped at and eventually hacked to pieces.”¹⁴⁷ The unfortunate Soviet 163rd and 44th Divisions were destroyed in this piecemeal fashion, further establishing the image of the Finnish forces as the “White Death.”

Before the Soviet 163rd could be reinforced, the Finnish forces, led by Colonel Hjalmar F. Siilasvuo, attacked on December 11, 1939, isolating the long column into smaller groups and destroying the Russians who were spread out across twelve miles of road.¹⁴⁸ Then on December 14, 1939, the Finns, only around 350 men, launched attacks on the approaching 44th Division, isolating them on the frozen lakes as they attempted to flank the now bottlenecked road into Suomussalmi.¹⁴⁹ Over the following days, as Colonel John Hughes-Wilson describes, “in a steady series of counterattacks in the north, Finnish forces sliced the remnants of the 163rd Division to ribbons, gradually cutting the surviving units into ever-smaller pockets. Cold beyond belief, low on ammunition, and with no food, and nowhere to go but the white wilderness of the Arctic forests... [the Soviet divisions] disintegrated...disappearing never to be seen again.”¹⁵⁰ The *motti* tactic nearly annihilated both divisions, and while the Soviets had begun the battle with a three-to-one numerical advantage, they lost over 27,500 dead, compared to the Finns 900 killed and 1,770 wounded.¹⁵¹ Unfortunately for the Finns, this defeat, along with others, led the Soviets to reevaluate their strategy and, with a new general, focus all their offensives on the vital Karelian Isthmus.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 99.

¹⁴⁸ Hughes-Wilson, “Snow and Slaughter,” 51.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 51-52.

¹⁵¹ Esposito, *World War II: The European Theater*, 10-11.

¹⁵² Engle and Paananen, *The Winter War*, 120.

The Winter War February 1940-March 1940

On January 7, 1940, Stalin appointed Semyon Timoshenko to command the Finnish campaign, and many of the other Soviet generals were either replaced, demoted, or executed.¹⁵³ After the defeat at Suomussalmi and others, Timoshenko temporarily halted all offensives to reorganize and construct a new strategy.¹⁵⁴ During this time, negotiations began through the intermediary of Swedish diplomats in Stockholm. Paasikivi noted a distinct shift in Soviet negotiation strategy at the end of January 1940 before the February Offensive.¹⁵⁵ It is unclear why Stalin began negotiations through Sweden after being unwilling to recognize the Finnish government. However, this shift was likely due to several factors, such as Soviet prestige, pressure from the West, and the distraction Finland was becoming, leaving the Soviet Union vulnerable elsewhere.¹⁵⁶ Historian Gerhard Weinberg observes that Stalin believed that “as for Finland’s fate, that could be decided later.”¹⁵⁷

After shifting and increasing the number of troops, Timoshenko launched an all-out offensive with approximately 600,000 troops focused solely on the Karelian Isthmus on February 1, 1940.¹⁵⁸ Launching multiple attacks daily and supported by heavy artillery, firing a reported 300,000 shells per day, thirteen Soviet divisions attacked across the narrow front between Lake Kuolema and Lake Muola on the Karelian Isthmus.¹⁵⁹ Despite what Soviet propaganda and even Finnish propaganda released, the Mannerheim Line was not comparable to the Maginot Line. The weakest point of the defenses was near the town of Summa on the western side of the

¹⁵³ Ibid., 121.

¹⁵⁴ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 7.

¹⁵⁵ J.K. Paasikivi, *Paasikivi Diary: Meine Moskauer Mission 1939-1941* (Haburg: Holstein, 1966), 163

¹⁵⁶ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 105-106.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Robert M. Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 82.

¹⁵⁹ This was the heaviest bombardment since the German shelling of Verdun in World War I. Engle and Paananen, *The Winter War*, 122; and Esposito, *World War II: The European Theater*, 10.

Karelian Isthmus.¹⁶⁰ The Mannerheim Line was breached on February 13, 1940, and two days later, Mannerheim ordered a retreat to the Intermediary Line.¹⁶¹ The stubborn Finnish resistance continued, but while the Soviets were being reinforced with fresh units, foreign aid for the Finns seemed less likely to come, let alone stem the tide of Soviet offensives. As Robert M. Citino observes, “although Soviet losses were stupendous, the Finns were no match for such numbers.”¹⁶² On February 23, 1940, the Finnish government received Soviet conditions for peace that mostly echoed their original demands from the fall 1939, and while harsh, these demands would enable Finland to remain independent.¹⁶³ As the Finnish Parliament debated, the situation on the front lines rapidly deteriorated.

By March 1, 1940, Finnish forces were defending the outskirts of Viipuri.¹⁶⁴ The desperate defense continued, but as Catherine Merridale observes, “sheer numbers—of men and heavy guns—told in the Soviets’ favor in the end.”¹⁶⁵ The city fell on March 8 as the Finnish delegation left for Moscow. On March 12, 1940, the Finnish government accepted the treaty’s terms, and the next day they signed the Peace of Moscow.¹⁶⁶ The Winter War had ended, and in his farewell message to his soldiers, Mannerheim reflected:

Peace has been concluded between our country and the Soviet Union, an exacting peace which has ceded to Soviet Russia nearly every battlefield on which you have shed your blood on behalf of everything we hold dear and sacred.... You were forced into a struggle in which you have done great deeds, deeds that will shine for centuries in the pages of history. More than fifteen thousand of you who took the field will never again see your homes, ... But you have also dealt hard blows, and if two hundred thousand of our enemies now lie on the snowdrifts, gazing with broken eyes at our starry sky, the fault is not yours.... Soldiers: I have fought on many battlefields, but never have I seen your like as warriors... After sixteen weeks of bloody battle...our Army still stands unconquered

¹⁶⁰ Nenyé, *Finland at War: The Winter War*, 58-59.

¹⁶¹ Irincheev, *The Mannerheim Line*, 8.

¹⁶² Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm*, 82.

¹⁶³ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 122.

¹⁶⁴ Esposito, *World War II: The European Theater*, 10-11.

¹⁶⁵ Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 50.

¹⁶⁶ “The Moscow Peace Treaty of March 12, 1940,” *The History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/1940_e.htm.

...nor has our home front, where countless air-raids have spread death and terror among women and children, ever wavered. Burned cities and ruined villages far behind the front ...are the visible proofs of the nation's sufferings during the past months.... We are proudly conscious of the historic duty which we shall continue to fulfill; the defense of that Western civilization which has been our heritage for centuries, but we know also that we have paid to the very last penny any debt we may have owed the West.¹⁶⁷

The Impact of the Winter War

The failure of their tenacious defense of their country during the Winter War devastated the people and nearly destroyed the economy. U.S. Army historian Earl Ziemke observes the Winter War left "Finland independent but teetering on the brink of disaster."¹⁶⁸ Finland suffered 24,918 killed and 43,557 wounded, which ravaged a nation with a population under four million.¹⁶⁹ If the United States, with its 1940 population of 130 million, had suffered the same proportion of casualties, 2.6 million Americans would have died in 105 days.¹⁷⁰ No home in Finland was left untouched by the war. Beyond the loss of life, Finland had to cede 16,000 square miles, accounting for ten percent of their territory, which produced 420,000 refugees who had to move within ten days of the signing of the treaty in "one of the most frenzied migrations in history."¹⁷¹ Finnish diplomat Max Jakobson observed, "the exodus of the Karelians, a civilian Dunkirk, was a human tragedy as vast as had been the war itself. By a stroke of Molotov's pen, every eight inhabitants of Finland had been deprived of home and livelihood."¹⁷² Tanner reacted to the treaty by stating, "Peace has been restored, but what kind of peace? Henceforth our country will continue to live as a mutilated nation."¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷"The Commander-in-Chief's Order of the Day March 14, 1940. Field Marshal C.G.E. Mannerheim," *The History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, <https://histdoc.net/pdf/Mheim1940-03-14.pdf>.

¹⁶⁸ Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 113.

¹⁶⁹ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 284.

¹⁷⁰ Engle and Paananen, *The Winter War*, 143.

¹⁷¹ Gordon F. Sander, *The Hundred Day Winter War: Finland's Gallant Stand Against the Soviet Army* (Lawrence, KS: University of Press of Kansas, 2013), 333.

¹⁷² Max Jakobson, *Finland Survived: An Account of the Finnish-Soviet Winter War 1939-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 124.

¹⁷³ Engle and Paananen, *The Winter War*, 142.

After the war, Finland emerged as a more united nation than when the war began. Two of the most formative events in crafting a Finnish national identity were the Finnish Civil War of 1918 and the Winter War. Whereas the Civil War ended with a divided Finland with many of the working class sympathetic to communism and finding refuge in Russia, the Winter War, “the last vestiges of widespread pro-communist sympathies were finally shred.”¹⁷⁴ The Soviets placed the surviving Finnish communists from the Stalinist purges of 1937 led by Otto Kuusinen as the government of Finland.¹⁷⁵ However, predicated on a quick Soviet victory, the Kuusinen government failed to not only garner support but served as an incentive to motivate the Finnish people, who now viewed this war as not territorial or border concessions but rather as a fight for their independence again.¹⁷⁶ Kuusinen’s reputation never recovered, and the Soviets, not wanting to antagonize the Finns again, refused to allow him back into Finland or advise them regarding Finnish affairs.¹⁷⁷ Stina Katchadorian later reflected on her family’s experiences, “the war helped wipe away the lingering traces of class hatred after the Civil War, and it united the Finns as never before.”¹⁷⁸ United in the image of white-clothed soldiers on skies armed with their Suomi M31s and throwing Molotov Cocktails, the Winter War transformed the national identity of Finland. As Jason Lavery notes, this war provided a “collective frame of reference for the future” and changed how Finns viewed themselves in relation to the West.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, as Kimmo Rentola observes, “The Winter War was similar to the Civil War of 1918 also in the sense that the country’s subsequent history can be seen as a consequence of

¹⁷⁴ Neny, *Finland at War: The Winter War*, 61.

¹⁷⁵ Stalin ordered the execution of many foreign communists who had sought refuge in the Soviet Union. During the “Great Terror,” 9,078 Finnish communists were executed. Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 104.

¹⁷⁶ Kimmo Rentola, “The Finnish Communist and the Winter War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 4 (October 1998): 591, 600.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Katchadorian, *The Lapp King’s Daughter*, 32.

¹⁷⁹ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 123,

it.”¹⁸⁰ Echoed in Mannerheim’s farewell order of the day, many Finns were disillusioned with the nations of the West and the lack of aid in the face of a clear act of aggression. Thus, the Winter War and the following “war years formed Finland’s national identity for decades to come.”¹⁸¹

When the newly independent Finland emerged in the post-World War I era, its leaders ventured to navigate in an increasingly polarized Europe. They attempted various means of security to keep the Soviet Union at bay. Grounded in its recent history, Finland confronted the demands of the Soviets in the fall of 1939. They did not have any guarantees that the Soviets would honor their promises and that they would not share a similar fate with other Baltic states. Because the Finns viewed Russia as becoming increasingly unpredictable and “the land of red murk,” relations between the two nations were tense.¹⁸² Vehviläinen concludes, “Finland became involved in a war because it refused to submit to the position Germany and the Soviet Union had agreed on for it on 23 August 1939.”¹⁸³ Although Stalin “thought that all he had to do was fire a few shots and the Finns would surrender,” the Finnish Army held the Soviet onslaught for 105 days.¹⁸⁴ Thus, they gained lasting admiration from the world but faced the realities of bordering the Soviet Union with their defenses now compromised and a Western world looking increasingly unable to stop the actions of aggressors like the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. While costly for the Soviet Union, whose official casualty figures have never been released, Molotov and others believed this war was valuable. In reality, the Soviets only gained “a bitter neighbor anxious about its own security and thirsty for retribution.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Retola, “The Finnish Communist and the Winter War,” 606.

¹⁸¹ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 113.

¹⁸² Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 22.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* 45.

¹⁸⁴ Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston, 1970), 151.

¹⁸⁵ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 73.

CHAPTER THREE:
AN INCREASINGLY TANGLED KNOT: THE ROAD TO CO-BELLIGERENCY
MARCH 1940-JUNE 1941

Finnish Colonel Y. A. Jarvinen reflected on his experiences, “[The Winter War] perhaps should have compensated us better for our efforts and sacrifices. But being a straightforward people and being used to the thought that it is more important to fight well than to win, the loser is proud of his brave battle. If war and peace could be decided by the front-line soldier, wars would be few and far between, and peace would be just. He knows the horrors of war.”¹

Unfortunately for the Finns and people of every nation involved in World War II, war and peace were not decided by the frontline soldier. Now impeded by the restraints and territorial loss inflicted by the Treaty of Moscow, Finnish leaders believed they had extremely limited options moving forward. Furthermore, Finland struggled to recover from the devastation of the Winter War. Concurrently, by the summer of 1940, Nazi Germany had conquered most of Western Europe and now appeared close to defeating Great Britain. In the eyes of many Finns, Germany emerged as the only viable counterbalance to the Soviet Union. Beginning with economic treaties followed by transit rights in exchange for weapons shipments, Finland and Germany became increasingly intertwined. Finland, strongly influenced by its troubled relationship with the Soviet Union and the improbability of an Allied victory, chose to enter a co-belligerency with Nazi Germany to pursue its own goals and to protect its citizens from Russians rather than promote the spread of Nazi ideology.

As diplomatic historian Franklin Scott observes, “The Finns had no historic basis for thinking that the treaty of March 1940 would establish eternal peace between them and the

¹ Colonel Y.A. Jarvinen, interview by Eliose Engle and Lauri Paananen, *The Winter War: The Soviet Attack on Finland, 1939-1940* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1973), 149.

Russians.”² Limited by the restraints of the peace treaty and continually harassed by the Soviets, Finnish leaders attempted to navigate between Stalin and Hitler with their conflicting and competing demands for Finnish resources and favor. Finnish author Lauri Paananen and his wife, Eloise Engle, reflect on the period following the Winter War as characterized by a Finnish “undisguised hatred of the Soviet Union... matched by an almost pathological Russian suspicion of Finland.”³ For Finnish leaders, this resulted in animosity, “g[etting] the better of reason and judgment.”⁴ Finnish distrust and Soviet paranoia directly contributed to the increasing German-Finnish cooperation and eventual collaboration. As William L. Shirer noted, “the course of events—as distinguished from the motives—which led Finland to join Nazi Germany in the attack on Russia in June 1941, is still shrouded in a certain haze.”⁵ Despite this haze, the Finnish leaders clearly had foreknowledge of the planned invasion, coordinated their involvement, and sent the Finnish Army to participate in German operations on the Eastern Front.⁶

Germany’s Evolving Approach to Finland

Germany and Finland enjoyed “traditionally good and friendly relations” throughout their respective histories.⁷ Germany’s aid during the Finnish Civil War and support for an independent Finland left lasting impressions on Finnish leaders and citizens. Various German foreign ministers continually reminded Finnish officials of that fact. After the German loss in the Great War, the Finnish government quickly reoriented itself to align with the victorious Allies, but relations remained cordial between Finland and Germany. Still, as the 1930s

² Franklin Scott, *The United States and Scandinavia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 239.

³ Engle and Pananen, *The Winter War*, 147.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 335.

⁶ Vesa Nemye, Peter Munter and Toni Wirtanen, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars, 1941-1945*, (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2016), 35.

⁷ “The State Secretary in the German Foreign Office to the German Minister in Finland, October 9, 1939,” *Yale Law School: The Avalon Project, Document in Law, History, and Diplomacy*.

progressed, German officials, such as the ambassador to Finland, Wipert von Blücher, expressed concern over the Petsamo Nickel Mines and Finnish Foreign Minister Eino Holsti's pro-British leanings.⁸ During a meeting between German Foreign Minister Frieiherr von Neurath and Holsti on October 23, 1937, Neurath reminded Holsti that "Finnish foreign policy was...decisively influenced by her geopolitical position.... If Finland should ever again be in a situation where she had to defend her independence, she would receive hardly any assistance worth mentioning from the states outside the Baltic area."⁹ Neurath also asserted his advice that "it was in Finland's own interest to cultivate good relations with the country that not only was well disposed towards her, but that also had a certain interest in the maintenance of her independence."¹⁰ Blücher confidently reported his own assessment in August 1938 of what Finland's position would be in the case of an outbreak of war, writing:

In answering the question, it will not help much to say that Finland is remaining neutral.... One must assume, rather, that the concept of neutrality is very elastic and that, besides, in case of a European war, Finland's attitude will be determined by stronger forces [than] a concept of international law and is interpret[ed] as conditioned by the times.... The Finnish-Russian border contains a particular element of danger.... If Russia should be the first power to occupy Finnish territory in such a war, Finland would automatically be led over to the German side...so long as Finnish territory is respected by both belligerents, Finland would do everything to stay out of the conflict. Moreover, the sympathies of the Finnish military, the Finnish Defense Corps, and Finnish Rightest circles would be on the German side.¹¹

Blücher correctly predicted the improbability that Finland would be able to maintain its neutrality if war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union. However, Finland continued to attempt to maintain that neutrality in May 1939, when Germany proposed a non-aggression

⁸ "Minister Blucher to Senior Counselor Grundherr, October 15, 1937," *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945 Series D Volume V Poland, The Balkans, Latin America, and the Smaller Powers, 1937-1939* (United States Department of State, Washington DC: United States Printing Office, 1953), 533-535.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "The Minister in Finland to the Foreign Ministry, Helsinki August 1, 1938, *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945 Series D Volume V*, 589-593.

pact. Finland rejected it because it violated their now-defined strict Nordic policy of neutrality.¹² Concurrently, Stalin's appointment of Vyacheslav Molotov signaled to the German foreign ministry that the Soviets would be willing to negotiate some agreement.¹³ The former minister, Maxim Litvinov, advocated for collective security and mutual assistance treaties with France and England against Germany.¹⁴ Both nations were unwilling to commit to spheres of influence or allow transit rights through Poland if Germany attacked. However, Germany's expansionist goals for Eastern and Western Europe made them more willing to negotiate with the Soviets.¹⁵ Thus, "Germany's need for a free hand in Poland and, subsequently, the West had sealed Finland's fate."¹⁶

Their abidance to the Treaty of Non-Aggression signed with the Soviet Union shaped Germany's policy towards Finland preceding and during the Winter War. Germany also encouraged negotiations near the war's end because they did not want to jeopardize their trade with Sweden by embroiling the entire region in war and creating another theater of operations.¹⁷ Hitler was buying time and had his focus turned on Western Europe; therefore, he did not want to antagonize Stalin by interfering in any way during the Winter War.¹⁸

However, with the Winter War's conclusion, Hitler began to reevaluate his strategy regarding the Soviet Union, and as retired Brigadier General Vincent Esposito observes, "Ironically, Russia benefited from her mistakes in Finland because it lulled Hitler into a

¹² "Memorandum by the State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, Ernst von Weizsaecker, October 2, 1939," *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*; and Chris Mann and Christer Jorgensen, *Hitler's Arctic War: The German Campaigns in Norway, Finland, and the USSR 1940-1945*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Roberts, *Molotov: Stalin's Cold Warrior* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2012), 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁶ Mann and Jorgensen, *Hitler's Arctic War*, 26.

¹⁷ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 70.

¹⁸ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 103.

complacent belief that Russia could be defeated with relative ease.”¹⁹ The Soviet Union’s performance in the Winter War revealed key weaknesses the Germans would later attempt to exploit. The Soviets ultimately had to commit 1.2 million men to subdue Finland.²⁰ As the later German liaison with the Finnish Army observed, “Posterity has not always handed laurels to him who has emerged victoriously from combat.”²¹ Swedish historian Christer Jorgensen notes, “the war gave Hitler the fatal impression that the Red Army was rotten to the core and led by military blockheads.”²² However, they failed to consider the Russian reforms that had started before the Winter War but had yet to be implemented.

At the start of the Winter War, the “Soviets were caught between preparation for the war of maneuver and the war of position, [a strategy dependent on defensive fortification and maintenance of territorial position] and were not ready for either.”²³ Because of the chaos in the upper echelons of command, Soviet troops were not trained for either an offensive war utilizing deep operations, nor did they have the training required to coordinate the necessary jointness of combined arms. As a result of the campaigns in Finland, Stalin placed General Semyon Timoshenko in command of the Red Army as the Peoples’ Commissar for Defense.²⁴ He began a new training program and a reorganization of war industries. Chief Marshal of Artillery N. M. Voronov recalled that a plenary session was held at the end of March 1940 to investigate every facet of the campaign, from better lubricants to ensure mechanisms could work in severe cold to efforts in developing more mobile artillery.²⁵ Admiral N. G. Kuznetsov, who attended this

¹⁹ Esposito, *World War II: The European Theater*, 10-11.

²⁰ Mann and Jorgeson, *Hitler’s Arctic War*, 27.

²¹ Waldemar Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, edited by Thomas L. Houlihan (Lake Orion, MI: Maps at War Publishing, 2014), 5.

²² Christer Jorgensen and Christopher Mann, *Tank Warfare* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2001), 39.

²³ Pareto, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 669.

²⁴ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 73.

²⁵ N.N. Voronov, *Na Sluzhbe Voennoi* (Moscow, 1963), 153-157.

session, observed, “We had received a severe lesson. We had to profit by it. The Finnish campaign had shown that organization of military leadership at the center, left much to be desired.”²⁶ However, at the time of Operation Barbarossa, Soviet reforms, while initiated, were not complete. Thus, when the war “came on June 22, 1941, the Soviet State was not fully prepared.”²⁷

With the defeat of France in June 1940 and many of its objectives complete within its sphere of influence designated through the Treaty of Non-Aggression, Germany no longer needed Soviet inaction. As a result, Hitler decided that Germany would invade the Soviet Union in 1941.²⁸ As a result, Germany changed its policy regarding Finland, whose territories were now seen as a potential invasion route. On December 18, 1940, in his Directive No. 21, Hitler outlined the operation for Case Barbarossa in which the “German Wehrmacht must be prepared to crush Soviet Russia in a quick campaign.”²⁹ To do this, in part two of the directive, Finland, along with Romania, was expected to take “active participation” in the invasion and operate jointly with the German Army.³⁰ Therefore, the German Foreign Ministry and military began steps towards reaching an agreement, preferably an alliance, with Finland. This shift in focus was also exhibited by Germany’s renegotiating its relationship with Finland, starting with economic ties, transit rights for weapons shipments, and, finally, military cooperation. Through each of these, Finland and Germany became increasingly aligned.

²⁶ N.G. Kuznetsov, *Pered Voinoi* (Oktiabr, 1965), 188-189.

²⁷ Pareto, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 670.

²⁸ Neny, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 31.

²⁹ “Fuhrer’s Directive, December 18, 1940,” United States Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy; From the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry Series D, The War Years, Volume 11: February 1- June 22, 1941*. (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1957-1964) Document 532, 899-902.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Rapprochement between Germany and Finland

The consensus in Finland after the Winter War was that the Soviet Union was only biding its time and would invade again. The Treaty of Moscow, in Mannerheim's words, "had catastrophic effects on our strategic situation. We lost all the [geographical] defiles which had allowed us to halt invading armies. The new frontier left Finland naked to any aggressor. . . . The treaty removed our security and any freedom in foreign policy."³¹ During this fifteen-month "interim peace," Finland increased rations and appropriated half of the national budget to military defense.³² Along the new frontier, construction began on a defensive network, employing approximately 30,000 Finns.³³ Beyond focusing on Finland's defensive capabilities, the Finnish government had to address the over 400,000 refugees from the ceded territory and the resulting economic losses. On June 28, 1940, the Finnish Parliament passed the Emergency Resettlement Act to facilitate the relocation of refugees from Karelia and other portions of Finland. Many of the refugees had been farmers, and the government attempted to replace the approximately 40,000 farms that were lost.³⁴ Desiring a buffer zone between Norway and any other Western nations, the Soviet Union gave the Finns the Petsamo region back as part of the Treaty of Moscow.³⁵ That would prevent any incursions directly into the Soviet Union.³⁶ Despite having Petsamo, Finland lost many of its industrial centers, such as timber, chemical, textile, and metal factories, in the ceded territory.³⁷ Thus, as the months continued into 1940,

³¹ Mannerheim, *The Memories*, 145.

³² Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 75.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ M. Lähteenmäki, "Footprints in the Snow: The Long History of Arctic Finland," *Prime Minister's Office Publications* 12 (2017), <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi>.

³⁵ "Act of Petsamo's Transfer to the Finns, April 9, 1940," *Foreign Policy of the USSR Collection of Documents T. IV* (Moscow, 1946), <https://histdoc.net/pdf/NKID1940-04-09.pdf>.

³⁶ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 106.

³⁷ Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 7.

Finland's focus on internal affairs resulted in continued tense relations with the Soviet Union, and events outside of Finland would lead to further isolation.

The Finnish outlook drastically changed on April 9, 1940, when Germany invaded Norway.³⁸ With its successful capture of large portions of Norway, including the port of Narvik, and Oslo, Germany controlled all trade outside the Baltic, and Finland's trade partner, Britain, was cut off from the region. Molotov questioned the German ambassador in the Soviet Union in April 1940 regarding its intentions. German Ambassador Friedrich-Werner Graf von der Schulenburg sent an urgent communication back to the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin inquiring what his response should be. He advised assuring the Soviets that Germany "would not touch Sweden and Finland."³⁹ The concerns over Scandinavia between Germany and the Soviet Union in mid-1940 revealed the growing drift between the two powers. With the Allies' inability to defend Norway and Denmark, Germany emerged as the only convincing counterbalance to the Soviet Union and the only realistic trade partner. As Olli Vehviläinen observes, "The world war made trade and politics closely interdependent."⁴⁰

The fall of France two months later completed Finland's disillusionment with the West.⁴¹ By July 1940, both Sweden and Finland now had German troops on their borders, virtually isolating them from the Western Allies. Henrik O. Lunde observes, "If the Norwegians and the Allies had managed to thwart the German occupation of Norway, that fact would probably have

³⁸ This successful campaign was arguably the first "combined-arms operation," with the Germans defeating the Allies in their first encounter. Mann and Jorgensen, *Hitler's Arctic War*, 33.

³⁹ "The German Ambassador in the Soviet Union to the German Foreign Office, April 13, 1940," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*.

⁴⁰ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 78.

⁴¹ Henrik O. Lunde, *Finland's War of Choice: The Troubled German-Finnish Coalition in World War II* (Philadelphia, Casemate, 2011), 21.

kept Finland from joining Germany in its attack on the Soviet Union.”⁴² Furthermore,

“Geography, pure and simple, dictated to whom the Finnish government would have to turn.”⁴³

Reflecting on the realities of geography, the German minister in Helsinki von Blücher, reported to Berlin his thoughts on the ramifications of the Peace of Moscow on Northern Europe:

Russia...[has] definitely improved her strategic position on land vis-à-vis Finland by taking possession of the Karelian Isthmus, the gateway to Southern Finland... Russia has strengthened her position vis-à-vis Sweden by the annexation of Hangö,[Hanko] which is like a pistol aiming at Stockholm, as well as...will bring the Swedish ore mines within easy reach.... The Scandinavian countries have shown themselves too weak to help Finland... In Finnish eyes, orientation toward Scandinavia has thus failed the test of fire. ...The League of Nations has again produced only paper decisions and suffered a defeat in Finland. The Western Powers did not get beyond attempts at military intervention.... Confidence in the Western Powers, especially England, is shaken.... Political realists, however, are becoming aware that actually only two great powers, Germany and Russia, have any influence in the Baltic region and that a correct orientation toward both is of vital importance to the Finnish nation. Since it is not to be expected that the Finns will resign themselves definitely to the new boundary, and since it is uncertain whether the Russians regard the peace as an interim phase or temporary measure, further tension in the Baltic region must be anticipated.⁴⁴

He further advised that Germany make itself available for trade with Finland since they were, by this point, the only probable option.⁴⁵ Beginning in April 1940, representatives from Germany and Finland met to re-establish economic ties, especially regarding copper and nickel from the Petsamo region.

Soviet Diplomatic Blunders

While the German Foreign Ministry worked to rebuild relations with Finland, the “ham-handedness Moscow displayed in its interference with Finnish Affairs” directly influenced

⁴² Ibid., 21.

⁴³ Mann and Jorgensen, *Hitler's Arctic War*, 16.

⁴⁴ “German Minister in Finland to the German Foreign Ministry, Helsinki March 13, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Series D. Volume VIII*. (Washington, Department of State 1954), No. 672. <https://histdoc.net/pdf/NaSo1940-03-13.pdf>.

⁴⁵ “Memorandum by an Official of the Economic Policy Department Meeting Concerning Finland on March 28, 1940, at 6:00 PM,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, IX*, (Washington, Department of State 1954), Nr. 16. <https://histdoc.net/pdf/NaSo1940-03-28.pdf>.

Finland to become a co-belligerent of Nazi Germany.⁴⁶ For a short period after the Winter War, as Nikita Khrushchev notes, “Finland wasn’t relevant to the basic needs of the world proletarian revolution.”⁴⁷ However, as events in Europe developed, the Soviet view of Finland, with its vital strategic position, returned to paranoia.

Furthermore, it is vital to place the actions of Finland, the Soviet Union, and Germany within the context of the summer of 1940. On June 14, 1940, in Finnish air space, two Red Air Force planes shot down a Finnish passenger plane carrying Finnish diplomats, killing all aboard.⁴⁸ The Soviets continued to further violate the Finnish frontier both on land and in the air.⁴⁹ Thus, Stalin, “by driving the Finns into implacable hostility,” had left both Leningrad and the vital Murmansk Railroad vulnerable.⁵⁰ The Soviet Union also repeatedly blocked Finnish-Swedish attempts at a defensive alliance.⁵¹ The Soviets hindered attempts at this alliance beginning in April 1940, and they continued to thwart Finnish-Swedish negotiations throughout December 1940.⁵² Additionally, the Soviets declared any defensive unions, such as a Nordic Defensive Union with Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, in opposition to the Soviet Union.⁵³ Thus, eliminating other alternatives for Finland besides Germany, the Soviet Union left Finland isolated, which emboldened German intentions for the region.

The Soviet treatment of the Baltic states served as a further warning to Finnish leaders. In June 1940, the Red Army occupied Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and by August 1940, all the Baltic states ceased to be sovereign.⁵⁴ General Waldemar Erfurth, who would later serve as

⁴⁶ Sander, *The Hundred Day Winter War*, 342.

⁴⁷ Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 157-158.

⁴⁸ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 397.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 398.

⁵⁰ Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 106.

⁵¹ Sander, *The Hundred Day Winter War*, 341.

⁵² Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 403.

⁵³ Nenye, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 29.

⁵⁴ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 79; and Buttar, *Between Giants*, 40.

the German liaison between the two armies, observed that many “Finns felt deserted and believed that their mighty eastern neighbor had further evil designs against their country with the ultimate object of destroying its independence, in the same way as the Baltic States had lost their freedom to the Soviet Union.”⁵⁵ An increasingly isolated Finland desperate for allies presented an opportunity for Germany. Near the end of June 1940, the German Army’s *Generaloberst* Franz Halder visited Helsinki and met with Finnish politicians and generals. Although this visit did not have any immediate political or military consequences, as noted by General Waldemar Erfurth, these trips “revived the Finnish-German brotherhood-in-arms created in World War I (The Finnish Volunteer Light Infantry Battalion [27th Jägers] in Germany and the German auxiliary forces in Finland during the Civil War in 1918).”⁵⁶

On June 23, 1940, Molotov demanded a meeting with Paasikivi to discuss important issues regarding its resources at Petsamo.⁵⁷ The Soviets insisted the Finns replace the Anglo-Canadian company with a Finnish-Russian Company or give them management of the Petsamo Nickel Mines and the ability to place their own employees, which the Finns feared would translate easily into a military force.⁵⁸ Since the discovery of nickel deposits in 1935, the Petsamo nickel mines had always been an interest to foreign powers. As early as July 1937, the Soviet envoy in Finland expressed his concerns regarding the increase of the British share of the mines. Furthermore, “although today there are no signs indicating violation of Finland of Art. 6 of the Tartu Treaty, which prohibits the militarization of Petsamo,” that could change, and “we

⁵⁵ Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁷ “Telegram from the Finnish Legation in Moscow to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, June 23, 1940,” *Documents on Soviet Policy, March 1940—June 1941* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1941), Doc. 14 <https://histdoc.net/pdf/NKID1940-06-23.pdf>.

⁵⁸ “The Ambassador in the Soviet Union to the Foreign Ministry, July 2, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D, vol 10*, Doc. 77, 87; and “President Risto Ryti Radio Address,” *Heninen*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/ryti1941_e.htm.

nevertheless should watch closely the events in the north.”⁵⁹ In a telegram on June 27, 1940, Paasikivi relayed the disappointing news that the Soviets would not be satisfied with the concession of selling them fifty percent of the nickel ore. Molotov informed him that the Soviets “were not now interested in the ore, but in the area itself and the nickel in it, for all time, and that the British must be cleared out of the area.”⁶⁰ Discussion with the Soviets in all areas proved difficult because they continually increased and often changed the conditions of such negotiations.

Molotov issued demands on other areas of Finland. On July 9, 1940, the Soviets proposed a transit agreement to use Finnish railroads to transport troops to the leased Hanko Base.⁶¹ Later in October 1940, Molotov informed Paasikivi of the Soviet’s desire that the Åland Islands be demilitarized and that Finland guarantee that no other foreign powers establish forces there.⁶² Finnish leaders feared this was the first step in a potential Soviet occupation of the islands.⁶³ Not wanting another war, the Finnish government agreed to the demilitarization of the islands and the Soviet use of the railroads to Hanko; however, because of the investments of Britain and Germany, the Finns refused Soviet demands regarding Petsamo.⁶⁴

⁵⁹“The Letter of the Plenipotentiary Representative in Finland to the People’s Commissar of the Foreign Affairs of the USSR M.M. Litvinov on July 30, 1937,” *History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, https://histdoc.net/pdf/Assmus_30.7.1937_Petsamo.pdf.

⁶⁰ “Telegram from the Finnish Legation in Moscow to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, June 27, 1940,” *Documents on Soviet Policy, March 1940—June 1941* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1941), Doc. 15. <https://histdoc.net/pdf/NKID1940-06-27.pdf>.

⁶¹ “The Proposal for Hanko Transit Traffic Submitted by the Soviet Commissariat for Foreign Affairs on July 9, 1940,” *Documents on Soviet Policy, March 1940—June 1941* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1941), Doc. 18. <https://histdoc.net/pdf/FOFI1940-07-09.pdf>.

⁶² “Agreement Between Finland and the Soviet Union Concerning the Åland Islands, October 11, 1940,” *Documents on Soviet Policy, March 1940—June 1941* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1941) Doc. nr. 34. <https://histdoc.net/pdf/FOFI1940-10-11.pdf>.

⁶³ “Ryti Radio Address,” http://heninen.net/sopimus/ryti1941_e.htm.

⁶⁴ Also referred to as Pechenga. The Petsamo Mines are in the Pechenga Region of Northern Finland. “Ambassador Ritter to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, July 3, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, vol 10, doc. 98, 108.

Referring to the Soviet's actions post-Winter War, President Risto Ryti justified Finnish reasons for going to war with the Soviet Union again in 1941, stating, "in this manner, the Soviet Union attempted by various means [to] weaken the political and military position of Finland."⁶⁵ Perhaps most detrimental, the Soviets, alleging that Finland had violated the Treaty of Moscow, canceled the current trade treaty. Mannerheim recalled its devastating effects:

In the economic situation existing at the time, this was a serious blow to Finland.... The cutting off of supplies from the Soviet Union was, in these circumstances, calculated to produce a serious crisis, especially where grain and fuel were concerned. In consequence, we became dependent on Germany's resources, which of course, in time, enabled Germany to apply political pressure. The extent to which Finland became dependent on importation from Germany is illustrated by the fact that soon ninety percent of our whole imports came from Germany. This was the result of a Soviet trade policy which cannot be described as other than short-sighted.⁶⁶

With Soviet opposition to Finland's attempts at a defensive alliance with Sweden and cancelation of its trade treaty with Finland "by a series of remarkable diplomatic blunders, the Kremlin succeeded in throwing Finland into Germany's waiting arms."⁶⁷ With the end of the trade treaty, Finland was now cut off from the Allies in the West and the Soviets in the East and had only one option for a source of supplies—Nazi Germany.⁶⁸ After three weeks of negotiations, Finland and Germany reached a trade agreement on June 29, 1940.⁶⁹ Economic ties almost invariably become political knots.

Finland's Road to Co-Belligerency

As the economic and political interactions increased between Finland and Germany, Soviet leaders became increasingly concerned. Within Finland, pro-German sentiments

⁶⁵ "Ryti Radio Address," http://heninen.net/sopimus/ryti1941_e.htm.

⁶⁶ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 403-404.

⁶⁷ Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 336.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 337.

⁶⁹ "Memorandum by an Official of the Economic Policy Department, July 1, 1940," *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D, vol 10*, doc.74, 145.

increased with the influx of imports, and this would only be reinforced once trade expanded to weapons shipments. Reflecting this trend, on July 4, 1940, the Finnish Foreign Minister Rolf Witting informed Blücher that “sentiment friendly to Germany was developing in the population ‘in avalanche proportions [*lawinenartig*]’ and that efforts were underway to form a government oriented exclusively toward Berlin. Public opinion was influenced strongly by the idea that Finland, with the aid of German arms, could in a few months recover the territories lost to Russia.”⁷⁰ Blücher reflected that he “preferred a government which cooperated with us secretly [*unter der Hand*] but which outwardly displayed an attitude of reserve.”⁷¹

The nickel resources of Finland continued to be an area of contention. On July 17, 1940, the German ambassador to the Soviet Union reported that “the Soviet Government regards the Petsamo region as its exclusive domain and wants no third power to appear there.”⁷² However, by July 24, 1940, an oral agreement was reached between the Finnish Government Committee and the German delegation guaranteeing regular shipments of nickel ore from Petsamo.⁷³ By July 30, 1940, Germany was able to negotiate the delivery of sixty percent of the ore production.⁷⁴ Throughout this period of negotiations, the German ambassador also reflected on the “continuous pressure” of the Soviet government on Finland.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ “The Minister in Finland to the Foreign Ministry, July 4, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, series D*, vol 10, doc.109, 183

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² “The Ambassador in the Soviet Union to the Foreign Ministry, July 17, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, vol 10 doc.182, 237.

⁷³ “The Chairman of the Finnish Government Committee to the Chairman of the German Delegation, July 24, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, vol 10, doc. 221, 288.

⁷⁴ “The State Secretary to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, July 30, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, series D*, vol 10, doc. 259, 368.

⁷⁵ “The Ambassador in the Soviet Union to the Foreign Ministry, July 27, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy Series D*, vol 10, doc. 242, 331.

No longer waiting for the capitulation of Great Britain, on July 31, 1940, Hitler ordered preparations for an invasion of the Soviet Union.⁷⁶ This resulted in a renewed German interest in courting Finland as a potential ally. General Wilhelm Keitel, chief of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW), the supreme command of the German Army, expressed his concern about the possibility of renewed Soviet-Finnish war and the implications for the German military. He advised, “a restraining word be spoken in Moscow.”⁷⁷ The Germans believed the Soviet Union would resume military operations in Finland by mid-August 1940.⁷⁸ However, Germany was still hesitant to commit to official aid in case of another outbreak of war between Finland and the Soviet Union.⁷⁹ As Earl Ziemke observes, in the late summer of 1940, Germany was concerned about “keep[ing] the friendship with Finland from ripening too quickly... a fairly nebulous relationship was advantageous” for Germany but frustrating for Finnish leaders who were seeking avenues to deter future Soviet aggression.⁸⁰

Despite German hesitation, on August 12, 1940, Hitler allowed an arms deal between Germany and Finland.⁸¹ General Franz Halder detailed in his diary on August 26, 1940, “Finland would get arms and ammunition from us. In the event of a Russian attack against Finland, we shall occupy Petsamo.”⁸² Intelligence reports that relayed information regarding Soviet intentions of a complete annexation of Finland also reinforced Hitler’s decisions.⁸³ A key turning point occurred on August 18, 1940, when Lt. Colonel Joseph Veltjens, a weapons

⁷⁶ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 83.

⁷⁷ “Memorandum by the State Secretary, August 10, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, Vol 10, doc. 325, 460.

⁷⁸ Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 115.

⁷⁹ “Memorandum by the Director of the Political Department, August 14, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, vol 10, doc. 341, 478.

⁸⁰ Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 120.

⁸¹ “Memorandum by the State Secretary, August 12, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, vol 10, doc. 330, 467.

⁸² Franz Halder, *The Halder War Diary, 1939-1942* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1988), 251.

⁸³ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 83.

manufacturer who often served as a messenger for Reichsmarschall Herman Goring, arrived in Finland and informed the government that Hitler had authorized the sale of weapons. He requested in exchange that Finland allow German troops to travel through Finnish territory to Norway and concessions regarding Petsamo. Mannerheim recalled, “On August 18, one of Goring’s agents obtained Finnish permission to ship Luftwaffe supplies and personnel across Finland to Northern Norway... in return, the Finns were to receive war material from Germany.”⁸⁴

According to Vehviläinen, Veltjen’s proposal was agreed on verbally, most likely by then Prime Minister Risto Ryti.⁸⁵ The Veltjens Agreement was then signed on October 1, 1940, and it guaranteed weapons shipments to Finland from the German firm J. Veltjens Arms and Munitions.⁸⁶ In exchange, Finland “grant[ed] the Greater German Reich a right of pre-emption,” regarding mineral resources at Petsamo, and “transit of German supplies and German troops through Finland to Norway.”⁸⁷ As noted by historian H. Peter Krosby, Finnish leaders were not ignorant of the ramifications of this treaty, and by signing it, they had more closely tied Finland to Germany in a way that might compel Germany to protect its newly gained economic resources.⁸⁸ Following more negotiations, on September 12, 1940, representing the Finnish General Staff, Lt. Colonel M.K. Stewen signed a transit agreement with Major Nimi Epaselva, representing the German Air Force General Staff, that enabled the transport of German troops

⁸⁴ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 66.

⁸⁵ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 83.

⁸⁶ “Memorandum of the German and Finnish Governments. Helsinki, October 1, 1940,” *A History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*, <https://histdoc.net/history/NaSo1940-10-01.html>.

⁸⁷ “Memorandum of the German and Finnish Governments, October 1, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D. XI, doc. 139, 232.

⁸⁸ H. Peter Krosby, *Finland, Germany, and the Soviet Union 1940-1941: The Petsamo Dispute* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), viii.

through the Finnish ports of Vaasa and Oulu to Norway.⁸⁹ After further negotiations, the respective foreign offices signed a final Transit Agreement on September 22, 1940.⁹⁰ Max Jakobson noted that the Transit Agreement was “the first overt step toward enlisting German support.”⁹¹ The number of Wehrmacht troops in Finland increased as it became a “transportation corridor,” and in exchange, Finland received vital war material.⁹² At the same time, German convoys arrived in Finnish territorial waters, which violated Nordic neutrality policy. This Transit Agreement resulted in a clear shift in Finnish foreign policy and a redrawing of the spheres of influence initially designated in the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. The Soviet envoy to Finland, Ivan Zotov observed that the presence of German troops clearly emboldened Finnish leaders.⁹³ General Halder also reflected on a growing German desire to “draw the Scandinavian states into the orbit of the Tripartite Pact” in preparation for an invasion of the Soviet Union.⁹⁴

When Molotov traveled to Berlin in early November 1940, he demanded that Germany clarify its intentions regarding Finland. Molotov complained about “Finnish provocation,” and he insisted that Germany withdraw its troops from Finland as it violated previous agreements.⁹⁵ He further requested that German leaders stop encouraging anti-Soviet behavior within Finland.⁹⁶ Hitler assured Molotov that “Germany did not desire any war in the Baltic Sea and

⁸⁹ “Transit Agreement between The Finnish Armed Forces and the General Staff of the German Air Force, September 12, 1940,” *The Finnish National Archives*, Helsinki, https://histdoc.net/pdf/Kauttakulkusopimus_12.9.1940.pdf.

⁹⁰ Vehviläinen, *Finland in World War II*, 83.

⁹¹ Max Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War: An Account of the Russo-Finnish War, 1939-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 256.

⁹² James Ellman, *Hitler's Great Gamble: A New Look at German Strategy, Operation Barbarossa, and the Axis Defeat in World War II* (Lanham, MD: Stackpole Books, 2019), 64.

⁹³ “Ivan Zotov to Molotov, November 27-28, 1940,” *Arkhiv Vneshnei Roosiyskoi Federatsii [Archives of the Russian Federation]*(AVPRF f. 0135, op. 23 Moscow), 147.

⁹⁴ “Halder Diary Entry: October 11, 1940,” *Halder War Diaries*, 262.

⁹⁵ “Halder Diary Entry: November 16, 1940,” *Halder War Diaries*, 282.

⁹⁶ “Record of the Conversation between Hitler and Molotov, November 13, 1940,” *Documents of German Foreign Policy*, D: XI, 329.

that she urgently needed Finland as a supplier of nickel and lumber. Politically, she was not interested [in an alliance] and, in contrast to Russia, had occupied no Finnish territory. Incidentally, the transit of German troops would be finished within the next few days.”⁹⁷ In return, Hitler asked Molotov what the Soviet intentions for Finland were, and Molotov responded, “he imagined this settlement on the same scale as in Bessarabia [Romania] and in the adjacent [Baltic] countries.”⁹⁸ Hitler requested the Soviets delay any such action in the Baltic for six months to a year, and that any “further Russian action [now would be considered] *casus belli*.”⁹⁹ The growing German influence in the Baltic region ensured a decrease in Soviet ability to interfere without German intervention.¹⁰⁰ Despite this meeting, Finland continued to belong “among these issues...which spoiled the atmosphere of German-Russian relations.”¹⁰¹

Thus, hindered on the international stage by renewed German interest in Finland, the Soviets resorted to internal interference. As early as May 1940, Stalin established the Finnish-Soviet Union Peace and Friendship movement, whose task was to produce pro-Soviet views in Finland and increase tension to lead to a justification for a renewed invasion.¹⁰² The more overt intervention occurred in December 1940 when Finnish presidential elections convened after President Kallio resigned due to poor health. Molotov informed the Finnish envoy, led by Paasikivi, that if certain individuals were elected, Moscow would interpret this as Finland would

⁹⁷ “Memorandum of the Conversation Between the Führer and the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars Molotov in the Presence of the Reich Foreign Minister and the Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Dekanosov, as well as of Counselor of Embassy Hilger and Herr Pavlov, Who Acted as Interpreters, in Berlin on November 13, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, Volume XI, Nr. 328.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* General Halder later stated in his diary on November 14, 1940, “The Fuhrer apparently has talked the Russians out of Finland.” “Halder Diary Entry: November 16, 1940, *The Halder War Diary*, 281.

¹⁰⁰ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 84.

¹⁰¹ “Memorandum of the Conversation Between the Führer and the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars Molotov, November 13, 1940,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, Volume XI, Nr. 328.

¹⁰² Nénye, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 29.

no longer adhere to the Moscow Peace Treaty.¹⁰³ He mentioned individuals such as Vaino Tanner, Toivo Kivimaki, Gustav Mannerheim, and Pehr Svinhufvud. On December 19, 1940, Risto Ryti was elected, and he would take a far more active role in the cabinet than his predecessor.¹⁰⁴ Ryti and his inner circle, including military leaders such as Mannerheim, Heinrichs, and Talvela, along with Foreign Minister Witting and Berlin ambassador Kivimaki, dominated the decision-making process during the war years.¹⁰⁵ As Ryti later reflected, “the USSR has unscrupulously attempted to interfere with Finland’s internal affairs through the election tampering, the Soviet Union Friendship Association, and the spreading of Bolshevik ideas.”¹⁰⁶

General Erfurth believed that “the repeated bad experiences of Finland increased her feeling of distrust toward the Soviet Union to a fever pitch and brought about an agreement with Germany.”¹⁰⁷ Despite Mannerheim’s insistence otherwise, and although details are unclear, Finnish leaders may have learned of German intentions to invade the Soviet Union around the time Hitler’s Directive 21 was issued in December 1940.¹⁰⁸ Army Group North could not achieve its objective without some cooperation from Finland. The earliest indications of German intentions were likely obtained by Major General Paavo Talvela, one of Mannerheim’s confidants, first on December 16, 1940, when he met with Chief of the German General Staff, Franz Halder and later when he met with Reichmarshall Hermann Göring on December 18.¹⁰⁹ While it is difficult to prove, it is likely that Halder or Goring hinted at future German plans.

¹⁰³ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 84.

¹⁰⁴ “Ryti Radio Address,” http://heninen.net/sopimus/ryti1941_e.htm.

¹⁰⁵ Johansen, *Hitler’s Arctic Circle*, 174.

¹⁰⁶ “Ryti, Radio Address,” http://heninen.net/sopimus/ryti1941_e.htm.

¹⁰⁷ Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Vehviläinen, *Finland in World War II*, 86.

¹⁰⁹ M. Jokipii, *Jatkosodan Synty. Tutkimuksia Saksan ja Suomen Sotilaallisesta yhteistyöstä 1940-41* (Keuruu: Otava, 1987), 157-161.

Halder did reveal the details of Molotov's November 1940 meeting with Talvela.¹¹⁰ Talvela later wrote in his diary, "Maybe this year will be brighter and just maybe, together with the Germans, we can now strike back at the Russians."¹¹¹ Based on the German documents during the Winter of 1940 through early January 1941, U.S. Army historian Earl Ziemke reflects, "As far as can be determined, no commitments were made on either side; still, they [the Finns] provided the Germans with information useful in their planning for an invasion of the Soviet Union and the Finns with more than a hint that they could expect to be drawn into collaboration with Germany."¹¹²

The interactions between Finland and Germany from January 1941-May 1941 are clouded in conjecture, propaganda from the Soviets, and the desire for secrecy in Germany and Finland. Some sources note that during Chief of the Finnish General Staff, Lt. General Axel Erik Heinrichs' visit to Berlin to report on the Finnish experience in the Winter War, he was read in on the basics of Plan Barbarossa near the end of January 1941.¹¹³ But others disagree. According to Erfurth, "No negotiations took place. The idea of German-Finnish cooperation was neither mentioned by the Germans nor by the Finnish general.... Nothing came to his knowledge during his visit to Germany of German plans regarding a war against the Soviet Union."¹¹⁴ Chief of Staff of the German Army Headquarters Norway Colonel Erich Buschenhagen visited Helsinki in February 1941. He conducted several other visits in March 1941.¹¹⁵ Finnish leaders later insisted no discussions were made about possible joint operations if the Germans launched an invasion of the Soviet Union in the northern regions, but rather discussions focused on further

¹¹⁰ Halder, *The Halder War Diary*, 300.

¹¹¹ Paavlo Talvela, 1976, in *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 34

¹¹² Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 127.

¹¹³ Vehviläinen, *Finland in World War II*, 86.

¹¹⁴ Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 13.

¹¹⁵ Nénye, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 35.

details regarding the transit of troops.¹¹⁶ Halder noted in his diary of coordination of efforts between the Finnish Army and German Air Force regarding cooperation in the Finns' recapture of the Hanko base on February 14, 1941.¹¹⁷ Regardless of what was discussed, from February 1941 onwards, interactions between German and Finnish military officials continued to increase. On March 14, 1941, German intelligence reported a growing number of Soviet troops along the borders of the former Baltic states further incentivizing German attempts to persuade the Finns to act.¹¹⁸

Tensions escalated in the new year, and once again, the issue surrounded the Petsamo mines in the northern Pechanga region of Finland. Strengthened by German support and military equipment along with nearly completed fortification networks, Finland refused a renewed Soviet proposal.¹¹⁹ On March 5, 1941, Molotov told Paasikivi that a Russian general manager for Petsamo must be appointed.¹²⁰ Advocating for compromise and unaware of the secret interactions with Germany, Paasikivi resigned as the Finnish envoy to Moscow. Although he admitted in his diary that "to remain under the Soviet heel would be fatal," and Germany was Finland's only hope, he was unconvinced of Germany providing any substantial assistance; therefore, in his mind, the Finnish government was taking an unnecessary risk.¹²¹

Perhaps realizing his heavy-handed policies were driving Finland into closer cooperation with Germany, in the spring of 1941, Stalin made some gestures to foster goodwill between the two nations. Ivan Zotov was replaced with Pavel Orlov, and Stalin authorized the delivery of

¹¹⁶ Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 13.

¹¹⁷ Halder, *The Halder War Diary*, 319.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹¹⁹ Vehviläinen, *Finland in World War II*, 86.

¹²⁰ J.K. Paasikivi, *Toiminani Moskovassa ja Suomessa 1939-1941 I. Talvisto* (Porvoo, WSOY, 1958)

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

20,000 tons of grain. However, as Olli Vehviläinen observes, this was too little, too late, and “these belated conciliatory measures had no effect on Finnish policy.”¹²²

While it is not clear the exact sequence of events, it is undeniable that by spring 1941, Finland had made its choice—Germany. The May 1, 1941, Directive of the OKW instructed that steps be taken to finalize coordination with Finnish forces for Operation Barbarossa.¹²³ On May 12, 1941, The German Chief of the Operations Staff of OKW, General Alfred Jodl noted it was “now becoming urgent to enter into detailed discussions with Finland concerning military cooperation, particularly about further troop transports to Finland, a joint plan of operations, [and] High Command [coordination].”¹²⁴ He requested the Foreign Ministry to invite members of the Finnish General Staff to Germany.

In mid-May 1941, the Finnish military delegation, led by General Heinrichs, the Finnish Army Chief of Staff, arrived at OKW headquarters in Salzburg, and it appears “Finland’s road to war truly began on May 25, 1941.”¹²⁵ General Jodl informed the Finns what the Germans expected with regard to their cooperation. Meetings continued over the next several days. General Halder recorded in his diary that they discussed with the Finnish General staff “operational possibilities... [an] attack west or east of Lake Ladoga...on a six-division front.”¹²⁶ Furthermore, it was decided that mobilization efforts should remain hidden until after German troops arrived in position for Operation Silver Fox on June 16, and as for the Hanko base, “the Finns must do this by themselves.”¹²⁷ As James Ellman notes, “Finnish complicity in the

¹²² Vehviläinen, *Finland in World War II*, 87.

¹²³ “Directive of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, May 1, 1941,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, vol. XII, doc. 431, 685.

¹²⁴ “Memorandum by Ambassador Ritter, May 12, 1941,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy Series D* vol XII, doc. 501, 787.

¹²⁵ Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 11; and Nenyé, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 35.

¹²⁶ Halder, *The Halder War Diary*, 393.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

German attempt to conquer the Soviet Union is clear.”¹²⁸ Following this May 1941 meeting, the Finnish Parliament officially sanctioned military action against the Soviet Union provided that the Soviets attacked first and Germany would respect Finland’s sovereignty.¹²⁹ Thus, it is clear that at the latest of May 1941, and probably earlier, Finland knew about and agreed to participate in the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Further demonstrating a growing political and military commitment to Germany was the Finnish government’s authorization of 1,500 volunteers to serve in a Finnish Waffen-SS Battalion as part of an international SS-Division.¹³⁰ This also served as an important part of securing agreements and aid both economically and militarily from Germany. Not only was the creation of the volunteer SS battalion needed for securing aid, but it also played a “pivotal role as a guarantee or ‘pledge’ for the de facto German-Finnish war coalition.”¹³¹ Initially recruited in secret under the leadership of former Chief of the Finnish State Police Esko Riekke, recruitment for the SS-volunteer battalion also had to be undertaken by a non-governmental organization to avoid violating Finnish neutrality.¹³² General Halder wrote in his diary that there was some opposition in Finland to recruiting Finns into an SS regiment, noting that some Finns preferred a situation similar to the World War I 27th Jäger.¹³³ In many ways, the creation of this volunteer battalion reflects the heritage of the Royal Prussian 27th Jäger Battalion. As Finnish historian Oula Silvennoinen notes, “SS volunteers followed in [the] Jäger’s footsteps.”¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Ellman, *Hitler’s Great Gamble*, 201.

¹²⁹ Neny, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 36.

¹³⁰ Westerlund, *Finnish SS Volunteers*, 17.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Halder, *The Halder War Diary*, 348.

¹³⁴ Oula Silvennoinen, in Simo Muir and Hana Worthen ed., *Finland’s Holocaust: Silences of History*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 227.

At Mannerheim's insistence, recruitment was also limited to those not drafted into the Finnish Armed Forces.¹³⁵ The Finnish State Police, under Riekki, recruited Finns to the *Finnisches Freiwilligen Battalion der Waffen SS*.¹³⁶ In February 1941, this volunteer battalion was incorporated into the Waffen SS International Division *Wiking*.¹³⁷ Composed of three infantry regiments, most of the Finnish SS Volunteer Battalion was a part of the Nordland Regiment.¹³⁸ Most of the Finnish volunteers ranged from 17-19 years of age, with over 40% not associated with a political party and 80% having served in the Civil Defense Force.¹³⁹ The motivations for each volunteer varied greatly, and many were "strongly influenced by anti-Soviet feelings, that were only strengthened by the Winter War experience."¹⁴⁰

As the spring of 1941 transitioned into the summer, coordination between the Finns and Germans increased as specific details were decided. On June 3, 1941, Germany officially agreed to aid if the Soviets attacked Finland.¹⁴¹ Two days later, Major General Paavo Talvela wrote in his diary that members of OKW had informed him of the exact date and time of Operation Barbarossa.¹⁴² Perhaps as early as June 7, 1941, German troops traveled into northern Finland.¹⁴³ At the height of the Continuation War, approximately 220,000 German troops were stationed in Finland.¹⁴⁴ General Erfurth recalled the relationship between Finnish and German troops; "Of all peoples who fought during the last war alongside Germans, the Finns were those

¹³⁵ Westerlund, *The Finnish SS-Volunteers*, 17.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ The International Waffen SS-Division *Wiking* was composed of volunteers from various different nations, including Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Estonia, and Belgium. Chris McNabb, *Hitler's Elite: The SS 1939-45* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2013), 178.

¹³⁸ Gordon Williamson, *The SS: Hitler's Instrument of Terror* (London, UK Amber Books, 2011), 117.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴¹ Neny, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 36.

¹⁴² Paavo Talvela, *Sotilaan Elama* (Gummerus: 1976) in Neny, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 36.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 39.

¹⁴⁴ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 124.

with whom the German soldier had the best relationship.”¹⁴⁵ However, this friendship would cost the Finnish Army dearly over the next three years.

By June 1941, the Finnish Army was considerably stronger than it had been before the outbreak of the Winter War. Reorganized into sixteen divisions, the Finnish Army was equipped with captured Russian equipment and strengthened by recent weapons shipments from Germany.¹⁴⁶ On June 17, 1941, Finnish Minister of Defense Rudolf Walden began mobilization under the guise of extraordinary military maneuvers.¹⁴⁷ During the course of the war, Finland mobilized approximately 630,000 men and women, representing sixteen percent of the population of Finland.¹⁴⁸ As Earl Zeimkie observes, this was “a tremendous force for a nation of four million, and one which, as was quickly demonstrated, it could not maintain indefinitely.”¹⁴⁹ A prolonged war would not allow sustaining such a force. Thus, Finnish hopes rested in the ability of Germany to reach a quick victory over the Soviet Union—a belief many in both Germany and Finland thought possible.

After the Winter War, which had, according to Mannerheim, “bled Finland white,” Finnish leaders were desperate to avoid facing the Soviet Union alone again.¹⁵⁰ Few in Finland were optimistic that the Soviets would not once again invade, and their actions towards Finland in the summer of 1940 only reinforced those beliefs. Concurrently, the Germans worked to rebuild relations providing first economic trade and then shipments of war material. Thus, the web of entanglements increased as the new year of 1941 dawned. Then presented with the opportunity to regain the valuable territory lost in the Winter War, Ryti and others in the inner

¹⁴⁵ Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 20.

¹⁴⁶ Unlike the Winter War, the Finns utilized captured T-26s, T-37s, and T-34s in three battalions. Peter Abbott and Nigel Thomas, *Germany's Eastern Front Allies*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Nenyse, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 40

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Zeimke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 188.

¹⁵⁰ John Langdon-Davis, *Finland: The First Total War* (New York: George Routledge & Sons, 1940), 121.

circle agreed to cooperate with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. As Franklin Scott observes, “The motivation of the people had not been pro-German or pro-Nazi, although there were those in government and army who were quite ready to use Germany to strengthen Finland’s position against Russia.”¹⁵¹ Although the document trail is obscure and often contradictory, clearly Finland knew about and agreed to coordinate Finnish participation in German operations on the Eastern Front and, with the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1941, eventually became a co-belligerent of Nazi Germany.

¹⁵¹ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 244.

CHAPTER FOUR

“FOR FREEDOM OF FATHERLAND”: FINLAND’S CONTROVERSIAL CONDUCT IN THE CONTINUATION AND LAPLAND WARS

JUNE 1941-APRIL 1945

In a national radio broadcast, Finnish President Risto Ryti informed the Finnish people that “our hardened defense forces enter a battle for freedom of fatherland, living space of our people, faith of our ancestors, and the free society system, equally courageous and ready.”¹ Thus, a little over a year after signing the Treaty of Moscow, the nation of Finland was again at war with its traditional enemy. However, unlike the previous war, Finland lacked clear war aims, was aligned with a dictatorship, and launched offensive operations to gain territory it had never possessed. As a result, the legacy of Finland’s heroic defenses against overwhelming odds during the Winter War is clouded by Finnish cooperation with Germany and the actions of Finnish volunteers in the Waffen SS participating in atrocities committed on the Eastern Front. Attempting to wage a separate war, independent of other belligerents, doomed not only the sustainability of the co-belligerency with Germany but also the Finnish ability to hold the territory. Nevertheless, the decision to join Germany’s war on the Soviet Union must be placed within its proper context. Viewing the Winter War as not over, Finnish leaders seized the opportunity to regain what had been lost, launching on June 25, 1941, what became known as the Continuation War.

The Continuation War

On June 25, 1941, a force of 487 Red Air Force aircraft bombed Helsinki, Turku, and other cities in retaliation for Hitler’s June 22, 1941, radio message, in which he stated that the Wehrmacht “united with their Finnish comrades, the fighters of the victory of Narvik...German

¹ “Radio Address by President of Finland Risto Ryti, June 26, 1941,” *Heninen*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/ryti1941_e.htm.

divisions commanded by the conqueror of Norway, in cooperation with the heroes of Finnish freedom, under their marshal, are protecting Finnish soil.”² The same day of the bombing, President Ryti, in a closed session of the Finnish Parliament, explained that “this war is Finland’s only salvation. The Soviet Union will never give up its attempt to conquer Finland.”³ Then on June 26, 1941, Ryti addressed the nation, explaining the reasoning for going to war and citing the various grievances against the Soviet Union:

Once again, it is the same enemy, which during in excess of half a century has over short intervals in total for some 100 years by ravaging, shattering, and murdering waged wars against our small nation...[has] from the instant of commencement of hostilities between Germany and Soviet Union, numerous instances of border violations have been committed by the Soviet Union... In this manner has commenced our second battle for defence [*sic*] only some 19 months since occurrence of the previous attack. This new attack towards Finland is as if it were a culmination point for that mode of politics which the Soviet Union has ever since the Moscow peace settlement utilized towards Finland, and the purpose of which has been the destruction of our independence and enslavement of our people.... Centuries have shown that at this location which fate has to our people given, permanent peace has not been able to be achieved. We have for ever been confronted with pressure from East. For alleviation of this pressure, for annihilation of eternal threat, for safeguarding happy and peaceful life of future generations, we now take up arms.⁴

He also referred throughout his address to the theme that the Finnish attacks were purely “defensive operations.”⁵ Finland declared its neutrality violated, and on June 29, 1941, the first Finnish units crossed the border to conduct reconnaissance.⁶ As Gordon Sander observes, in June 1941, “The Finns, seeing a prime opportunity to recover their lost lands and thus continue the war, which for many had never ceased, Finland went with [Germany], not as a full ally but as a co-belligerent.... Unfortunately, the distinction between co-belligerent and ally was lost on

² “Adolf Hitler: Declaration of War on the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941,” *Jewish Virtual Library* <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/adolf-hitler-declaration-of-war-on-the-soviet-union-june-1941>.

³ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 341.

⁴ “Ryti Radio Address,” http://heninen.net/sopimus/ryti1941_e.htm.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Philip Jowett and Brent Snodgrass, *Finland at War 1939-45* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2006), 11.

many, if not most, in the West.”⁷ Furthermore, as Jouni Tilli argues, the “mere threat of communism could be used to justify extreme measures.”⁸

Historian Leonard Cooper reflects, “The truth is that there is too much of Russia and too many Russians and that, even if there are many roads to Moscow, there are even more which lead away from it.”⁹ Thus with Operation Barbarossa began on June 22, 1941, the Germans attempted to do what had not been accomplished in the modern era—conquer Russia. Composed of three large armies, Army Group North with the objective of Leningrad, Army Group Center aimed at taking Moscow, and Army Group South with the goal of conquering Ukraine, this was the largest land invasion in history, representing roughly eighty percent of the entire Wehrmacht spread across 120 divisions.¹⁰ Operation Barbarossa also included an element distinct from previous invasions—it was a war of ideologies. Hitler informed General Jodl, “The upcoming campaign is more than a mere contest of arms. It will be a struggle to the death between National Socialism and ‘Jewish Bolshevism.’”¹¹

Robert Cinto observes that it is important not to overlook the fact that Germany “prosecuted the war with a degree of ruthlessness, not just toward enemy armed forces but the civilian population as well, that hearkened back to Frederick the Great... that was a historical tendency the Wehrmacht would bring up to twentieth-century standards in the course of the war, until National Socialism’s racial ideology brought the trend to a mad, simmering perfection.”¹² Furthermore as Timothy Snyder notes, due to this ideological element, Operation Barbarossa

⁷ Gordon F. Sander, *The Hundred Day Winter War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 341.

⁸ Jouni Tilli in Muir and Hana Worthen, *Finland’s Holocaust*, 160.

⁹ Leonard Cooper, *The Many Roads to Moscow: Three Historic Invasions* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1968), 5.

¹⁰ Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff 1657-1945*, translated by Brian Battershaw (New York: Praeger, 1959), 395.

¹¹ *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), 414.

¹² Robert M. Cinto, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 273.

“was the beginning of a calamity that defies description.”¹³ Additionally, ruthlessness does not equate to efficiency, and in many ways, the “German planning was too bloodthirsty to be practical.”¹⁴ Finnish troops in the north witnessed this brutality and, in the case of the Finnish SS volunteers, took part in the atrocities committed by German troops as they advanced into the Soviet Union.¹⁵ Thus, failing to realize the nature of the war planned by their ally Nazi Germany and clinging to the notion of waging a “separate war,” Finland became complicit in the horrors conducted by the German war machine on the Eastern Front.

Much like their brothers-in-arms, the Finnish forces experienced victory in the early months of what became known in Finland as the Continuation War. During the course of this war, Finland was divided into the Southern Finnish Front, where the

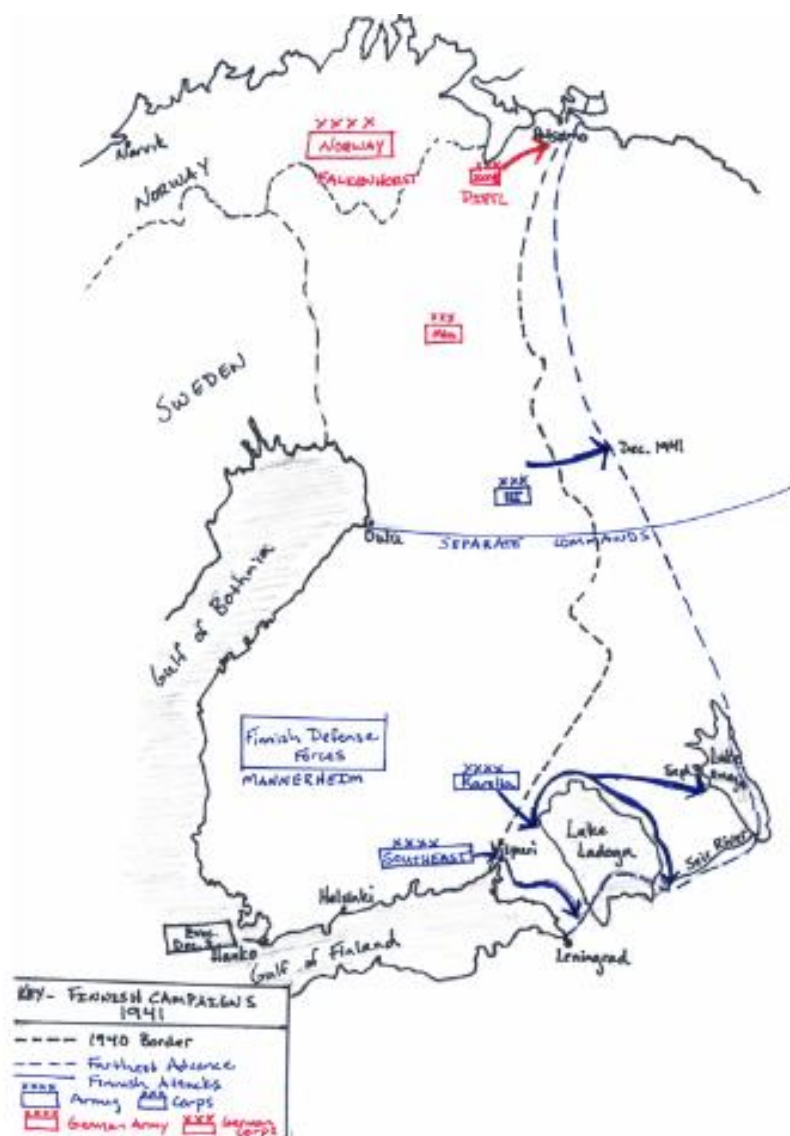


Figure 3: “Finnish Campaigns 1941.” Drawn by Author.

¹³ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 155.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁵ Westerlund, *Finnish SS Volunteers*, 36.

2nd and 4th Corps advanced on the Karelian Isthmus, and the Karelian Army, composed of the 6th and 7th Corps supported by the German 163rd Division, focused on the area of Karelia north of Lake Ladoga.¹⁶ The other front, the Northern German Front, had only one Finnish Corps with the German Army of Norway under General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst's command focused on the Petsamo region.¹⁷ At the start of the invasion, the German forces in the north successfully occupied the region, and on June 29, 1941, Operation *Platinfuchs* (Platinum Fox) began with the objective of Murmansk.¹⁸ Buoyed by German assistance and equipment and the fact that a significant portion of the Soviet forces was transferred south, the Finnish forces concentrated on the Karelian Isthmus and other strategically vital areas. As Olli Vehviläinen notes, "they had the advantage of being mobile in roadless terrain, which allowed them to penetrate deep behind enemy lines and attack from the rear."¹⁹ Furthermore, the Finns utilized the tactics of feigned frontal assaults to distract the Soviets while the bulk of their forces attacked from the flanks.²⁰ On July 10, 1941, the Finnish Army launched its first major offensive towards Lake Ladoga, and by July 23, Finnish troops had reached the 1939 borders, where they halted.²¹ General Talvela reported to Mannerheim, "the Russians have been chased out of Finland...the area...has been freed from our hereditary foe."²²

While some cooperation existed in the northern regions, the Finnish forces operated basically independently and under Mannerheim's direct control.²³ General Oehquist reported to

¹⁶ Abbot and Snodgrass, *Germany's Eastern Front Allies*, 10.

¹⁷ Claes Johansen *Hitler's Nordic Ally? Finland and the Total War 1939-1945* (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2016), 184.

¹⁸ Lunde, *Finland's War of Choice*, 111.

¹⁹ The Finns also had a four-to-one superiority in infantry and a nine-to-one advantage in artillery in strategically vital areas. Vehviläinen, *Finland during the Second World War*, 93.

²⁰ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally?*

²¹ The Finnish 3rd Corps, attached to the German forces, launched its attack on July 1, 1941. Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 11.

²² Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 33

²³ Halder, *The Halder War Diary*, 436.

Halder on July 21, 1941, that the “success of the Finnish troops in the advance are very gratifying.”²⁴ By August 21, 1941, all Finnish ground forces were committed to the offensive, and eight days later, the Finnish IV Corps liberated Viipuri.²⁵ Although a great morale boost, in their retreat, the Soviets virtually destroyed the city. They also practiced a scorched earth policy as they withdrew from Karelia and the Karelian Isthmus. Finnish aviator Eino Luukkanen recalled visiting the city in the immediate aftermath of its recapture; “Once across the border [1940 border] ...the scene became most disagreeable, desolation and destruction everywhere one looked.... Although I had lived in Viipuri, I could hardly recognize the city...[it] was now a pile of rubble, and few buildings stood unscathed.”²⁶

Failing to plan a withdrawal, retreating Soviet forces were caught again by Finnish *motti* tactics near Porlampi, with the last pockets of resistance eliminated on September 1, 1941.²⁷ Deemed the “*motti* of hell” by Danish war correspondent Holger Horsholt Hansen, the Finns captured the largest cache of supplies during the war and completely annihilated yet another Russian Division, this time the retreating 43rd Division.²⁸ Hansen, who visited Porlampi a day after the fighting ended, recalled, “We were met by a choking stench. [There] were not just individual soldiers...but huge piles of mutilated and bloody corpses.... The sight was terrible and simply beyond description....Dead Russian and Finnish soldiers side by side in twisted positions. The destruction was so complete it was hard to believe that this could take place in the year of our Lord 1941 in ‘the century of culture and civilization.’”²⁹ The Finnish forces advanced and

²⁴ Ibid., 483

²⁵ Nenye, *Finland at War the Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 99.

²⁶ Eino Luukkanen, *Fighter over Finland* (London, McDonald, 1963), 98-99.

²⁷ The Finns acquired 55 tanks, 300 tractors, 700 trucks, approximately 300 artillery pieces, 250 mortars, 270 machine guns, thousands of infantry weapons, and around three million rounds of ammunition. Nenye, *Finland at War: the Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 106.

²⁸ H. Hansen, *I krigets spar—Ett Ogonvittnes Skildring av krig och stillestand I Fjarrkarelen* (Stockholm, Tidens forlag, 1943), 26-27.

²⁹ Ibid.

reached their 1939 borders on the Karelian Isthmus by early September 1941.³⁰ While successful in their advances, there were continual glimpses that this was not the same Red Army of the Winter War.

The Germans were hopeful that not only would the Finns occupy a considerable number of Soviet troops but that they would also aid in the cutting off and capture of Leningrad as the German Army Group North advanced towards the city from the south. On September 9, 1941, the Finnish I Corps stopped its advance outside the first Soviet defensive lines approximately twenty kilometers from Leningrad.³¹ All the retreating Soviets from the Karelian Isthmus had reinforced the cities' impressive fortifications, and the Finns lacked the necessary force to attempt further attacks.³²

Upon reaching the 1939 borders, a debate arose within the Finnish government that lasted through the late fall of 1941. The decision to continue the advance would have significant ramifications both politically and militarily. Some of the Finnish Armies' advances beyond those borders could be justified militarily as securing their flanks or moving to a more defensible position.³³ Finnish commanders also frequently took personal initiative seizing the opportunity to further trap or pursue the retreating Soviets without regard to national borders or the political ramifications of their actions.³⁴ While the government was divided, with opposition coming from the Social Democrats, Mannerheim authorized what has become known as the East Karelian Offensive on September 4, 1941, carried out by Major General Talvela's VI Corps.³⁵

³⁰ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 240.

³¹ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 205.

³² Neny, *Finland at War the Continuation and Lapland War*, 108.

³³ Lunde, *Finland's War of Choice*, 172.

³⁴ The advance of the Finnish army throughout the early months of the Continuation is rife with examples of such behavior. Such as the aggressive reconnaissance of Viipuri that turned into a full attack based on what the Finnish forces were seeing on the ground. Mannerheim also encouraged this behavior. Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 197.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

Many historians point to this as a clear indication that Finnish war aims had changed from simply retaking the lost Winter War territories.³⁶

As with each area of debate regarding Finnish decisions in World War II, this decision must be placed within its context. Linked historically and linguistically, Eastern Karelia had been an objective of groups within and without the Finnish government. Although a part of the Russian empire and not the Grand Duchy of Finland, Finns and the inhabitants of Karelia could easily cross the border resulting in trade and intermarriage between them. Thus, as Claes Johansen observes, “these contacts came naturally and needed no ideological or historical justification.”³⁷ The ideology of a “greater Finland” and the desire to unite all members of the Finno-Ugric language also played a role and peaked during the decade following the Finnish Civil War through the student organization *Akateeminen Karjala-Seura* (AKS). In the aftermath of the Finnish Civil War, there was a movement to unite the Karelians, a Finnic ethnic group of people living in the regions of East Karelia, Ingria, Estonia, and Pechanga, with the newly independent Finland.³⁸ Several “semi-official” military offensives were conducted from 1918 until 1922. With the goal of liberating the population from the rule of Bolsheviks, these campaigns were conducted by volunteers in the name of *heimoaate*, translated as “kindred idea or kindred war.”³⁹ As historian Aapo Roseulis notes, this was “a name emphasizing images of a romantic and even mythological national past with a timeless bond between the scattered Baltic Finnish peoples.”⁴⁰ According to a nationalistic right-wing minority group, which was popular

³⁶ Lunde, *Finland's War of Choice*, 377-378.

³⁷ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 212.

³⁸ Aapo Roselius, “Holy War: Finnish Irredentist Campaigns in the Aftermath of the Civil War,” in *The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy*, edited by Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2014), 119.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

with students in the 1920s and the 1930s, Finnish leaders should strive to unite all ethnic Finns within the nation, particularly Finns living in Eastern Karelia.⁴¹

In October 1920, the Soviet Union and Finland signed the Peace of Tartu that formally established the border.⁴² This diminished ambitions of a “greater Finland,” but discussions still continued in the public sphere. This can be seen in various Finnish newspapers throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In the newspaper, *Karjalainen*, on December 23, 1930, an article, “The Question of Karelia,” included details on the population of the region and their political leanings.⁴³ However, as Jason Lavery notes, by 1932, “while support for fascism was growing in other parts of Europe, it was on the decline in Finland.”⁴⁴ Following the Finnish Army’s successful advance, this belief resurged.

It is difficult to determine how much ideology influenced the German-Finnish military alliance and whether or not from the beginning the occupation of Karelia was intended. Claes Johansen notes, “President Ryti and his inner circle seem to have felt that Finland might as well profit from the situation as much as possible since the decisive step was now taken. Hence when the Continuation War broke out, political Karelianism received fresh impetus.”⁴⁵ Urho Kekkonen recalled regarding,

The pro-National Socialists attitude of certain circles of citizens in our country has sometimes been mentioned abroad in reviewing this point. The answer is that the firm democratic convictions of the great majority of the Finnish people cannot be held in doubt. No responsible Finnish sector would even consider the possibility that Finland

⁴¹ Silvennoinen, “Janus of the North,” in *Hitler’s Scandinavian Legacy*, edited by John Gilmour, and Jill Stephenson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 129.

⁴² “The Peace Treaty between Finland and the Federal Socialist Republic of Soviet Russia,” *A History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, https://histdoc.net/history/dorpat1920_en.html.

⁴³ “*Karjalainen*: The Question of Karelia,” *The National Library of Finland*, <https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/sanomalehti/binding/1856697?term=greater%20Finland&page=1>.

⁴⁴ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 99.

⁴⁵ Johansen, *Hitler’s Nordic Ally*, 215.

could have become the springboard for a German offensive....Fancies such as these in the outside world rest on the complete ignorance of our conditions.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the Finnish government, when trying to generate support for the resumption of war with the Soviet Union, promoted regaining the lost territory, not expanding Finland itself for a “greater Finland.”⁴⁷ Protests from the public when Finnish troops went beyond the 1939 border, indicates that most Finns did not support the “greater Finland” ideology and were interested in only regaining what was lost during the Winter War.⁴⁸

Undeniably, Finland as a nation did not accept the racial ideologies of the Nazis. No racial laws were passed in Finland.⁴⁹ Jews were granted full citizenship rights after Finland gained its independence in 1918.⁵⁰ Along with all men, Finnish Jews were required to serve in the Finnish Army.⁵¹ Furthermore, Finnish leaders refused to dismiss Jewish troops out of the Finnish army, resulting in Finnish Jews fighting and dying among German troops.⁵² Several Jews including, Samuli Skurnik and Salomon Klass, were nominated for the Iron Cross.⁵³ Over 200 Finnish Jews served in the army during the Continuation War.⁵⁴

While both anti-Russian and anti-Soviet feelings were deeply rooted in Finnish culture, many of the tenants of Nazism were not. In a report to the Foreign Ministry on May 28, 1938, Blücher reported the disappointing impact of the *Nordische Gesellschaft*'s (Nordic Society).⁵⁵ Founded in 1921 with the task of strengthening German-Nordic relations, the Nordic Society

⁴⁶ Kekkonen, Urho. *Neutrality: The Finnish Position*. translated by P. Ojansuu and L.E. Keyworth and edited by Tuomas Vilkuna (London, UK: Heinemann, 1970) 23-24.

⁴⁷ Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*, 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Report on Finland,” *Yadvashem*, www.yadvashem.org.

⁵⁰ Muir and Worthen ed., *Finland's Holocaust*, 195.

⁵¹ John Simon, *Strangers in a Stranger Land: How One Country's Jews Fought an Unwinnable War Alongside Nazi Troops. . . And Survived* (Lanham, MD: Hampton Books, 2019), 12.

⁵² Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 126.

⁵³ Simon, *Strangers in a Stranger Land*, 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁵ “The Minister in Finland to the Foreign Ministry, May 28, 1938,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945 Series D Volume V*, doc. 429, 560-563.

continued under the Nazis, and its new leader, Alfred Rosenberg, wanted to transform the organization as a proponent for Nazism.⁵⁶ According to Blücher, in 1938, this organization had “hardly gained any supporters. It is naturally very difficult for a German society to gain a foothold in a country which is more than 40 percent socialists and over 90 percent democratic... they are seldom among the politically influential persons [and students] while [studying] in Germany... have stated they do not wish to adopt German culture but rather to transmit Finnish culture to Germans.”⁵⁷

During the war, German General Waldemar Erfurth, the German liaison between the two armies, wrote in a report that “Finland’s political approach to Germany...was based on a sober and realistic judgment of the over-all world situation and was not due to any sympathy with National Socialism. This ideology, with a few exceptions, had taken no root in Finland either prior to or during the war. The Finns were not interested in National Socialist doctrines, in fact often strongly opposed to them.”⁵⁸ He further noted that “the development of conditions in Germany under the Third Reich remained unknown to the Finnish public.... Those few Finns who traveled to Germany during the war had official missions and were well cared for by the German authorities. What they saw of life in Germany was, therefore, of a limited nature.”⁵⁹ Additionally, many in Finland failed to realize this Germany was not the same as the Germany of 1918, which helped them gain their independence.⁶⁰ Many Finnish civilians and officials saw the cooperation with Nazi Germany as necessary for the survival of Finland against the Soviet Union.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Joachim Joesten, “The Nazis in Scandinavia,” *Foreign Affairs*, 15, no. 4 (July 1937): 720.

⁵⁷ “The Minister in Finland to the Foreign Ministry, May 28, 1938,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945 Series D Volume V*, doc. 429, 560-563.

⁵⁸ Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 140.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 87.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

It is also vital to realize the nature of relations between Finland and Nazi Germany. While the relationship often appeared amicable, Finland was dependent on Germany for basic economic needs to feed its people, and if Finnish leaders refused to continue the advance to the River Svir, which the Germans believed necessary to their strategic goals in the region, aid would be denied.⁶² The Germans used trade as a motivator for Finland to continue fighting and hinder Finnish attempts to leave the war later.⁶³ Nevertheless, the controversial decision to advance beyond the 1939 borders had immediate consequences and left a conflicting legacy of Finnish involvement during World War II.

Nations in the West had mixed reactions to Finland's participation in Operation Barbarossa. While many in the West were sympathetic and understood Finland's desire to recapture the lost territories, much of that sympathy ended when Finnish troops invaded Eastern Karelia and other areas beyond its original borders. In August 1941, the first warnings were issued to Finland from the U.S. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles. He also informed the then Foreign Minister Risto Ryti, that "the Soviet government was prepared to negotiate a new peace with Finland which would involve the making of territorial concessions by the Soviet Union to Finland." Ryti responded with the question "in view of the experience Finland had had with the Soviet Union in 1939, what guarantees would Great Britain and the United States offer Finland" for the maintenance of such or treaty, and what guarantees of helping maintain Finnish sovereignty would they provide in the case of German defeat and Russian resurgence?⁶⁴ The

⁶² Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 219.

⁶³ For example, when the Germans discovered Paasikivi's visit to Stockholm to receive Soviet terms of surrender in February 1944, Hitler ordered an embargo on weapons shipments to Finland. He ended the embargo on June 12, 1944, on the condition that the Finnish Army continue to fight. Howard D. Grier, *Hitler, Donitz, and the Baltic Sea: The Third Reich's Last Hope* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 30.

⁶⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Undersecretary of State (Welles). August 18, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941, General, The Soviet Union, Volume 1* <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01>.

conversation thus ended. Warnings and demands for clarifications of intentions continued between U.S. and Finnish officials going forward.⁶⁵

Then on October 25, 1941, U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull instructed the U.S. Ambassador to Finland, Hans Schoenfeld, to inform Finnish leaders that “if Finland desires to maintain our friendship now and later, satisfactory evidence must be given that it is the intention of the Finnish Government to discontinue immediately all offensive operations against Soviet territory and that to that end Finnish troops will promptly be withdrawn.”⁶⁶ Hull also instructed Schoenfeld to warn Finland “that should any war material dispatched from the country via the Arctic Ocean to northern Soviet territory be attacked en route even allegedly or presumably from Finnish-controlled territory, such an incident in the present status of American opinion must be expected to create an immediate crisis in American-Finnish relations.”⁶⁷ Although the United States did not immediately act on its warnings, Finnish leaders did begin to limit some cooperation with the German Army, with Ryti instructing Mannerheim to halt offensive operations as soon as it would be militarily sound.⁶⁸

U.S. Newspapers also recorded the change and increased tension in the interactions between Finland and the United States. An article in the *New York Times* on June 30, 1941, nearly praised the Finns for “end[ing] [their] passive resistance to the U.S.S.R.,” and echoed the official line of the Finnish government with a spokesman for the government explaining “We saw the enemy get ready to assault us by land as well as by air. We had no choice but to strike

⁶⁵ “The Secretary of State to the Minister in Finland (Schoenfeld), October 4, 1941, October 7, 1941” *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941, General, The Soviet Union, Volume 1* <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01>.

⁶⁶ “The Secretary of State to the Minister in Finland (Schoenfeld), October 25, 1941,” *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941, General, The Soviet Union, Volume 1* <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 221.

back before we were overwhelmed.”⁶⁹ However, by November 4, 1941, *Lynchburg News* reported, “Sad-eyed and obviously thinking of other days, Secretary of State Hull disclosed that Finland was being told that unless she halted such operations and withdrew her troops, she would forfeit American Friendship.”⁷⁰ While Finnish officials tried to downplay the cooperation with Germany, balancing relations with nations of the West became increasingly difficult as Finnish troops continued to advance and the government signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1941. After Finland signed the pact, Hull declared “Finland a puppet of the Nazi Regime,” and he also “asserted the little country’s signing of the Anti-Comintern pact was highly significant and could not be camouflaged or explained away, and added that every recent act of the Finnish government shows it is ‘fully cooperating with the Hitler forces.’”⁷¹ The Soviet Union also demanded action from both the United States and Great Britain.⁷² Under this pressure from the Soviet Union, Britain declared war on Finland on December 6, 1941.⁷³

While acknowledging Western concerns, Finland still signed the Anti-Comintern Pact on November 25, 1941, in essence officially becoming a co-belligerent of Nazi Germany.⁷⁴ According to international law, co-belligerents are “simply States engaged in a conflict with a common enemy, whether in alliance with each other or not. ... Allies are not necessarily co-belligerents, ... [N]or are co-belligerents necessarily allies, for they may merely be associated

⁶⁹ “Finland’s Troops on the Offensive: Heavy Guns Duel, Russians Declare that They Stopped a Thrust at Frontier,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1941, 1.

⁷⁰ “U.S. Tells Finland Fight on Russia to Forfeit Amity,” *Lynchburg News*, November 4, 1941.

⁷¹ “Hull Declares Finland Puppet of Nazi Regime,” *Lynchburg News*, November 29, 1941.

⁷² This pressure is exhibited in correspondence between Stalin and Churchill from July 18, 1941-November 23, 1941. “Stalin’s correspondence with Churchill in July-August, 1941 and later in November 1941,” *A History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, <https://histdoc.net/pdf/Stalin1941.pdf>.

⁷³ “Britain Declares War on Finns, Hungarians, and Rumanians: Britain Declares War on Finland,” *The Washington Post*, December 6, 1941, 1.

⁷⁴ Wipert von Blucher, *Gesandter Zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie* (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1951), 206-262.

with one another for the purpose of war.”⁷⁵ Germany and Finland, along with the other signatories, were united in war on a common enemy—communism.

Ryti and other Finnish leaders had, up until that point, resisted German insistence on signing either the Anti-Comintern Pact or the Tripartite Pact. On August 12, 1941, Finnish envoy to Berlin, Toivo Kivimäki, informed the Germans, “Finland’s accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact was not necessary and that her accession to the Tripartite Pact would not be useful.”⁷⁶ In his conversations with Ryti, on November 17, 1941, Blücher informed Berlin that not only did Ryti believe that the timing was wrong, but Finland’s “accession would also only formalize existing policies.”⁷⁷ However, Finland could not delay Germany indefinitely. Henrik Lunde observes, “The Finns were in no position to refuse the German demand.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, the recent emergency delivery of 75,000 tons of grain and along with German promises of more if the pact was signed, compelled Finland to concede.⁷⁹

While the regular Finnish Army focused on operations on the isthmus and in East Karelia for Operation Barbarossa, the *Wiking* Division, with its Finnish volunteers, was attached to the Southern Army Group commanded by Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, tasked with conquering Ukraine.⁸⁰ On July 1, 1941, as the army advanced toward Lemberg, Ukraine, the division acting as a flanking guard was involved in its first combat action.⁸¹ The *Wiking* volunteers performed well, and they were moved to the front line to spearhead an attack across

⁷⁵ John P. Grant and J. Craig Barker, *Perry and Grant Encyclopedic Dictionary of International Law* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 102.

⁷⁶ “Finnish Minister Kivimäki to the Foreign Minister, August 12, 1941,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, Vol XIII, document 197, 310.

⁷⁷ “The Minister in Finland to the Foreign Ministry, November 17, 1941,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, Vol XIII, document 479, 788.

⁷⁸ Lunde, *Finland’s War of Choice*, 185.

⁷⁹ “Minister in Finland to the Foreign Ministry, November 23, 1941,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, Vol XIII, document 493, 814.

⁸⁰ Westerlund, *The Finnish SS Volunteers*, 24.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

the Dnieper River in Ukraine.⁸² After withstanding Soviet attacks and holding the ground on the eastern side of the Dnieper in August 1941, the regiments of the *Wiking* Division advanced slowly to Rostov-on-Don.⁸³

As the Finnish and German governments reached a more defined relationship, the fighting continued along the Finnish frontier and within Finnish territory. Upon the outbreak of the Continuation War, a small Finnish detachment reinforced by a battalion of Swedish volunteers isolated the 35,000 Soviets in Hanko and contained any excursions made by the Soviets through *motti* tactics.⁸⁴ The Soviets abandoned the base in early December 1941, with the last convoy leaving on December 2 and the Finnish forces raising the national flag on the partly destroyed mayor's office.⁸⁵

In other areas of the war, the offensives continued. By October 6, 1941, in East Karelia, after an initial strong defense by the Soviets, Finnish forces secured a 100-kilometer front with a bridgehead a further twenty kilometers.⁸⁶ However, after crossing the River Svir, Talvela's Corps quickly lost its offensive vigor as the Soviets' resistance was stronger than anticipated causing more casualties than could be replaced. Further north, the Finnish advance towards Petrozavodsk slowed due to the Soviets successfully countering the preferred Finnish method of flanking and encircling large numbers of Soviet troops.⁸⁷ Although the city fell on October 2, 1941, the Soviets had clearly learned much from their experiences during the Winter War.⁸⁸ Reflecting the increased diplomatic pressure from both the United States and Great Britain, Mannerheim, under Ryti's insistence, ordered all offensive operations to end after the capture of

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ McNabb, *Hitler's Elite*, 178.

⁸⁴ Neny, *Finland at War the Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 141.

⁸⁵ Johanssen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 202.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 206.

⁸⁷ Mann and Jorgenson, *Hitler's Arctic War*, 78.

⁸⁸ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 207.

Medvezhyegorsk, which he viewed as necessary to the defense of positions in East Karelia.⁸⁹ On December 6, 1941, Finnish forces captured that town, and all offensive operations ceased.⁹⁰ As Claes Johansen observes, “With that, the Finnish offensive ended, and despite German encouragement, it was never resumed.”⁹¹ There has been much debate regarding why Finland never resumed offensive operations. Some historians claim that it was simply because Finland had reached all of its objectives. However, more recent scholarship notes that Finland would have likely continued advancing if it was deemed advantageous.⁹² In reality, it is a combination of several factors, both internally and externally, that led Ryti and Mannerheim to this decision.

External factors, such as diplomatic pressure, did play a role in ending the advance. Another significant external factor that concerned Finnish leaders, especially those with the Finnish Army, was the poor performance of the German Army in the far north and their inability to reach, let alone cut, the Murmansk Railroad.⁹³ The Finns reported their dissatisfaction of German troop performances to the OKW.⁹⁴ Additionally, the failure of a quick “Summer War,” to defeat the Soviet Union, resulted in a slow eroding of Finnish confidence in German capabilities.⁹⁵ Despite the Wehrmacht’s unprecedented victories and the enormous casualties they inflicted, as Robert Citno notes, “the only trouble was, it didn’t annihilate. Although the Red Army was getting clobbered, it continued to defend tenaciously.”⁹⁶ The Soviets lost six tanks to every one German, and by the end of 1941, the Germans had captured over two million Soviets.⁹⁷ Based on German Army communications throughout mid-December 1941, Finnish

⁸⁹ Ibid., 221.

⁹⁰ Lunde, *Finland’s War of Choice*, 185.

⁹¹ Johansen, *Hitler’s Nordic Ally*, 222.

⁹² Lunde, *Finland’s War of Choice*, 185.

⁹³ Nenye, *Finland at War the Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 141.

⁹⁴ Halder, *The Halder War Diary*, 495

⁹⁵ Johansen, *Hitler’s Nordic Ally*, 222.

⁹⁶ Cinto, *The German Way of War*, 293.

⁹⁷ Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 103, 111.

generals deduced that, despite assurances otherwise, the Germans were encountering difficulties and the Soviets had halted their advances.⁹⁸ Hitler's somber order of the day on December 31, 1941, in which he stated, "the year 1941 now lies behind us. It was a year of most difficult decisions and extremely bloody fighting," did not particularly inspire confidence in Finland.⁹⁹

Furthermore, internal factors also contributed to the decision. Lacking a clear war aim, soldiers in the Finnish Army were not united in fighting once the 1939 borders had been crossed, resulting in discipline problems in some of the frontline troops in Eastern Karelia.¹⁰⁰

Additionally, during the Winter War, the united resolve of the Finnish people can be seen in that there were no arrests for interfering with the war effort and a small number, under 200, were arrested for political reasons, with most shortly released.¹⁰¹ During the Continuation War, however, the arrests were significantly higher.¹⁰² The Finnish Army also incurred higher casualties than it could sustain. By the end of 1941, Finland lost the equivalent number of troops killed during the Winter War and incurred a further 75,000 wounded.¹⁰³ Furthermore, as Henrik Meinander observes that while "Finland played a rather marginal role in the big war, no other belligerent country mobilized so vast a percentage of its population for active service—not even Germany."¹⁰⁴ Over seventy percent of the national budget was dedicated to the military, and the war impacted every facet of Finnish society.¹⁰⁵ With so many men in the military by 1943, over sixty-five percent of the workforce was composed of women.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 61.

⁹⁹ "Adolf Hitler's Order of the Day, December 31, 1941," in Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War*, 61.

¹⁰⁰ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 222.

¹⁰¹ Kimmo Rentola, "The Finnish Communists and the Winter War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 4 (October 1998), 602

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 222.

¹⁰⁴ Henrik Meinander, *Finland 1944* (Helsinki, Soderstrom, 2009), 112.

¹⁰⁵ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 224.

¹⁰⁶ K. Brunila, "Vinterkrigetets konsekvenser, De Politiska Aspekterna, Hemmafronten," *Landstridskrafterna* (Ekberd, II), 182.

The war also impacted Finnish children, with over 80,000 evacuated, mostly to Sweden, Norway, or Denmark. In an interview in the 1990s, one child who was evacuated to Denmark recalled, “Up in Finland, we played war with wooden sticks and so on, pretending we sneaked up on the Russians and shot at them. But down here in Denmark, we didn’t play such games at all. We played Rounders and football.”¹⁰⁷ Virtually dependent on trade with Germany for the bare essentials, the Finnish economy was significantly hampered by shortages everywhere. This reality was simply unsustainable in a prolonged war, and by stopping the advance, Finnish leaders hoped to lessen the burden on the Finnish economy and people.

Beyond the external and internal difficulties, Finland struggled with a nebulous and undefined goal for this war. Unlike the Winter War, Finnish war aims were unclear. As Jason Lavery notes “what Finland had in resources, it lacked in clarity of mission and moral authority.”¹⁰⁸ There were conflicting war aims within the Finnish government itself. Kivimäki informed German officials that while “some circles would like to acquire Eastern Karelia,” others were focused simply on the territory lost in the Winter War.¹⁰⁹ This lack of clarity led to continual friction between the two armies of Finland and Germany. In addition to not having clear war aims, the Finnish forces and the Germans were under different and divided leadership. It is never good from a strategic and tactical perspective to have separate commands in the same theater of operations. Furthermore, the quick success of the advance lent itself to the promotion of expansion beyond the 1939 borders and a “greater Finland” for some.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ L. Jessen, *Finneborn* (Danish Broadcasting Corporation, 19.8.1996)

¹⁰⁸ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 126.

¹⁰⁹ “Minister in Finland to the Foreign Minister, September 1, 1941,” *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D*, Vol XIII, doc. 262, 417.

¹¹⁰ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 127.

As a result of the halting of offensive operations and the construction of defensive fortifications along the new front, Finnish-German relations remained rife with tension. Franklin Scott observes that a key problem throughout the coalition was that Germany “could not, however, persuade the Finns to join fully in their war.”¹¹¹ Chris Mann and Christer Jorgensen note that despite the impact still of the Finnish Civil War on Finnish views of Germany, “Mannerheim...prove[d] remarkably adept at keeping them [the Germans] at arm’s length, limiting their influence and maintaining Finnish independence even though both countries were engaged in a war against the Soviet Union.”¹¹² After linking with German troops near the Svir River, north of the city and thus completing the encirclement of Leningrad, Finnish troops halted.¹¹³ Despite repeated attempts, German military and political leadership could not persuade Mannerheim to commit offensive actions against Leningrad. Beyond Mannerheim’s focus on stabilizing the front, the weather dictated and significantly hindered any further offensive operations.¹¹⁴ Besides questioning its feasibility because of weather and insufficient numbers, Mannerheim also bemoaned, “I shall attack no more, I have already lost too many men.”¹¹⁵ In reality, the Finnish Army lacked the numbers and the heavy artillery to truly contribute to the siege beyond simply holding the line between the city and the shores of Lake Ladoga.¹¹⁶

Thus as 1942 began, the Finnish front dissolved into a stalemate, with Finnish forces digging extensive trenches and only conducting patrol operations. Once the weather broke, the Soviets launched minor offensives aimed at the Svir River bridgehead on April 11, 1942;

¹¹¹ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 241.

¹¹² Mann and Christer Jorgensen, *Hitler’s Arctic War*, 21.

¹¹³ Ziemke, *German Northern Theater*, 196-197.

¹¹⁴ Abbot and Thomas, *Germany’s Eastern Front Allies*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 298-300.

¹¹⁶ Ellman, *Hitler’s Great Gamble*, 205.

however, the offensive failed and ended ten days later.¹¹⁷ No other large-scale battles were fought, and beginning in the spring, large number of troops started to be rotated away from the front in order to relieve the pressure on the Finnish home front. While the “colossal amount of troops used in the offensive stages of the war had been a dream scenario for the military elite,...it was a nightmare for the rest of Finnish society.”¹¹⁸ For Finnish SS volunteers in the *Wiking* Division on the Eastern Front, they were pulled off the front line in late fall 1941 to rest and resupply.¹¹⁹ In spring 1942, to support the new offensive in the Northern Caucasus Region, the divisional command placed the division back on the front line. Over the next six weeks, the German offensive successfully pushed further into the Soviet Union. The *Wiking* Division pushed as far south as the Terek River near the Georgia border.¹²⁰

Not satisfied with the situation within Finland, in an effort to try and persuade it to participate more actively, Adolf Hitler visited Mannerheim on June 4, 1942, under the guise of recognizing Mannerheim’s seventy-fifth birthday.¹²¹ Near Mannerheim’s headquarters in Immola, the Finnish Intelligence Service left the recording machine on during part of Hitler and Mannerheim’s discussion, resulting in one of the only private conversations ever recorded of Hitler. He apparently launched into an extensive dialogue claiming he single-handedly persuaded the Soviets not to attack Finland in the fall of 1940.¹²² While the Finns graciously received Hitler and his staff, they could not be persuaded to resume offensive operations.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 225.

¹¹⁸ Johansen, *Hitler’s Nordic Ally*, 243.

¹¹⁹ Westerlund, *The Finnish SS Volunteers*, 25.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 229.

¹²² The recording is housed at the Finnish State Radio Archives, Johansen, *Hitler’s Nordic Ally*, 247.

¹²³ Halder, *The Halder War Diary*, 629.

This meeting further added tension between the United States and Finland, resulting in the August 1942 closing of the Finnish consulate in the United States.¹²⁴

Finland's attempt to maintain relations with the nations of the West is further demonstrated by the lack of German coverage of the Finnish SS volunteers in newspapers encouraged by Finnish politicians. Other nationalities that participated in the Waffen SS were praised as part of the mission of the international division of the SS to promote the universal nature of national socialism against communism. Lars Westerlund notes, "A strong propaganda emphasis on the SS volunteers ran the risk of disturbing the Finnish relations with these powers. [Furthermore] keeping propaganda on the Finnish SS volunteers at a muted level was also acceptable to the German side, which favored pragmatic operational and mutual military cooperation with the Finnish government over [an] emphasis on ideological issues and National Socialists aims."¹²⁵ Thus, understanding the limits of ideological similarities with Finland, German officials focused on increasing military cooperation to reach their objectives.

As Henrik Lunde observes, "the period from early 1943 to June 1944 was a time of total stagnation in Finland, and a period of increased friction between coalition partners."¹²⁶ The stagnation was so complete that the Finnish front became known as "the front without combat activity."¹²⁷ However, events elsewhere began the process of Finnish extraction from the war. The breaking of the German lines around Leningrad in January 1943, followed by the disaster at Stalingrad in February 1943, changed the perceptions of Finnish leaders within Ryti's inner circle.

¹²⁴ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 242.

¹²⁵ Westerlund, *The Finnish SS Volunteers*, 18.

¹²⁶ Lunde, *Finland's War of Choice*, 241.

¹²⁷ Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 245.

In a meeting on February 3, 1943, between Ryti, Prime Minister Rangell, and other ministers with Mannerheim, it was decided that “the war had reached a definite turning point, and that Finland must use the first possible opportunity to get out.”¹²⁸ Six days later, in a secret session of the Finnish Parliament, Colonel Aladàr Paasonen, chief of Finnish intelligence, addressed the members and informed them of the harsh realities of the German positions on the Eastern Front and that “it would be wisest to become familiar with the idea of once again being forced to conclude a ‘Peace of Moscow.’”¹²⁹ Additionally, after a presidential election in which Ryti was reelected, he appointed Dr. Henrik Ramsay as the new Foreign Minister and Edwin Linkomies as the prime minister. These appointments clearly reflect a shift in policies to more peace-orientated officials.¹³⁰ Ramsay had good relations with both British and American contacts, and on March 20, 1943, the U.S. *Chargé d'affaires* Robert McClintock, met with Ramsay and informed him that the United States would help Finnish attempts to exit the war.¹³¹ Linkomies directed the government to “release from the German influence and return to Scandinavian humanitarian-based principles.”¹³² Negotiations between Finland and the Soviet Union, however, were slow due to Finland’s fear of German repercussions and the Soviet Union’s increased demands.

The Germans were enraged with the Finns and demanded that they reject the U.S. offer.¹³³ Furthermore, Ribbentrop informed Finland that such an act of seeking a separate peace would make them, in essence, an enemy of Germany, or as Johansen describes, “the 200,000 strong German military presence in Lapland would turn into an occupation force and install a

¹²⁸ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 460.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 461.

¹³⁰ Johansen, *Hitler’s Nordic Ally*, 265.

¹³¹ The Charge in Finland (McClintok) to the Secretary of State, March 20, 1943,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1943*, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943v03/pg_213.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 463.

quisling as Finland's dictator."¹³⁴ Finland, compelled by Germany, refused the offer. However, with continual failed German offensives, it became increasingly clear that the Germans would not capture Leningrad. Faced with the possibility of a Soviet breakout from Leningrad with an offensive aimed at Finland and after the failed Operation Citadel, Finland continued various attempts to start peace negotiations through different avenues. The Germans continually thwarted these efforts and threatened cutting off trade. General Talvla met unofficially with German General Alfred Jodl, who reminded him that "if Finland is forced to calculate that Germany will lose this war, [that Finland] would once again have to face the might of the Soviet Union."¹³⁵ Jodl also pointed out the difficulty in negotiating with the Soviets was that "Finland's only guarantee of the country's continued existence would be the treaty they would sign with the Bolsheviks. And the Finns well know the worth of all such agreements."¹³⁶ However, German assurances failed to convince Finnish leaders and secret forays resumed with Soviet officials in November 1943.¹³⁷

Additionally, preparing for the worst, near the end of June 1943, Mannerheim requested the Finnish SS volunteers be returned to Finland.¹³⁸ Acquiescing to Mannerheim's position that Finland needed the SS volunteers for its defense, Germany reluctantly agreed.¹³⁹ As a result, the SS Finnish Volunteer Battalion was disbanded in August 1943, and the volunteers returned to Finland.¹⁴⁰ When they returned, they were integrated into the Finnish Army. As the SS

¹³⁴ This happened in Hungary in March 1944, and this served as a further warning to Finland of what the Germans might resort to if they continued to try and negotiate peace with the Soviet Union. Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 265.

¹³⁵ Paavo Talvela, *Paavo Talvela Muistelmatt II* (Gummerus, 1977) in Nenyé, *Finland at War the Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 185.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Zeimke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 250.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹³⁹ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 470.

¹⁴⁰ Nenyé, *Finland at War the Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 19.

volunteers were integrated back into the Finnish Army, many “decided to keep our mouths tightly shut about what we did during the war.”¹⁴¹ This desire to maintain silence on their involvement in atrocities against Jews and others may have been due to the fact that the Finnish people did not widely accept either antisemitism nor racial hierarchy. Their silence would continue after the war out of fear of further retributions at the hands of the Soviet Union.

The situation only continued to deteriorate in 1944. On January 27, 1944, the Soviets broke the siege of Leningrad, and as Army Group North retreated, the Finnish front lines became increasingly exposed as a salient was created.¹⁴² Beyond its military significance, the liberation of Leningrad was a considerable morale boost for the Soviets and a crushing one for the Germans and their allies. With the cities’ liberation, Stalin was able to order preparations for larger scale operations in both the Baltic region and Karelia.¹⁴³ On February 12, Paasikivi arrived in Moscow to discuss peace terms.¹⁴⁴ However, under the new commander of Army Group North, Walter Model, the situation stabilized, and the harsh Soviet demands were refused.¹⁴⁵ This respite would not last long, as Stalin decided that, based on what had been discussed at the Tehran Conference a year earlier, Finland must be driven out of the war and sign a peace treaty with the Soviets.¹⁴⁶ The Soviet terms reflected much of the previous conditions of the Treaty of Moscow. They wanted the 1940 border reinstated, but they demanded Petsamo permanently instead of a lease on Hanko, reparations for approximately fifty percent of damages inflicted by Finnish actions, the termination of cooperation with Germany including the

¹⁴¹ Mann and Jorgensen, *Hitler’s Arctic War*, 223.

¹⁴² David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad 1941-1944* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 410.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 161.

¹⁴⁵ Lunde, *Hitler’s War of Choice*, 255.

¹⁴⁶ United States Department of State, Historical Office, Bureau of Public Affairs: *The Conference at Cairo and Tehran 1943* (Washington, DC: United State Governmental Printing Office, 1961), 593.

expulsion of troops, and finally, a reorganization of the Finnish Army significantly limiting its striking power in the future.¹⁴⁷

To motivate the Finns to the negotiating table, the Soviets launched several bombing raids in mid-January 1944 and three major raids throughout February 1944.¹⁴⁸ These raids, conducted by a Soviet air fleet composed of 2,000 aircraft, were surprisingly ineffective, with the vast majority of the bombs missing their target. As one Soviet pilot recalled, “The enemy protected his large strategic targets with a barrage of anti-aircraft fire. In front of the bomber, a wall of lethal fire rose up. Beneath and above us hundreds of projectiles of various calibers exploded, thousands of tracer bullets flew in all directions and beams of light traces swept across the sky.”¹⁴⁹ The Soviets failed to realize that the Finns had installed, with German help, a complex network of anti-aircraft guns. Although relatively ineffective, the bombings sufficiently relayed Stalin’s intentions.

Paasikivi and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Enckell arrived in Moscow in April 1944 to begin another round of negotiations. Again, the Finnish government found the terms unrealistic, especially how quickly they were to drive the Germans out, and the negotiations failed. At this time, Finland’s Army remained undefeated in the field and still controlled significant areas of Soviet territory. Furthermore, many in Finland, observing the German takeover of Hungary in March 1944, feared “that the German response to Finland’s defection might be violent.”¹⁵⁰ Paasikivi bitterly recalled, “The outcome of the war was clear already then, and the military knew it. Peace could have been achieved if Mannerheim, Ryti, and

¹⁴⁷ “Armistice Agreement between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on the one hand, and Finland on the other, September 19, 1944,” *A History of Finland: A Selection of Events and Documents*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/1944_e.htm.

¹⁴⁸ Johansen, *Hitler’s Nordic Ally*, 269.

¹⁴⁹ Meinander, *Finland 1944*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations*, 274.

the government had taken that view, the Finnish people would probably have accepted the agreement.”¹⁵¹

While in many ways Paasikivi was correct, he, along with many were not fully aware of the pressure Berlin exerted on Finland. When Hitler discovered the renewed talks between the Soviet Union and Finland, he secretly ordered an embargo on shipping any goods to Finland. This act became apparent when in early May 1944, both the weapons and food shipments from Germany failed to arrive.¹⁵² Finland could not survive long without those shipments. As Mannerheim had predicted earlier, Germany once again utilized their trade to influence Finnish actions.¹⁵³ As Franklin Scott observes, the ability to continue without these shipments “showed this spirit of the Finns, but it also showed the German stranglehold on the Finnish economy.”¹⁵⁴ Failing to persuade the Finns to accept the peace terms, Stalin authorized launching an offensive primarily targeting the vital Karelian Isthmus, followed shortly by attacks in East Karelia. The Soviets believed Leningrad was still vulnerable with Finnish troops in defensive positions approximately eighteen miles from the city.¹⁵⁵ As noted by David M. Glantz, one of Stalin’s primary goals for the summer of 1944 was to break up the Nazi bloc of allies, which resulted in the “Red Army’s priority military mission in the northern theater of operations was to defeat Finnish forces on the Karelian Isthmus, and in southern Karelia, liberate Finnish-occupied territory, if possible, capture the Finnish capital of Helsinki, and drive Finland from the war.”¹⁵⁶

Concurrently, the United States and Great Britain pressured Finland to agree to terms with the Soviet Union. However, with the failure of negotiations and Finnish admission of

35. ¹⁵¹ J. K. Paasikivi, *Dagbocker 1944-56 bd. I: Vid Katastrofens Rand* (Borga, Askelin & Hagglund, 1985),

¹⁵² Lunde, *Finland’s War of Choice*, 266.

¹⁵³ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 403-404.

¹⁵⁴ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 242.

¹⁵⁵ Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 416.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

military cooperation with Germany, the United States, citing the direct impact of Finnish operations on Allied war efforts, on June 30, 1944, formally ended diplomatic relations with Finland.¹⁵⁷ According to the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, Averell Harriman, Stalin informed him that “They [the Finns] are a serious, stubborn, blunt people and sense must be hammered into them.”¹⁵⁸

The Finns would nearly be hammered not only into submission but nearly into oblivion by the Soviet offensive that entailed staggered attacks on the Karelian Isthmus and East Karelia utilizing approximately 450,000 troops, 800 tanks, 2,000 aircraft, and 10,000 artillery pieces.¹⁵⁹ This translated to a numerical superiority of five to one in infantry, ten to fifteen to one in tanks and artillery, and fifteen to one in combat aircraft.¹⁶⁰ On June 9, 1944, the Soviet Summer Offensive began with a massive artillery barrage on the Karelian Isthmus, followed by the ground assault the next day, deemed by Mannerheim as “the black day of our war history.”¹⁶¹ Firing over 200,000 shells in the opening hours, the artillery had a devastating effect on Finnish troops. One Finnish soldier relayed to his Soviet captors the effect of this artillery barrage; “I will remember it for the rest of my life. I did not know whether my nerves would endure the artillery bombardment. Unending thunder began at 0630 hours. It seemed as if all the forces of the world were put in motion and were brought down upon us.... Everything was in disorder, and no one grasped what was occurring.”¹⁶² Lulled into complacency by inaction, the Finnish Army was not prepared for this onslaught, and this was not the same Red Army of 1939. The four

¹⁵⁷ “The Secretary of State to the Finnish Charge (Thesleff), June 30, 1944,” *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe, Volume III*. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1944v03/d547>.

¹⁵⁸ “Joseph Stalin to Averell Harriman, July 10, 1944,” *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, General, Volume I*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1944v01/ch2>

¹⁵⁹ Mann and Jorgensen, *Hitler's Arctic War*, 161-162.

¹⁶⁰ Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 420.

¹⁶¹ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 476.

¹⁶² S. P. Platonov, *Bitva za Leningrad 1941-1944* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1964), 448.

defensive lines on the isthmus, the Main Line near the 1939 border, the V-T Line along the entire width of the isthmus from Vammelsuu to Taipale, the VKT Line anchored in Viipuri, and the Salpa Line a short distance behind the 1940 border, slowed but did not stop the Soviet advance.¹⁶³

Lacking sufficient anti-tank weapons and deafened by artillery, the Finnish front collapsed, and chaos ensued. One Finnish soldier recalled, “I went over to my bunker to gather my group. There was no group any more... Then I ran up the hill. Here I saw the last of our men who were retreating from the front. They were crying.”¹⁶⁴ The Soviets reached the V-T Line, a mere fifty kilometers from Viipuri, by June 12, 1944.¹⁶⁵ Mannerheim requested aid from General Eduard Dietl of the 20th Mountain Division in northern Finland, and he detailed the potential of a withdrawal from East Karelia to free Finnish divisions desperately needed on the isthmus if they could not hold the V-T Line.¹⁶⁶ While initially able to hold the line, Mannerheim ordered a fighting withdrawal to the VKT Line on June 15, 1944, and the evacuation of East Karelia to transfer troops to hold Viipuri.¹⁶⁷ The Soviets, after amassing twenty divisions, four tank brigades, three artillery divisions, and other nearby tank and assault gun regiments, attacked the city with portions of it falling under their control throughout June 20-22, 1944.¹⁶⁸ They also launched the next stage of the offensive in East Karelia.¹⁶⁹ Unless the Germans intervened or at the least lifted the embargo, Finland was in danger of collapse.

¹⁶³ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 275.

¹⁶⁴ Anonymous Finnish soldier, P. Rintala, *Soldaternas Roster Om Genombrottet Pa Karelska Naset 1944* (Stockholm, Bonnier, 1967), 17.

¹⁶⁵ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 280.

¹⁶⁶ Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington DC: Army Historical Series, 1968), 299.

¹⁶⁷ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 478.

¹⁶⁸ Johansen, *Hitler's Nordic Ally*, 280.

¹⁶⁹ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 479.

On June 22, 1944, Ribbentrop arrived in Helsinki and met with Ryti. In what later became known as the Ryti-Ribbentrop Agreement, Ryti assured the German official that as long as he was president, Finland would not seek a separate peace with the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁰ As a result, Hitler lifted the embargo, and from June 23- September 2, 1944, Germany sent large amounts of military equipment that while beneficial, could not stem the Soviet onslaught for long.¹⁷¹ Additionally, the Germans agreed to transfer the 122nd Infantry Division from Estonia, the 303rd Assault Gun Brigade, and some air units.¹⁷² The Germans now fighting a two-front war with the Normandy invasion could not afford to divert any more aid. Nevertheless, the lifted embargo came just in time for the most significant battle of the Continuation War in the Tali-Ihantala sector of the Salpa defensive line northwest of Viipuri.

While they had been caught by surprise and generally unprepared for the Soviet Summer Offensive of June 1944, the Finnish Army was able to recover and stop the Soviet onslaught. Fought over an area of forty square miles and larger in scale than the Battle of El Alamein, the Battle of Tali-Ihantala from June 25-July 9, 1944, “prov[ed] to [be] the most decisive of the Continuation War—victory [saved] Finland from the Fate of every other country in Eastern and Western Europe.”¹⁷³ The Finnish forces of IV Corps under Lt. General Taavetti Laatikainen, composed of approximately 50,000 men and over fifty percent of the entire Finnish Armies’ artillery, faced the Soviet 21st Army composed of over 150,000 men and supported by an artillery component that amounted to ten guns every 100 yards enabling the Soviets to conduct one of the heaviest bombardments endured at the Finnish positions.¹⁷⁴ While the terrain was

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 480-481.

¹⁷¹ The shipment included 47 tanks, 50 anti-tank guns, 88 artillery pieces, 184,000 shells, 88 anti-aircraft guns, 24,112, antitank grenades, and 16,602 Panzerschrecks. Grier, *Hitler, Donitz and the Baltic Sea*, 30.

¹⁷² Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 300.

¹⁷³ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 13.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 14.

more favorable to the Soviet tanks, and they possessed a significant numerical advantage, the Finns possessed one advantage, the realization of Finnish troops who knew “the stark fact that they [were] fighting not just for their own survival, but for their nations very existence.”¹⁷⁵

The Soviet Summer Offensive was successful to this point, and the Soviet Army improved considerably since the Winter War with both its tactics and equipment. However, because Stalin insisted the campaign be “exceptionally violent and quick,” Soviet forces had to resort to their standard frontal assaults without regard to their own casualties and relied on their numerical superiority both in troops and equipment.¹⁷⁶ Finnish aviator, Hans Wind, who shot down twenty-seven aircraft in thirteen days before he was wounded during the Soviet offensives, recalled the overwhelming numbers the Soviets employed. After receiving orders on June 28, 1944, to conduct reconnaissance to discover “whether fresh enemy reinforcements were on their war... We knew from the start this would be a nearly impossible mission, as the skies were full of enemy pilots.... I took off, together with Warrant Officer Nils Katajainen...we had barely reached the Viipuri area when we were struck by seven enemy fighters.... More Soviet aircraft kept appearing.... Everything turned into a crazy fireball.”¹⁷⁷

Through their adept use of German equipment, such as the *Panzerschrecks* and *Panzerfausts*, the Finns were able to inflict heavy casualties. Intense fighting continued as the Soviets attempted to break through Finnish lines, and the Finns counterattacked. Finnish soldier and tank ace, Reino Lehtinen recalled:

All our tank companies were committed. Every day men and tanks were lost forever. Counter-attack after counter-attack, again and again, those of us still left gathered our strength in order to fulfill our orders... Hardened and without pity for themselves, the tank crews waged their war.... Young men took the places of those gone before, and the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Lunde, *Finland's War of Choice*, 271.

¹⁷⁷ Mauri Sariola, *Nain Tekivat Ritarit* (Weiling Goos, 1969), in Nenye, *Finland at War Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 239.

war went on and on. We advance a kilometre and retreated two. More ammunition ...more fuel, and again the tanks attacked. We were tired and dirty...nothing seemed to matter anymore. Men spoke less and less. When the order to advance arrived, we sat in our places, drove, and fired until the guns shimmered red; this was the work of a tankie. At times we collapsed, sleeping next to our tanks...only to hear the sound again.... Counterattack! We were deadly tired. There was no time to sleep. We slept under our tanks; this was our home. We had no idea what time it was. Somebody nudged us awake...*Sotkas* to counterattack!¹⁷⁸

Due to the tenacity of Finnish counterattacks and reinforcements, the Finns were able to retreat, construct a new defensive line under heavy fire, and stop the Soviet offensive. The Soviets stopped the offensive on July 10, 1944, and thus ended the largest battle north of Leningrad. While the Soviet's numerical superiority was a significant factor in their success, their ability to utilize the element of surprise contributed greatly and negated Finnish ability to rely on their defensive network. Once the element of surprise was lost, the Finns were able to recover and effectively use their defensive fortifications.¹⁷⁹ Had the Soviet successfully broke Finnish lines, the path to Helsinki would have been open. This Finnish victory persuaded Stalin that a separate armistice should be attempted again. As David Glantz observes, "given this failure and the Red Army's spectacular progress in Belorussia and the western Ukraine," Stalin and his generals, were "unwilling to waste precious manpower resources in what by that time had clearly become a secondary theater of military operations."¹⁸⁰ While some skirmishes continued through the end of July and into early September 1944, there was no change in the overall situation.¹⁸¹

Due to the foresight of many of the leaders in Finland and the tenacity of Finnish Army frontline soldiers, Finland was the only nation, except Norway who bordered the Soviet Union to maintain its sovereignty after World War II.¹⁸² On August 1, 1944, President Ryti resigned, thus

¹⁷⁸ Reino Lehtinen in Nemy, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland War*, 238.

¹⁷⁹ Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 458.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 15.

¹⁸² Shirer, *The Challenge of Scandinavia*, 298.

freeing Finland from many of its ties with Germany. Led by Mannerheim, now the Finnish President, and Foreign Minister Carl Enckell, negotiations began through the Soviet embassy in Stockholm.¹⁸³ Thankfully for the Finns, the road to Berlin did not go through Helsinki; thus, Stalin was willing to negotiate to refocus his forces and attention back on Germany. After the Finnish Parliament agreed to terms on September 2, 1944, a ceasefire went into effect three days later.¹⁸⁴ On September 19, 1944, members of the Finnish delegation signed the Interim Peace Treaty.¹⁸⁵

The Lapland War

However, the fighting in Finland did not end with this treaty. One of the conditions of the treaty required Finland to expel the over 200,000 German troops from Finnish territory.¹⁸⁶ This period of fighting became known as the Lapland War. Beginning on September 7, 1944, Finnish citizens began evacuating from Lapland, and both the Finnish and German troops attempted to avoid any further bloodshed.¹⁸⁷ The Finns wanted to avoid any destruction of what little infrastructure was in northern Finland, and the Germans wanted to evacuate to Norway, avoiding casualties and entrapment from the impending Soviet attempts to take what was guaranteed them in the armistice. However, the staged withdrawal eventually resulted in some fighting because of the unrealistic timescale the Soviets gave the Finns and the contingency plans of the Germans to remain in control of the vital nickel mines. After the Finns signed the armistice, the Germans launched Operation *Birke* (Birch) and seized Petsamo.¹⁸⁸ The first two

¹⁸³ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 128.

¹⁸⁴ Nenyé, *Finland at War, The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 275.

¹⁸⁵ "Interim Peace Treaty," *A History of Finland: A Selection of Documents and Events*, http://heninen.net/sopimus/1944_e.htm.

¹⁸⁶ Nenyé, *Finland at War, The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 279.

¹⁸⁷ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 16.

¹⁸⁸ By 1943, nearly 73% of Germany's nickel came from Finland, and it continued to rise throughout the war, eventually reaching almost 90%. Nenyé, *Finland at War, The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 280.

weeks of the withdrawal, or as Lt. General Airo deemed the coordinated withdrawal and pursuit “Autumn Maneuvers” because they resembled a peacetime joint exercise, resulted in virtually no casualties.¹⁸⁹ However, attempts by German forces to hold Suursaari Island, and maintain the blockade on the Baltic Fleet, ended this somewhat peaceful period of the Lapland War.¹⁹⁰ From October 1944-April 1945, the Germans slowly withdrew, practicing a scorched earth policy that devastated northern Finland, and several instances of fierce fighting broke out between the former brothers-in-arms.¹⁹¹ The Germans destroyed over 16,000 buildings, obliterated and booby-trapped the networks of railroads and bridges, and killed over half of the reindeer population.¹⁹² The last battle with German troops occurred in January 1945 near Lataseno, and the last vestiges of German troops left Finland on April 28, 1945, thus officially ending Finland’s involvement in World War II.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 284.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 285.

¹⁹¹ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 17.

¹⁹² Nenyé, *Finland at War Continuation and Lapland War*, 317.

¹⁹³ Jowett and Snodgrass, *Finland at War*, 17.

CONCLUSION:

A CONFLICTED LEGACY

After Russian soldiers shot *SS-Standartenfuhrer* Hilmar Wackerle, commander of the 7th Company, near Lemberg, Ukraine, Finnish SS volunteer Ahti Paikkala wrote in his diary, “The 7th Company went on a ‘vengeance excursion’ and after that, the village was nothing but ash. As a revenge for the death of the Commander, a few Russians and Jews stopped growing older.”¹ This diary entry is one of the hundreds written by the 1,408 Finnish volunteers who served in the Waffen SS Division *Wiking*.² In 2019, the Finnish government published these diaries as part of a 250-page report. With the service of Finnish volunteers made public, another layer was added to the complexity of decisions made by Finns and their interactions with the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany during World War II.

The Impact of World War II on Finland

The Finnish experience during World War II greatly influenced and determined how Finnish leaders approached the following decades and how Finnish actions would be remembered in the national consensus. Finland struggled to recover from the immense losses suffered over the course of three wars. More than 600,000 Finns had served within the Finnish Defense Forces, fulfilling some military service.³ The war affected every Finnish family, and few homes were left untouched. Approximately 93,563 Finnish soldiers died during the wars, a further 2,086 civilians perished in Soviet bombings, and another 200 Finnish citizens were killed by Soviet partisan activity in border areas.⁴ Over 200,000 soldiers were wounded, including

¹ SS Volunteer Ahti Paikkala in Westerlund, *The Finnish SS-Volunteers and Atrocities 1941-1945*, 114.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ Jaakko Valtanen, “The Finnish Defense Forces as Part of a Democratic Society,” *National Defense University: Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy*, 3, no. 2 (2017), 2.

⁴ Nemye, *Finland at War: The Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 320.

5,000 with permanent disabilities.⁵ As with the Winter War, Finnish citizens had to retreat within the 1940 border.⁶ By advancing past the 1939 borders, the Finnish Army had moved the fighting away from most of the civilian population. However, as the Germans retreated, they burned an estimated one-third of Finnish farmland and infrastructure in northern Finland.⁷

Beyond the immense human cost, Finland had to fulfill the conditions laid out in the armistice before starting negotiations for a more formal treaty with the Soviet Union and other Allied nations. Throughout 1945 and 1946, Finland removed German troops, banned all organizations deemed “Hitlerite” by the Soviets, evacuated the ceded territories, prosecuted “war criminals,” and finally, scheduled and began payment of the \$226.5 million in war reparations to the Soviet Union.⁸ On March 4, 1946, Mannerheim resigned as president, and J. K. Paasikivi, the long-time politician and diplomat, took office.⁹ As a result, formal negotiations began, and on February 10, 1947, Finland signed the Peace of Paris with the Soviet Union and other nations that had declared war on Finland.¹⁰ This treaty reaffirmed the conditions of the armistice and added restrictions on the Finnish military. Jason Lavery notes in the immediate aftermath of the war, “Finland would have to choose a new course of relations with Moscow, one based on the realities of the time and the lessons of the past.”¹¹ With the same stoic determination that has been now ingrained in the Finnish national identity, the Finnish people uttering the saying, “The East took our men, the Germans took our women, the Swedes took our children, but at least we

⁵ Valtanen, “The Finnish Defense Forces as Part of a Democratic Society,” 2.

⁶ Gilmour and Jill Stephenson ed., *Hitler’s Scandinavian Legacy*, 229.

⁷ Nenye, *Finland at War, the Continuation and Lapland Wars*, 317.

⁸ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 135.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁰ “Treaty of Peace with Finland, 1947,” *The American Journal of International Law* 42, no. 3 (1948): 203-23.

¹¹ Lavery, *The History of Finland*, 130.

are left with our war debt,” quickly focused on recovery and rebuilding their devastated nation after World War II.¹²

Grounded in centuries-old experiences at war with Russia and later the Soviet Union, Finnish leaders entered into a military agreement to invade the Soviet Union, followed by the commitment to a co-belligerency with the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact. While their initial goals were limited to seizing the territory lost during the Winter War, Finnish success encouraged advances beyond those borders. Thus, Finland became embroiled in an ideological war of extermination on the Eastern Front. However, evaluations of Finnish decisions throughout World War II must be placed in the proper context that considers both the realities of its precarious geopolitical position and its long, troubled relationship with Russia.

Throughout Finnish history, its people and lands have served as a buffer zone between Eastern and Western Europe. First, as part of the Swedish Empire, then as an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, the Finns often found themselves at the mercy of these great powers vying for control. Yet despite this, a unique and distinct Finnish culture eventually flourished. Following the chaos of World War I and the collapse of the Russian Empire, Finland became an independent nation.¹³ Conflicting visions of Finland’s future resulted in a brief but bloody civil war that left lasting animosities amongst the Finnish people and lingering anti-communist views.

Thrust onto the world stage in 1918, Finnish leaders struggled to navigate a complex geopolitical environment. Maintaining its sovereignty was complicated due to its location as a strategic gateway and its over 800-mile border with the now revolutionary and ideologically driven neighbor—the Soviet Union. Stalin reportedly told Paasikivi during negotiations in 1939,

¹² Engle and Panannen, *The Winter War*, 148.

¹³ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 4.

“You can’t change geography, and neither can we.”¹⁴ Throughout the decades following the Great War, Finns attempted various means to both coexist with the Soviet Union and deter its expansionist tendencies. Lacking suitable allies and recognizing the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations, Finland relied on the policy of neutrality to protect its sovereignty. Confident in their neutrality and wary of developing events in the fall of 1939, Finland refused Soviet demands for territory and a mutual assistance treaty. While it is often easy to criticize, historians must be careful not to overestimate Finnish negotiating capabilities. As Henrik Lunde notes, “It was not the failure of these negotiations that changed the situation between Finland and the Soviet Union radically in 1939, but rather the new relationship between Germany and the Soviet Union.”¹⁵

After failed negotiations, Stalin authorized the invasion of Finland. With the Finns, in Mannerheim’s words, fighting “a Thermopylae every day,” they managed to hold off the Soviet onslaught for 105 days garnering much sympathy and admiration from the Western world.¹⁶ Aided by the Soviets’ poor performance, the Finns inflicted horrendous casualties on the Soviets.¹⁷ Unfortunately for the Finns, “the result of this conflict could not be in doubt in the long term. The force disparity was simply too great.”¹⁸ However, the tenacious defense, according to Eloise Engle and Lauri Paananen, “undoubtedly had much to do with Stalin’s decisions to bow out when he did. Subjugating the people of this stubborn, hostile nation would be an awkward task where guerilla activities were certain to continue indefinitely.”¹⁹ The Finns

¹⁴ “Geopolitics: The Root Cause of Paasikivi’s Foreign Policy,” *J. K. Paasikivi*, <https://jkpaasikivi.fi/en/geopolitics-the-root-cause-of-paasikivis-foreign-policy/>.

¹⁵ Lunde, *Finland’s War of Choice*, 11.

¹⁶ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 300.

¹⁷ Sander, *The Hundred Day Winter War*, 17.

¹⁸ Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm*, 81.

¹⁹ Engle and Paananen, *The Winter War*, 144.

signed the Treaty of Moscow, which, while it left Finnish sovereignty intact, Finland's territory was significantly reduced and vulnerable to potential invasions.

Although the Winter War devastated Finland, the war united a previously divided people and contributed to the culmination of Finnish national identity. Finns, after their experiences in the Winter War, rallied around the image of the Finnish soldier who “fights the towering, flat-footed invader to a standstill amidst the swirling snows of the Finnish fells, even besting him for the first six weeks, armed with little more than Suomi submachine guns, homemade Molotov cocktails, and a large supply of *sisu*.”²⁰ Furthermore, the Winter War directly influenced Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union and the resultant rapprochement between Finland and Germany.

Compounded by various Soviet diplomatic blunders, Finnish leaders increasingly sought at first economic support and then military equipment from Germany. There were limited options beyond Germany, especially after the fall of Norway and France, which left Finland virtually isolated from the West. Given the recent history and the actions of the Soviets, Russia was not an option. With German guarantees of grain and other supplies came the entangling agreements regarding transit rights and concessions regarding the vital Petsamo nickel mines. Finally, although documentation is unclear, Finns learned of German invasion plans and started coordinating efforts as early as January 1941, with the final details negotiated in May 1941. Agreeing to participate in German operations on the Eastern Front, along with enabling Finnish volunteers to join the Waffen SS, convolutes Finland's involvement in World War II. As Simo Muir notes, by “casting Finland as having been involved in a mainly pragmatic ‘separate war,’ the notion of separation sanitized the complexities of the alliance.”²¹ Furthermore, lacking the

²⁰ Sander, *The Hundred Day Winter War*, 1.

²¹ Muir, *Finland's Holocaust*, 3.

clarity of purpose from the Winter War, Finnish leaders, particularly Ryti's inner circle, made controversial decisions such as crossing the 1939 border and launching offensives into East Karelia that historians will continue to debate. As Jason Lavery observes, "Finland's conduct of the war was rife with paradoxes. It fought to defend a democracy by allying with a dictatorship that had expansionist and genocidal aims. In a purported defensive war, it conquered foreign territory."²²

Analyzing these paradoxes results in a difficult study of some of the potential "ideological convergence" of Finland and Germany beyond a strictly military relationship.²³ The irredentist belief of a "greater Finland," which surged following the Civil War, lost much of its support throughout the 1930s and only temporarily resurged following Finnish advances in the opening months of the Continuation War. While it is important to include the role of ideology, it is often in the background. The realities of geopolitics and economics are the primary driving factors in the decisions made by governments of smaller nations, who, because of geography, are often at the mercy of the surrounding great powers. Tendencies of antisemitism can be seen within the *Valpo* and some who served with the *Waffen SS*. However, even within the volunteers, the primary motivation was anti-Russian views emboldened by their experiences in the Winter War.²⁴ It is also vital to note, as Franklin Scott observes, while many within the government, especially Ryti's inner circle and the upper echelons of the Finnish Army were ready to capitalize on German military strength to enhance Finland's, "the motivation of the people had not been pro-German or pro-Nazi, . . . The end result was defeat by the Russians and hatred and disillusionment toward Germany."²⁵ Ideology is an underlying factor, but it is not the

²² Lavery, *The History of Finland* 127.

²³ Muir, *Finland's Holocaust*, 3.

²⁴ Westerlund, *Finnish SS Volunteers*, 13.

²⁵ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 244.

primary reason. The primary factors for Finnish alignment with Germany were guaranteeing Finnish sovereignty and preserving their way of life.

Thus, while each school of thought and interpretive lens contains elements of truth and, in many ways, there were elements within Finnish society that embodied aspects of the driftwood theory, the *Poltamo* Thesis, as well as Nazi collaboration, none presents a complete picture. Perhaps a better analogy would be that the actions and decisions of Finnish leaders embodied the role of a ballast tank. A ballast tank is the compartment in the hold of a ship that can be pumped full or emptied of water to provide stability. To prevent the ship from tipping over as it is unloaded or loaded, the ballast tanks must be carefully adjusted for the ship to remain afloat. In many ways, Finnish leaders had to strike a delicate balance between Germany and the Soviet Union to remain a sovereign nation. When fighting the Soviets to a standstill in the Winter War, their defensive tenacity encouraged the Soviets to reach a peace treaty. Thus, the Finnish ship of state remained barely afloat. However, seizing the opportunity to regain the lost territory and resources, Finnish leaders aligned the nation with Germany, a decision enhanced by past experiences with Germany and ideological convergence among a few key officials. However, the majority failed to anticipate the full intention of Germany and the nature of total war. This mistake nearly capsized Finland. However, realizing the error of their decisions, Finnish leaders such as Mannerheim, Paasikivi, Enckell, and others worked to extract Finland from Germany and regain stability. Demonstrating lessons learned, Finnish actions during the decades following the end of World War II and throughout the Cold War, resemble the role of a ballast tank in a cargo ship.

When presented with the opportunity to regain what they had lost during the devastating Winter War, the Finnish government entered a military agreement with Nazi Germany, and the

Finnish Army invaded the Soviet Union. Finnish leaders argued this was merely a continuation of what was started with the Winter War by the Soviets. Because no formal alliance was reached, and the Finnish and German troops operated under separate commands, the Finns failed to capitalize on the Soviet vulnerabilities of the Murmansk Railroad and Leningrad. By limiting their cooperation with German forces, Finnish leaders strove to maintain relations with the United States and other nations of the West.²⁶ They failed to realize the only way they could hold the territory they recovered and conquered was if the Soviet Union was utterly defeated. By aligning with Germany first through military cooperation and then co-belligerency, Finland became involved in a genocidal war of ideology on the Eastern Front, and some of its soldiers participated in Nazi atrocities committed against Jews, civilians, and Soviet prisoners of war. While Finland was able to extract itself from the Continuation War “without Soviet occupation; a significant portion of its young lay dead, its territory shrank, and its sovereignty curtailed.”²⁷ Over the following years, Finnish leaders and people attempted to recover from this devastation and once again navigate a vastly different Europe. The Finnish experience during World War II determined how Finnish leaders approached the growing tensions between the last remaining superpowers following the war—the United States and the Soviet Union.

While on the periphery of the conflict, the war in Finland had profound strategic implications. It could be argued that had the Finnish Army cut the Murmansk Railroad and aided in the siege of Leningrad, the city may have fallen, leaving the potential for the Soviet Union to negotiate peace terms. However, by attempting to balance relations with nations such as the United States, the Finns halted offensive operations, thus leaving the railroad open and a

²⁶ Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 423, 435-436.

²⁷ Ellman, *Hitler's Great Gamble*, 209.

continuous supply of Lend-Lease equipment to the beleaguered Soviets.²⁸ Thus, not fully committing to an alliance with Germany doomed Finland's attempt to successfully hold the recovered territory. As James Ellman notes, Germany's "most militarily potent allies, Finland and Japan, had both the historical animus and the ability to tip the balance against the USSR and lead to its defeat. That they did not do so was the proximate cause leading to the Soviet victory in Europe."²⁹ Therefore, while often neglected Finland's involvement in World War II contributed to the final outcome of the war.

Failing to realize the realities of both their new ally and warfare on the Eastern Front, Ryti and his inner circle led Finland to become a co-belligerent participating in German operations on the Eastern Front. The Finnish people, shielded by their government, welcomed the opportunity to regain what they lost and to no longer fight the Soviets alone. However, in so doing, Finland became complicit in some of the horrors of the attempted conquest of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Finnish leaders "clung to the notion that a single nation could wage a separate war while the world chose sides."³⁰ In the modern era and as a small nation, this would prove impossible. Even small nations can and have to make decisions; therefore, for Finland, it was a more willing "drift" toward Germany.³¹

Finland, strongly impacted by its troubled relationship with the Soviet Union, chose to enter a co-belligerency with Nazi Germany in order to pursue its own goals and to protect its citizens from the Soviet Union rather than furthering Nazi ideals. However, in doing so, Finland entangled itself in Nazi Germany's war of extermination against the Soviet Union. It is important to note as Finnish historian Antero Holmila states, "to say that Finland's Russophobic

²⁸ Westerlund, *The Finnish SS Volunteers*, 18.

²⁹ Ellman, *Hitler's Great Gamble*, 95.

³⁰ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 244.

³¹ Anthony Upton, *Finland in Crisis*, 27.

outlook shaped much of the Finnish thinking about the war and the Holocaust is not the same as to excuse Finnish response to the tragedy—for to explain is not to excuse.”³² Convinced that it was their only viable option and provided with an opportunity to regain lost territory, Finnish leaders pragmatically decided to commit to a co-belligerency with Nazi Germany. However, they failed to anticipate either the nature of warfare on the Eastern Front or the reality of the ramifications of allying with Nazi Germany. The Finnish-German co-belligerency played a significant role in the history of World War II and especially in Finland’s struggle as a newly independent nation navigating the complex geopolitical environment. Nevertheless, Finnish soldiers “fought skillfully and with a bravery that made the shields ring in Valhalla.... It was both a miracle and a tribute to her stubborn strength that she survived as a nation.”³³

³² Antero Holmila, *Reporting the Holocaust in the British, Swedish, and Finnish Press, 1945-50* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 57.

³³ Scott, *Scandinavia*, 244.

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