

The Race for Northern Europe:

Thesis:

Outbreak of WWII (Sept. 1 1939) and Soviet invasion of Finland (Nov. 1939) unleashed a RACE FOR NORTHERN EUROPE by great powers!

Interests in region:

- Iron ore in Northern Sweden, exported to Germany, =raw material most vital to Nazi armaments industry:
 - Via port of Narvik and Norway's coast
 - By train thru Sweden and shipped thru Baltic
- Strategic importance of Norwegian coast to British security/German interest in naval bases on coast.
- Germany calculated that the continued neutrality of North (ie free-trade) would best serve German interests, interest in maintaining "status quo."

Developments in Fall 1939/winter 1940:

- Soviet Union aimed at "re-absorbing" Finland and three Baltic states (liberated 20 years earlier). USSR felt threatened by Hitler's aggression.

- Soviet invasion sparked discussions by Western Allies about aid to Finland and possible occupation of iron-ore fields in Northern Sweden and Narvik. Attempted to form policy of greater Allied influence in Scandinavia.
- Allied fear of Soviet conquest of Norwegian coast.
- Vidkun Quisling (leader of Norwegian NS) visited Hitler's Berlin in December 1939, with "invitation" to nazify Norway.
- By winter 1939/40, both Western Allies ("Allied Invention Plan") and Nazi Germany were preparing to extend the War into Northern Europe.

The Tide Turns:

- Resolution of the "iron ore question" called for Swedish cooperation. (Motivation for assistance to Finland was attempt to persuade Sweden to accept occupation of Orefields by Allied troops).
- Sweden maintains neutrality – does not join Finnish cause (Winter War) despite Allied pressure (Sweden feared Soviet & German counter-measures).

- Sweden declared it would not permit passage of belligerent troops through Sweden to Finland.
- Ending of Winter War, Finland signed peace with Moscow 12 March 1940, accepting substantial territorial losses and 400,000 Karelian refugees.
- Preconditions for Western intervention in North had changed. Allies reduced military preparations for invention, while Germany continued deliberate preparations (spurred in February by “Altmark” incident, German vessel in Norwegian waters)
- March 1, Hitler order execution of Operation West.

Occupation of Denmark and Norway, April 9, 1940:

- No political or military preparedness by Denmark and Norway.
- British had laid minefield off of Narvik.