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Between Germany and Russia

Olli Vehviläinen
Translated by Gerard McAlester

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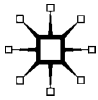

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Preface

An invasion launched by the Soviet Union on 30 November 1939 forced Finland to engage in a defensive struggle which, despite the assistance provided by Sweden, France and Great Britain, it for the most part waged alone. In the end, it was compelled to accept a dictated peace, but it preserved its independence. During the three and a half months of the Winter War, the gaze of the whole world was focused on the unequal struggle that was going on in the north of Europe. In contrast, Finland's later engagement in the Second World War received less attention, buried as it was under the avalanche of more newsworthy events in the greater war. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, Finland joined the Germans with the aim of getting restitution for what it had lost in the Peace of Moscow and obtaining a secure border in the east. Subsequently, Great Britain also declared war on Finland. Finland was the only democratic country that fought on the German side. After waging heavy defensive battles against the Soviet forces in the summer of 1944, it managed to pull out of the war and conclude an armistice. It was the first belligerent nation to succeed in this. It was also the only state on the side of Germany that the victors did not occupy, and it was the only western neighbour of the Soviet Union that preserved its democratic system after the war.

The views of the Finns concerning the war that they waged have changed over the years. Earlier, at least in public, they tended to emphasize their errors, such as intransigence in the face of the demands made by the Soviet Union in autumn 1939, which then persuaded Stalin to attack Finland, or their decision to align themselves with Germany in 1940–41. Subsequently, most Finns have come to consider that the country's struggle in the Second World War was a fight for survival, and that, in a situation where there were only bad alternatives to choose from, Finland made what in retrospect would seem to have been the least harmful choices. The Finnish interpretations have always been made with the knowledge that the nation was close to annihilation on several occasions during the Second World War. A number of American, British, German and Swedish historians have made important contributions from their own points of view to the study of Finland's role in the Second World War. In the Soviet Union, the Winter War was mostly passed over in silence as a

less honourable 'incident', and later events were seen as part of the Great Patriotic War against fascism. One notes with pleasure that over the last few years an open scholarly debate on the subject has started with Russian researchers, and that the archives of the former Soviet Union have been partly opened up.

During my period of tenure, I had the pleasure to be in charge of two extensive research projects. I am grateful to the researchers, both senior and junior, of the Research Project Finland in the Second World War and to my colleagues, Finns and Russians alike, who worked in the Finnish–Russian Winter War Project. This book is to a great extent based on the work that was done in these two projects. Rauno Endén, the former Secretary-General of the Finnish Historical Society, has provided valuable advice on a variety on subjects during the production of this work. Professor Robert E. Bieder (Indiana University), Ilkka Juonala, the former editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Aamulehti*, and Dr Pertti Luntinen, my colleague from the University of Tampere, have taken the trouble to read the manuscript and to offer helpful comments. Professor John C. Cairns (University of Toronto), Professor David N. Dilks (University of Hull), Professor Keith W. Olson (University of Maryland) and Professor Peter Such (University College of the Fraser Valley) have helped me with their advice at various stages of the work, as have my Finnish colleagues Dr Antti Laine, Professor Ohto Manninen, Colonel Jyri Paulaharju, Professor Erkki Pihkala and Professor Hannu Soikkanen. I am deeply indebted to all of them. I am also most grateful to the staff of the Department of History of the University of Tampere, particularly Riitta Aallos and Risto Kunnari from the departmental office, and Sari Pasto from the University's Center for North American Studies, who were always willing to help. I would also like to extend my thanks to the staff of the Savonlinna School of Translation Studies, where it has been possible for me to work in the heart of the Finnish lake district during the summer months. I am most grateful to the Finnish Historical Society for funding the translation from the Eino Jutikkala Translation Fund. My patient translator, Gerard McAlester from the University of Tampere, deserves special thanks for translating this work from Finnish to English. I would also like to thank Kristiina Halonen for excellent work in drawing the maps. As the consultant editor, Jo Campling deserves my special gratitude for arranging the contact with the publishers.

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May 2001

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From Northern Outback to Modern Nation

Finland is the daughter of the Baltic. It is embraced by the gulfs of that sea, the Gulf of Finland in the south and the Gulf of Bothnia in the west. In the east, it borders on the boundless forests and swamps of northern Russia. Along its perilous southern coast a sea route to Russia has run ever since prehistoric times. This was used by the Vikings on their expeditions into the east and by many other maritime peoples after them. The sea was the Finns' highway to the cities of Europe. They might live far away from them but they were not totally cut off from them.

In the Middle Ages, Finland became a battlefield in the struggle for supremacy between Sweden and the Russian principality of Novgorod and at the same time was involved in a conflict between two churches: the Roman Catholic and the Russian Orthodox. Gradually Sweden subdued most of the areas inhabited by the Finns, and in the far north Finland came to represent the extreme frontier of western Christendom. Karelia, the area inhabited by the easternmost Finnish tribe, which stretched from the White Sea to Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland, was divided, the eastern part coming under the rule of Novgorod and later Russia, and thus coming within the precincts of the Orthodox Church. In this way, the frontier drawn with the sword between Finnish Karelia and Russian Karelia also became a border between two cultures.

Finland was considered by Sweden not as a conquered land or a colony but as an integral part of the centrally administered kingdom of Sweden. Swedish rule brought Western culture, the Lutheran faith, the Scandinavian liberty of the peasant, the rudiments of popular education, rule by law and efficient government to Finland. Another legacy of Swedish rule was bilingualism. Swedish was the language of

administration, higher education and the upper classes, but the majority of the people spoke Finnish.[1] However, as Russia grew in strength, Sweden was no longer able to hold on to Finland. In 1709, Peter the Great routed the Swedish army at the Battle of Poltava, and Sweden's position as a great power in the Baltic collapsed. In the middle of Finnish-inhabited lands he had conquered from the Swedes, Peter founded his new capital: St Petersburg.

However, it was not until the time of the Napoleonic wars that Russia finally conquered the rest of Finland. In order to keep the country pacified, Alexander I promised the Finnish representatives at the Diet in Porvoo in February 1809 that he would uphold the religion and the rights the people had hitherto enjoyed. Finland became a Grand Duchy of the Czar of Russia, with its own administration run by Finnish civil servants. They continued to follow the laws of the period of Swedish rule, and Swedish remained the language of administration. Finland, which had been one of the poorest corners of Europe, now became more prosperous. The country's wealth sprang – and indeed still springs – from its forests. There was a growing demand for Finnish timber on the markets of Western Europe, while Finnish industry profited from handsome customs concessions within the Russian Empire, and Finnish metal, textile and paper products found extensive markets there.

The connection with the Empire did not lead to a Russification of Finland; on the contrary, its separate status became stronger over time. Among the numerous minorities of the Russian Empire, this Grand Duchy of three million people enjoyed a clearly distinct and indeed privileged position. Its population confessed to the Lutheran faith and spoke Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue. It had its own Diet, its own money, its own railways and its own army. Finnish became the second official language alongside Swedish, and as a result of an often bitter language dispute, the Finnish-speaking population strengthened its position in society. The Finns' cultural links with Russia were tenuous. The country's main scholarly, technological and ecclesiastical contacts were with Germany and Scandinavia. Literature, art and music followed the movements of western Europe. The Finns considered that they were altogether more advanced in terms of social conditions, education and technology than Russia. On the other hand, Russia was a good trade partner, and belonging to the Empire brought them many advantages. They had no reason to aspire to independence as long as Russia permitted them to live their own way of life.[2] However, it was just this freedom that was cast in doubt as the nineteenth century approached its close.

Russian nationalists had become ever more critical of the special privileges enjoyed by minority peoples living on the fringes of the Empire. They began to speak of a united, undivided Russian Empire. The Russian civil service tried to bolster the realm internally by centralizing the administration, as was being done in many other European countries. According to the Finnish interpretation, Alexander I and his successors on the throne had solemnly endorsed the Finnish constitution, on which its autonomous position was based. The Russians now disputed this. They considered that Russia held Finland by right of conquest. Admittedly the Finns had cunningly taken advantage of their rulers' benevolence to obtain all kinds of privileges for themselves, but these could be revoked whenever the interests of the Empire so required. In 1898, the energetic Nikolai Bobrikov was appointed by Nicholas II as Governor General of Finland, and he began to implement a policy of integration. The policy of the Russian government certainly did not bring about a rapprochement between Finland and the Empire; in fact, it had exactly the opposite effect. The Finnish people, who up to then had been loyal subjects of the Czar, resisted the Russification measures. In doing so, they felt that they were defending their legal rights, Western culture and Nordic liberty against imperial despotism.

After its defeat in the war against Japan in October 1905, Russia suffered from a widespread wave of strikes, which shook the position of the Czar. The strikes spread to Finland as well. Both non-socialists and socialists, who were organizing under the banner of social democracy, took part in a week-long general strike, which brought the country to a standstill. The general strike represented the breakthrough of democracy in Finland. The Diet, a relic of the days of Swedish rule that left the majority of the people without representation, was abolished, and the Parliament Act of 1906 implemented universal suffrage. Finnish women were the first in the world to be granted both suffrage and eligibility for office. In the new unicameral Parliament, the Social Democrats won eighty seats out of two hundred.

Once the situation in Russia had settled, measures aiming at the Russification of Finland were resumed. From the Russians' point of view, it was a matter of modernizing the Empire into a centrally administered and nationally unified state. The Finns, on the other hand, considered that their whole way of life was threatened. The growing tension between the great powers now began increasingly to affect the position of Finland. In order to protect St Petersburg, the Russians started to build a system of fortifications called the 'Sea Fortress of Peter the Great', which was designed to shut off the Gulf of Finland.

The outbreak of the First World War and Russian defeats at the hands of Germany raised the hopes of many Finns that the outcome might result in an improvement in the position of the country. Students began to consider the idea of a rebellion. Naturally, this would require trained men and arms. Finnish activists turned their gaze towards Germany, whose strategy included support for disaffected national minorities in order to weaken the enemy. It agreed to train Finnish volunteers, who formed the *Königlich Preussiches Jägerbataillon 27*. These *Jägers* were to play a significant role in subsequent events.

The monarchy in Russia was overthrown by the Russian Revolution in March 1917. The provisional government that took power decided to continue the country's involvement in the war, and the suppressed ambitions of the Empire's minority peoples now came to the fore. However, the provisional government, supported by the Liberals and groups of the moderate left, wanted to keep the Empire intact and to prevent peripheral nations from breaking away. Consequently, it hastened to restore the privileges that Finland had previously enjoyed, while reserving for itself the former powers of the Czar and rejecting the Finns' demands for complete internal independence.

The rise to power of the Bolsheviks in Russia in November created a totally new situation. The Soviet government announced that it agreed to the separation of national minorities. In Finland, the idea of complete independence received increasing support. The Bolshevik revolution had increased social agitation and when the old order collapsed the workers began to form units called 'Red Guards', while the non-socialists created their own 'Civil Guards'. The presence in the country of Russian revolutionary military units encouraged the workers, who increasingly began to take matters into their own hands. This strengthened the desire of the non-socialists to sever the country altogether from revolutionary Russia, and the government of P.E. Svinhufvud asked Germany to provide help in ejecting the Russian forces from the country.

In fact, Germany's war aim in the east was to weaken Russia by detaching its western fringe territories. The new states thus created would in the future be dependent on Germany. In August 1917, General Erich Ludendorff, who was the real leader behind German policy, told the Crown Council that the severance of the Ukraine and Finland from Russia was in the military and economic interests of Germany. When the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia in early November, Germany realized that its chance had come. Its first aim was to make peace with Russia, so that it could concentrate its forces for a decisive blow in the west.

Nothing must jeopardize this. But if the Bolsheviks, in accordance with their doctrine of self-determination for the non-Russian nationalities, themselves agreed to the separation of Finland from Russia, Germany could draw Finland into its sphere of influence without endangering a separate peace with Russia. On 26 November, Ludendorff received envoys from Finland, who brought with them a request for assistance from the Finnish government. The general was reluctant to dispatch the navy into the northern Baltic in winter with its darkness, fog and Russian mines. However, he advised Finland to declare its independence as soon as possible and to demand the withdrawal of Russian troops from the country, and he pledged German support for these measures.

This removed the Finns' last vestiges of doubt before taking the plunge. On 6 December 1917, Parliament passed a declaration drawn up by the government proclaiming that Finland was an independent republic. The Social Democrats, who were in opposition, also supported independence, but they thought that it should be achieved by means of an agreement with Russia. Svinhufvud's government would have preferred to have nothing to do with its Russian counterpart under V.I. Lenin. However, it had to take the wishes of Germany into account. Germany still did not want to offend the Soviet government, with which it was currently engaged in peace negotiations. It advised the Finnish leaders to request the government of Russia to recognize the independence of Finland. Svinhufvud himself set off to deliver the request. On 31 December, a few minutes before midnight, the Finns were handed a document of recognition by the Council of People's Commissars. When Svinhufvud asked that he might be allowed to present his thanks to Lenin in person, the latter appeared on the scene, and the recognition of Finnish independence was sealed with a handshake. Afterwards, Lenin realized that he had addressed the Finnish bourgeois delegates as 'comrades', which amused him greatly.

The recognition of Finland's independence by Lenin and the Council of People's Commissars was no gift. Lenin was confident that the revolution would very soon spread beyond the borders of Russia, in the first place to Germany. By recognizing Finnish independence, he calculated that he would dispel the national prejudices of the Finns and thus further the victory of the revolution there. Once the revolution triumphed, nation states would in any case become an irrelevance.[3]

Finnish independence began with a tragedy. In January 1918, the government decided to restore order in the country, which was being threatened by the activities of the Red Guards and the Russian soldiers. The task was given to General C.G. Mannerheim, a Finnish aristocrat

who had made his career in the Imperial Russian Army and returned to his native land after the revolution. On the night of 27 January 1918, the Civil Guards disarmed the Russian garrisons in the province of Ostrobothnia in western Finland. At the same time, encouraged by Lenin, the revolutionaries, who had gained the upper hand in the workers' organizations, instigated an uprising. This was the beginning of a civil war between the Whites and the Reds that was to last for nearly four months. To start with the Reds seized the southern parts of the country, while the Whites were based in the west and north. The Civil Guards formed the backbone of the White army. Most of the soldiers were of landed peasant or middle-class stock. The Red forces were composed almost entirely of the urban proletariat and the poor of the countryside. They obtained all their arms from Bolshevik Russia, and a few Russians fought alongside them in the war. The Whites, for their part, had the support of Germany, which supplied them with weapons. Germany also allowed the *Jägers*, who had been fighting there as volunteers, to return home to join the government forces.

As Germany began to advance on Petrograd (as St Petersburg was renamed in 1914), Finland came to assume considerable importance. After peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks had broken down in mid-February, the Germans launched an offensive. The Bolsheviks were completely incapable of putting up any resistance. Estonia was quickly taken by the Germans. Intervention in the Finnish Civil War now offered them a chance to take control of the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland. At the beginning of April, a German division landed on the southern coast of Finland and took Helsinki. The government set up by the Reds fled to Russia.

A cruel vengeance was exacted on the Reds who surrendered. The number of those sentenced to death or summarily executed is still in dispute, but it is calculated that over 12,000 persons died of hunger and disease in the crammed prison camps. These events created a rift in the nation which has taken much time to heal. There is not even a universally accepted name for the tragedy of 1918: the Whites called it the 'War of Liberation' to indicate that it had secured the country's independence. An alternative name has subsequently been adopted: the 'Civil War', which emphasizes the contradictions and disputes in Finnish society that lay behind the conflict.

As a result of the Civil War, there was growing support for a monarchy in Finland, for it was thought that a king with wide powers would be able to protect the existing social system. In May, a depleted Parliament (nearly all the Social Democrat members were absent – in prison or in

exile) elected P.E. Svinhufvud, a strongly pro-German monarchist, as Regent. A government was formed under J.K. Paasikivi, another pro-German monarchist. The supporters of the German orientation believed that Russia remained a constant threat to the country's independence whatever the political colour of the government there. 'Russia will eventually attack as surely as autumn and winter follow summer', Paasikivi wrote to a friend, adding that only Germany might then be capable of providing Finland with armed assistance. 'If it doesn't, our independence will be but a brief episode in our history', he warned.[4]

It was the goal of the German military leaders to bind Finland to Germany by means of political, commercial and military ties. In the prevailing situation Finland held out important strategic advantages for Germany. Finland would provide a base from which it would be possible to pose a convincing threat to the Russian capital. Furthermore, in the future, Finland would constitute the northernmost link in a German-controlled chain of states stretching from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea. And in fact, the agreements signed by the government of Finland made the country the ward of Germany as far as foreign policy and foreign trade were concerned. The Finnish Army was organized and trained under German officers. In October 1918, Parliament elected Prince Friedrich Karl of Hesse King of Finland.[5]

One of the aims of the Finnish government was to unite Russian Karelia with Finland. The region had never belonged to Finland, and the people were Russian Orthodox in religion. However, they mostly spoke Finnish or closely related languages, traditional Finnish folk culture had been preserved there better than in Finland proper, and it was from there that most of the *Kalevala*, the national epic poem of the Finns, had been collected. The Finns' interest in Eastern Karelia, as they called it, had taken wing with the growth of the ideal of nationhood. This ethnic romanticism was at first cultural in nature, but it subsequently took on a political aspect. A dream of a 'Greater Finland' was inspired by the strongly nationalistic atmosphere created by independence. Nor was there anything particularly astonishing about the idea of uniting the 'bardic lands of the *Kalevala*' with Finland at a time when frontiers all over Europe were being redrawn according to the principle of nationhood. Almost all political circles in Finland considered the demand justified. Even the Red government had expressed its wishes in this respect to the Soviet leaders. One of the motives of the Finnish government's German orientation was to get German support for its policy on Eastern Karelia. This, however, Germany was not willing to provide, as it did not wish to provoke the Soviet government.

The monarchy in Germany was overthrown on 9 November 1918, and two days later the country submitted to an armistice. Austria-Hungary disintegrated. Democracy and the ideal of nationhood seemed to have prevailed in middle and eastern Europe. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became independent. The German orientation in Finland ended. The Regent, Svinhufvud, and the monarchist government of Paasikivi resigned. German troops left the country, and a British fleet sailed into the Baltic. The Finnish Parliament elected General Mannerheim, who leant towards entente, as Regent, and he was given the job of establishing relations with the victorious states. As a condition of recognizing Finland, these required certain changes in domestic politics, the most important being that a new general election be held.

In the general election of March 1919, the Social Democrats, who represented the workers' movement, once again emerged as the biggest party. After the Civil War, the party had reorganized under leaders who had stayed clear of the revolution. It had proclaimed itself a supporter of Western social democracy and had drawn a line between itself and the more extreme left. It was aided in this by the fact that those who were in favour of a violent revolution had founded the Finnish Communist Party in Moscow in August 1918. The leading figure among the Social Democrats was the pragmatic representative of the cooperative movement, Väinö Tanner. The second largest party was the Agrarian League, which had won the support of the landed peasant population, and which during the constitutional dispute had been clearly in favour of a republic. Of the smaller non-socialist parties, the Progressive Party was also republican in sympathy. The right, made up of the conservative National Coalition Party and the Swedish People's Party, constituted a clear minority.

The constitution was the result of a compromise. In order to satisfy the right, who demanded a strong government, the President was to be given wide prerogatives in order to counter the power of Parliament. According to the constitution, the President of the Republic was to be elected by a college of 300 electors chosen by universal suffrage. However, the first presidential election was exceptionally conducted by Parliament. The opposing candidates were C.G. Mannerheim (the 'White General') and K.J. Ståhlberg, the President of the Supreme Administrative Court, who had been largely responsible for penning the constitution. Ståhlberg, a liberal, got the backing of the centrist parties and the Social Democrats and beat Mannerheim by 143 votes to 50. It was Ståhlberg's task to institute Western-style parliamentary government in the Finnish political system and to build national reconciliation on the ruins of the Civil War.

In its foreign policy, Finland now clearly looked to the West. With the Western powers planning an intervention in the civil war that was being waged in Russia, the position of Finland assumed considerable importance, possessing as it did a well organized army in the immediate vicinity of Petrograd. Furthermore, Mannerheim, who had served in the Czar's army for nearly thirty years, passionately desired to assume the role of the 'saviour' of Russia. In the summer of 1919, when the counter-revolutionary armies in Russia were pressing the Bolsheviks hard, and the forces of General Yudenich were bearing down on Petrograd from Estonia, Mannerheim proposed an assault on the city on the Neva.

However, Finnish political circles regarded these projects with some reservation. It is true they dreaded the idea of Bolshevik rule in Russia, but they also had a deep mistrust of the Russian Whites. Their minimum condition was that the latter should unreservedly recognize the independence of Finland, but this the Russian counter-revolutionaries consistently refused to do. In their opinion, Russia might just give up Poland but never Finland, because it would open the way for an enemy attack on Petrograd and northwest Russia. To defend the capital it was necessary to have real safeguards – Russian garrisons and fortifications on each side of the Gulf of Finland in order to be able to close it off. Mannerheim appealed in vain to President Ståhlberg to embark on 'a decisive battle against the most cruel despotism in the world'.[6] The general's assurances that the overthrow of Soviet power was only a matter of time fell on deaf ears. When the fortunes of war eventually turned against the White generals, the world was forced to accustom itself to the fact that Soviet power had come to stay, at least for the time being. A Finnish peace delegation headed by J.K. Paasikivi met Soviet representatives in the city of Tartu in Estonia.

There was still widespread support for the unification of Eastern Karelia with Finland. According to the instructions approved by all the parties in Parliament, the Finnish negotiators were to seek agreement on a 'natural' frontier, which would run from Lake Ladoga via Lake Onega to the White Sea. This the Soviet government had not the slightest intention of accepting. Since the railway line to Murmansk, whose harbour was ice-free throughout the year, had been built in 1916, the economic and strategic significance of Eastern Karelia had grown considerably. When Finland did not get the support that it had hoped for from Britain, it finally had to give up its attempts to obtain even some areas of Eastern Karelia. For its part, the Soviet government withdrew its proposal that the border in southeast Finland should be

moved a bit further away from Petrograd. The peace agreement was signed in Tartu on 14 October 1920. In it Finland obtained Pechenga (Petsamo in Finnish) and with it an outlet to the Arctic Ocean. In other respects the border remained the same as it had been when Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russia, running quite close to Petrograd. (See Map 1.1)

After independence, Finland had to find its place in a Europe whose political map had been completely redrawn. Half a dozen new states had come into being between Germany and Russia. The building of an independent state was easier in Finland than in many other countries in that it already had an infrastructure that had been created during the period of its autonomy within the Russian Empire. Its population of three million was ethnically very homogenous: 96 per cent adhered to the Lutheran faith, and the minority who spoke Swedish as their mother tongue amounted to only 11 per cent. This minority felt that it belonged to the same nation as the Finnish-speaking majority, and the position of Swedish as the second national language was inscribed in the constitution. The dominant characteristics of Finnish culture, society and political tradition associated the country with Scandinavia. On the other hand, in its economic structure it resembled the countries of eastern Europe where industrialization had come late. It was still very much an agrarian country; about 70 per cent of the people gained their living from agriculture and forestry, and the traditions and values of the countryside pervaded Finnish society. Agriculture was mainly small farming. A typical farm would include some forest, from which the farmer obtained a significant part of his livelihood. The Agrarian League, which enjoyed the support of the majority of the small farmers, became the key party in the political life of the republic.

Finland's increased prosperity was crucially dependent on exports. Before the First World War, it had mainly exported timber goods to Western Europe, and the products of the paper, metal and textile industries to Russia. Exports to the east ceased after the Russian Revolution. However, the Finnish paper-making industry soon succeeded in conquering new markets in the West. The most important export market for Finland was undoubtedly Great Britain, and the rapid growth in the country's prosperity was to a great extent based on its trade with Britain. There was plenty of wood in Finland, and the fact that the Finnish mark was undervalued boosted exports. Hundreds of thousands of people living in the countryside earned a living from selling their forests, working as lumberjacks and in sawmills.

Map 1.1 Finland after the Peace of Tartu (1920)

The victory of the republicans in 1919 constituted the foundation of the Finnish political system. Within the government, power was mainly wielded by the centrist parties – the Agrarian League and the Progressive Party – with the tacit support of the Social Democrats. However, it took a considerable time for the long shadow of the Civil War to disappear. The agenda of President Ståhlberg and the parties of the centre included a programme of national unity, but the political right, which presented itself as the guardian of the legacy of the War of Liberation, stood in the way of reconciliation; it branded the Social Democrats as unpatriotic, and tried to exclude the country's biggest party from power. The representatives of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking right accounted for only about a quarter of the seats in Parliament, but the influence of the right was increased by the support it enjoyed in the worlds of business and culture as well as the civil service, the military and the Civil Guards. The latter was a volunteer paramilitary organization that strove to maintain the social hegemony of 'White Finland'. Such attitudes caused disaffection among the workers. Another cause for the bitterness they felt was the continuation of the patriarchal tradition in working life and the hostile attitude of employers towards trade unionism.[7] And there was yet a further source of conflict in the young republic: the language dispute. Behind this lay the strivings of educated Finnish speakers to oust the Swedish-speaking upper class from their traditional position as leaders in administrative and cultural life.

The Communist Party was banned in Finland and conducted its operations from Russia. The majority of workers supported the Social Democrats, who also found some following among small farmers. On the other hand, the Communists gained a firm foothold within the trade union movement. In the atmosphere of the Depression, the defiant behaviour of the extreme left provoked a popular movement, which initially received mass support from the landed farmers of Ostrobothnia in western Finland. It was called the 'Lapua Movement' after the name of the place in Ostrobothnia that formed its main base, and it saw itself as the defender of the legacy of the War of Liberation, which weak governments had squandered through their willingness to compromise. It demanded the suppression of the activities of the Communists and a strong government. In the beginning, the aims of the movement were widely approved within the non-socialist section of the population. Riding on this rightist wave, P.E. Svinhufvud, who enjoyed wide popularity among the people, was first made Prime Minister and then President. However, the Lapua Movement soon

became extremist and resorted to terrorism, which turned mainstream non-socialist opinion against it. Svinhufvud proved to be a disappointment to the supporters of the extreme right, and when some of the leaders of the Lapua Movement, joined by Civil Guards, rose in rebellion in February 1932, the President used his authority to quash it without loss of blood. The Lapua Movement was banned, and its successor, the Patriotic People's Movement, settled for more lawful means of operating.

In the general election of 1933, the same year that Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, the right-wing parties suffered a smarting defeat. The Patriotic People's Movement, which mainly resembled the Italian Fascists in its behaviour and its ideology, was isolated, particularly after J.K. Paasikivi, whose ideal was British Conservatism, was elected leader of the National Coalition Party in 1934. Thus the development in Finland was the opposite of that in the countries of eastern and central Europe, where democratic regimes were collapsing one after another. In Finland, the parliamentary system was reinforced, and the support of the voters went to the large democratic parties: the Social Democrats and the Agrarian League. The reasons for this process lay mainly in the robustness of the country's democratic principles and the people's deep-rooted respect for the rule of law, personified above all by President Svinhufvud. Moreover, the Depression had not affected Finland as badly as it had done many other countries. The economic progress that continued fairly steadily throughout the interwar period created the conditions for a stable society.

Like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, Finland had obtained along with its independence a fairly advantageous border at a point in time when Russia was weak. The great power of the east had been almost pushed out of the Baltic altogether. However, these five border states had to take into account the likelihood that as Russia grew in strength it would no longer be satisfied with this situation. For its part, Moscow regarded these states as all belonging to the cordon sanitaire created by the victors of the First World War. It considered that any one of them might offer a foothold for 'imperialist powers' to attack and crush the world's first socialist state.

After independence, the atmosphere in Finland was nationalistic and strongly anti-Russian and anti-Communist. The propaganda of the Whites had thrown the blame for the 'Red Rebellion' of 1918 on the Russians. The Russophobia of the extreme right was a form of ethnic hatred expressing a sense of racial superiority over the Russians, who were branded as 'the arch-enemy'. The question of Eastern Karelia also

strongly affected the Finns' attitude to their eastern neighbour. The most passionate supporters of a 'Greater Finland' denounced the Peace of Tartu as a shameful betrayal of the people of Eastern Karelia which left them at the mercy of the Bolsheviks. In 1921 there was an uprising in Eastern Karelia against the Bolsheviks, and Finnish volunteers crossed the border in support of it. After its suppression, Finnish activists founded the Academic Karelia Society to keep alive the ideal of a 'Greater Finland'. The Society, whose ideology was characterized by jingoism and 'hatred of the Ruskies', found widespread support among students, and many of the educated class of the young republic joined it. The Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of Karelia, established by the Bolsheviks in Russian Karelia with leaders drawn from the Finnish Reds who had fled from Finland after the Civil War, was generally considered in Finland to be no more than a crude attempt to camouflage political and ethnic oppression.

In Finland, Soviet Russia was feared both as the heir to Czarist imperialism and the seat of Communism. For its part, Russia was suspicious of Finnish intentions. Naturally it did not fear Finland itself or its army, but it did consider it highly likely that a hostile power might use Finnish territory as a springboard for an assault on Russia. In 1918 the Finns had invited the Germans into their country. A year later, they had offered Britain bases from which British motor torpedo boats attacked Russian warships. Why might this not happen again? Relations between Finland and its eastern neighbour continued to be strained by tensions and mutual hostility. The language used about the 'White Finns' in the Russian media corresponded in their crudity to the Russophobic rantings of the Finnish right.

The expected threat from the east dominated both Finland's foreign policy and its military planning. The most important task of foreign policy was to ensure in advance that outside help would be available if needed. However, this was a difficult problem. The Finnish leaders realized that it would be too risky for Finland to throw in its lot with the Baltic countries and Poland because it might involve the country in conflicts where its own interests were not at stake. Germany could no longer offer any protection. The Weimar regime maintained good relations with Soviet Russia, which came as a great disappointment to German sympathizers in Finland. Great Britain was content to promote its own commercial interests in the Baltic area. It was not possible to rely on the Scandinavian countries; they were weak, and relations with Sweden had been cool for some time. After the First World War, Sweden had sought to obtain possession of the Åland Islands, which

were, however, strategically important to Finland. The people of the islands, who were totally Swedish-speaking, had expressed their desire to be united with Sweden. The League of Nations had settled the matter in favour of Finland, and for a long time this question strained relations between the two neighbouring countries, as did the language dispute in Finland, in which Sweden understandably sided with the Swedish-speaking minority.

The best guarantor of Finnish security was considered to be the League of Nations. Finland was a loyal and active member of the organization, and in its activities within the League, Finland had done its utmost to obtain special guarantees for the security of small nations. Like the other new nations of eastern and central Europe, Finland was part of an international system established under the leadership of the Western powers at the expense of Germany and Russia. The position of the young nations depended on the continued existence of that system, and it was threatened by the growing strength of Germany and the Soviet Union in the 1930s.

2
The Clouds Gather

The coming to power of the National Socialists in Germany in January 1933 completely altered the balance of eastern Europe. Anti-communism – which was an integral element of Adolf Hitler's ideology – began to influence Germany's eastern policy, and as a result German relations with the USSR became openly hostile. Poland, which had been France's most important ally in eastern Europe, signed a declaration of non-aggression with Germany, and Moscow was forced to reassess the whole international situation. Up to now it had considered that the principal danger to the world's first socialist state came from Britain and France. Now a new and much more formidable threat had appeared, and the Soviet Union feared that Germany would begin to put into effect the eastern expansion outlined by the Führer in *Mein Kampf* as soon as the opportunity arose. The Soviet government therefore made advances to France, which for its part did not hesitate to seize the chance to get the major power of the east both to endorse the status quo in eastern Europe and to reconcile itself with the League of Nations. For the Kremlin it was a case of using the advice Lenin had given about taking advantage of the mutual conflicts of the capitalist countries in order to avoid the isolation of the Soviet Union and prevent any attack against it.[1]

In Finland, the end of German–Soviet friendship was greeted with satisfaction. Although there were few admirers of national socialism among the Finns, many of them thought that the increased strength of a rearming Germany would constitute a healthy counterbalance to the feared might of Russia. On the other hand, Moscow followed with concern all signs of an increase in German influence in the buffer zone formed by Finland and the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and Poland. These so-called 'border states' had come to constitute an

important shield against German ambitions, and it became the aim of Soviet policy in the Baltic to maintain the status quo in this area.

In May 1934, the governments of France and the USSR came to an agreement about the fundamental principles on which the so-called Eastern Pact should be built. According to the proposal, the USSR, Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania should sign an agreement in which they pledged mutual assistance in accordance with the Covenant of the League of Nations. The aim was to prevent Germany from establishing its predominance in eastern Europe. It fell through when Germany and Poland refused to be parties to it. Finland had made its negative stance clear from the very outset. It had concluded a treaty on non-aggression with the Soviet Union in 1932 and rejected further arrangements. Finland, Estonia and Latvia all feared that if a European war broke out, the Soviet Union would appeal to the Eastern Pact and send its troops into their territories, after which it would be impossible to get them out again.[2] All in all, the Eastern Pact provided Finland with a salutary reminder of the cold realities that now obtained in the small nations of the Baltic area, who found themselves in a field of tension between Germany and the Soviet Union.

When Italy attacked Abyssinia in October 1935, Finland, like nearly all the other member states of the League of Nations, participated in the sanctions against the aggressor, and the disappointment was all the greater when the sanctions failed to stop Italy. Confidence in the security guarantees that the League of Nations offered had received a mortal blow, and it was time to take stock of the situation. The four Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) began to cooperate more closely, and Finland and Sweden started to improve their defence capabilities.

Finland was connected to the other Nordic countries, particularly Sweden, by a shared history and cultural heritage, similar values and a desire to remain outside the conflicts of the great powers. As the international situation grew increasingly tense, earlier disputes between them became irrelevant. In December 1935, T.M. Kivimäki, the Prime Minister of Finland, made a statement in Parliament in which he declared that Finland should follow a neutral Nordic line in its foreign policy. The motives behind this declaration were both political and military. The intention was to make a clear distinction between Finland and the other states that bordered on Russia, and at the same time to dispel any Soviet suspicions that Finland intended to commit itself to Germany.

An important influence behind Finland's Scandinavian orientation was Field Marshal C.G. Mannerheim. After being defeated in the 1919

presidential elections, he had withdrawn from public life and spent much of his time abroad. Svinhufvud, soon after he became President in 1931, had invited Mannerheim, who was already sixty-four years of age, to be Chairman of the Defence Committee. Deeply concerned by the growing international tension and the increase in Soviet military power, Mannerheim began strenuously to demand reinforcement of the country's defence capability. In his opinion, the Scandinavian orientation offered Finland the best chance of surviving the crisis which he saw looming on the horizon. His long-term goal was a military alliance with Sweden, which he thought was the only country on whose help Finland could count if it got involved in a war with the Soviet Union. Sweden would be able to provide help most quickly, and anyway all war supplies from abroad would have to be transported through Sweden.

This corresponded to the thinking current in some Swedish military circles. The Swedes had good reason to hope that the Baltic countries and especially Finland would be able to maintain their independence. Consequently, certain Swedish officers as early as the mid-1920s had entertained the view that it would be possible to support Finland under the sanction system of the League of Nations if it should become involved in a war with the Soviet Union.[3] Successive Swedish governments were aware of these plans, but none of them ever committed themselves to them. In retrospect, it is easy to see that Finland pinned exaggerated hopes on the protection that might accrue from its Scandinavian orientation. In the latter half of the 1930s, Sweden was more afraid of Germany than it was of the Soviet Union, it was militarily weak, and it was certainly not willing to renounce the neutrality that had ensured it peace for over a century.

The Naval Agreement between Britain and Germany in June 1935 upset the power relations that had previously obtained in the Baltic. In contravention of the Treaty of Versailles, the agreement permitted Germany to build a fleet equivalent in tonnage to 35 per cent of that of Britain. This meant that Germany could in the future obtain naval superiority in the Baltic by closing off the Straits of Denmark. Moscow considered that the agreement between Germany and Britain greatly weakened the position of the USSR. It thought that Britain had given Germany a free hand to establish its domination of the Baltic. This caused the Soviet military to focus their attention even more closely on the Gulf of Finland. A directive issued in 1935 by the People's Commissar for Defence, K.J. Voroshilov, named Germany, Poland, Finland and Japan as likely enemies.[4]

In the following years, Moscow looked suspiciously for any signs that might point to cooperation between Germany and Finland. In accordance with the instructions they had received, the representatives of the USSR in Helsinki diligently reported anything that might substantiate these suspicions. Of particular interest were contacts between the military, like the visits made by Mannerheim to Germany, during which he met the German Minister of Aviation, Hermann Göring. When war broke out, the Russians expected the Germans to establish bases in the Åland Islands, to occupy the harbours of Finland and Estonia and, after blockading the Soviet Navy in the Gulf of Finland, to transport troops into Finland. The operational plans drawn up by the High Command of the Red Army prepared for the destruction of the Finnish, Estonian and Latvian fleets and the shifting of the theatre of war onto Finnish territory.[5] In November 1936, A.A. Zhdanov, a member of the Politburo and Party Secretary of the Leningrad District, issued a clear warning in his speech to the Congress of Soviets in Moscow: 'If the governments of small neighbouring countries go too far in the direction of fascism, they may end up feeling the might of the Soviet Union.'[6]

The declaration of the Finnish government concerning the country's policy of Nordic neutrality did not have the desired effect in Moscow. According to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, it was just another way of serving German ends. In the end it came down to the fact that the Soviet Union considered Finland to be a part not of a neutral Scandinavia but of a border area in which the Soviet Union had important strategic interests to protect, and which it should accordingly strive to include within the scope of its own security system.

What basis in fact, then, was there for the threats envisaged by the Soviet leaders? Certainly several of them were realised in 1941, but then the circumstances were completely different. In the 1930s Finland did not seek German support, which it felt would entail a major risk of the country becoming embroiled in great power conflicts. The aim of German diplomacy was no more than to prevent Finland from joining any anti-German blocs. Finland was required to display 'genuine' neutrality, which excluded involvement in any collective defence systems or active participation in the League of Nations. German propaganda made appeal to their common struggle against communism, and strove to encourage anti-Soviet attitudes in Finland and to hinder any attempts to improve Finnish-Soviet relations. The Germans were realistic enough not to count on the small but noisy radical right-wing

People's Patriotic Movement. Instead they tried to use cultural channels to maintain their influence. The mid-1930s saw the peak of German cultural propaganda in Finland.

However, in the second half of the 1930s Finland gradually increased the distance between itself and Germany. This was due partly to economic reasons and partly to changes within Finnish domestic politics. Great Britain had been by far the most important export market for Finland, and from the middle of the decade the British trade position was further strengthened. This was accompanied by an increase in British political and cultural influence, aided by the fact that its political system corresponded closely to the values of the centrist parties that usually held power in Finland and to those of conservatives such as Paasikivi.

The influence of those political circles that regarded Germany with a critical or even disapproving eye continued to grow throughout the latter half of the 1930s.[7] The 1936 election brought an Agrarian League government under Kyösti Kallio to power. The foreign minister's portfolio was given to Rudolf Holsti, a liberal anglophile. While he certainly could not be considered pro-Soviet, he clearly realized that the greatest threat to peace in Europe was Germany. Holsti believed that Nordic neutrality alone was not enough to guarantee security for Finland, and that it was essential for the country – along with the other Nordic states – to throw in its lot with the pro-League of Nations alliance led by Great Britain and France. That was the only way it could assure itself of protection against the Soviet Union. For the German diplomatic corps, therefore, Holsti came to personify a direction in Finnish foreign policy that it regarded as undesirable.[8] Germany encountered another setback when Svinhufvud lost the presidential election in February 1937 to Kallio. The next government was a coalition of the Social Democrats, Agrarians and Progressives, under the leadership of A.K. Cajander, of the last-mentioned party. Holsti continued as foreign minister.

Independent of the fluctuation in relations between Finland and Germany, military contacts continued. They had their foundation in the traditions of the *Jäger* corps. Nearly all the leading officers in the Finnish Army were *Jägers* who had received their military training in Germany during the First World War and many of them retained feelings of gratitude and sympathy for Germany. Also, Germany's rapidly growing military power and particularly its air force aroused their professional interest, which resulted in numerous visits at officer level. All this increased the suspicion of the Soviet Union, understandably

perhaps; the pro-German sympathies of the Finnish officer corps had also been noted by the British and the Swedes. Indeed, the visits of Finnish officers to Germany were sometimes embarrassing even to the Finnish government. However, Finland placed no faith in obtaining any aid from Germany. Finnish purchases of arms from Germany were few; the aircraft needed by the armed forces were bought from Britain and Holland. Preliminary negotiations were conducted with Sweden concerning the manufacture of armaments for Finland in the event of an outbreak of war.[9]

In February 1937, Foreign Minister Holsti paid an official visit to Moscow. The purpose was to dispel the suspicions that the Soviet Union, and indeed the West, held about Finnish foreign policy. In his discussions with the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Litvinov, and other representatives of the USSR, Holsti tried to convince his hosts of the fact that no responsible person in Finland could possibly countenance the idea of a policy that would make the country a battlefield between Germany and the USSR, for it was certain that a large part of Finland would be destroyed whichever side emerged victorious. Holsti also met the People's Commissar for Defence, Marshal K.J. Voroshilov, and the Chief of the General Staff, Marshal A.I. Yegorov, who brought up the possibility that some third state might, without permission, use Finnish territory as a base to launch an attack against the Soviet Union. The Finnish Foreign Minister assured them that Finland would consider any invasion of its territory a hostile act.[10]

Holsti's visit was followed by a short period of 'fair weather' in Finnish-Soviet relations. The election of Kyösti Kallio as President of Finland was welcomed in Moscow, as it meant the ousting of the pro-German Svinhufvud from Finnish politics. However, it was not long before relations cooled again, and mutual recriminations in the press once more became the order of the day.

Stalin's massive purges reached their peak in 1937, when the wave of arrests and executions swept through the whole of Soviet society. The ethnic minorities in the USSR and the foreign communist parties operating in exile there suffered especially in the Great Terror. The Finnish populations of Eastern Karelia and Ingria (an area around Leningrad inhabited by Finnish speakers) lost the last remnants of their national rights, and the use of the Finnish language was suppressed. Thousands of Finnish communists who had taken refuge in the Soviet Union perished. In Finland people were well aware of what was going on behind the country's eastern frontier, and this obviously could not fail to affect popular attitudes. All in all, the situation inside

the great power in the east was incomprehensible to the Finns. It was 'the land of the red murk', and its unpredictability was frightening.

Finnish political life in the 1930s was characterized by an increase in the support and influence of the Social Democratic Party. Apart from the short-lived administration (1926–27) of Väinö Tanner, it had spent the whole time in opposition while the country was administered by non-socialist minority governments. In the general election of 1933, the number of votes received by the Social Democrats out of the total cast rose from 34.2 per cent in the previous general election of 1930 to 37.3 per cent, and the number of seats in Parliament from 66 to 78. To some extent, the party benefited from the fact that the Communist Party was outlawed and could not put up its own candidates. In the 1936 election the Social Democrats raised their share of the vote to 38.6 per cent and won five more seats. This made them stronger in the 200-seat Parliament than the two largest non-socialist parties (the Agrarian League with 53 seats and the National Coalition Party with 20) put together.

After Kyösti Kallio of the Agrarian League had been elected President with the support of the Social Democrats in February 1937, the two parties quickly agreed on the formation of a coalition government. Each party got five cabinet posts. The balance of power was held by the small Progressive Party, to which the Prime Minister, A.K. Cajander, and the Foreign Minister, Rudolf Holsti, belonged. The strong-man of the Social Democrats, Väinö Tanner, received the portfolio of Minister of Finance. As leader of the largest government party, he became the key figure in the political life of the republic. The foremost Agrarian politician in the government was the Minister of Defence, Juho Niukkanen, a farmer from Karelia. The portfolio of Minister of the Interior went to a 36-year-old Agrarian lawyer called Urho Kekkonen. The whole political right – from the National Coalition Party and the People's Patriotic Movement to the Swedish People's Party – went into opposition.

The creation of this centre-left coalition government was one of the great turning points in the history of independent Finland. For the first time since 1918, the country had a government with a viable majority in Parliament. For the first time, the groups that had been on opposing sides in the Civil War were sitting in the same government. The centre-left coalition created the political foundation on which Finland confronted the crisis of 1939 and survived as a nation through the Second World War.

The cooperation between the centre and the left was stamped by opposition to the right and particularly the radical right. A promise to defend the rule of law and democracy was inscribed in the government's manifesto, and the needs of the underprivileged were emphasized in economic and welfare policy. The economic upswing had created a realistic basis for the government's optimistic programme to create a Scandinavian-type welfare state. The coalition also transformed the Social Democrats from an opposition party into one which shouldered the responsibility of office. This was most apparent in the party's changed attitude towards defence. It realized that democracy was threatened by the dictatorships of the time, and that it was necessary to be able to defend it. In the shadow of the Austrian *Anschluss* of spring 1938, the Finnish Parliament with general unanimity approved a bill for basic defence procurements which raised defence appropriations to a quarter of the total national budget of that year.[11]

All the government parties were in favour of cementing Nordic cooperation. They also publicly expressed their desire to improve relations with the USSR. A memorandum dated 1.4.1938 in the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs that was found in the Presidential Archives in Moscow asserted that the Government of Finland was not pro-German, but rather wished to improve relations with the USSR and leaned towards Scandinavia and neutrality. However, it was not capable of resisting the pressure of the Germans or its own fascist elements. Those who drew up the memorandum considered that Finland must be required to conclude a mutual assistance treaty with the USSR, and to provide it with 'real guarantees of a military nature'. Annotations in the memorandum indicate that Stalin had read it.[12]

The document throws some light on the background to the mission entrusted to a Soviet diplomat called Boris Yartsev in Helsinki. Yartsev was a member of the NKVD (the Soviet secret police) and by all accounts a trusted servant of the Soviet government in the Finnish capital, although officially he only held the humble position of second secretary in the Legation. It is known that Yartsev visited Stalin on 7 April 1938. A week later he was back in Helsinki urgently seeking an interview with Foreign Minister Holsti. Yartsev explained to the latter that his government was convinced that Germany intended to attack the Soviet Union, and that the German army would invade Finland in order to conduct operations against the Soviet Union from there. If the Germans were permitted to carry out these operations without resistance, the USSR would not just stand by at the border but would move

its forces as far into Finnish territory as possible. He therefore wanted to know whether Finland would agree to provide the Soviet Union with 'guarantees' that it would not assist Germany in a war against it, but that, on the contrary, it would resist a German invasion. If so, the Soviet Union would offer Finland all possible economic and military assistance and would pledge itself to withdrawing its forces from Finland once the war was over.[13]

The Finns rejected a mutual assistance treaty, appealing to their policy of neutrality. The most they could agree to was a written assurance that Finland would not permit any great power to use its territory for an attack against the Soviet Union. But this was not enough: Yartsev explained that no written assurance would satisfy his government as long as it was not backed up by some military and economic force. If some major power wished to launch an attack against the Soviet Union from its territory without Finnish permission, then Finland would not be able to resist it alone. Therefore, it must undertake to accept military aid from the Soviet Union in advance.[14] The negotiations ended without agreement.

The Sudetenland crisis in September 1938 again raised the question of the vulnerability of small nations. The fate of Czechoslovakia was felt to be a warning to Finland as well. The position of Holsti, a controversial figure who was hated by the right and unwelcome to the Germans, had already grown weaker during the previous months. The Munich Agreement destroyed the foundations of his policy, and in November he was forced to resign. The position of foreign minister went to Eljas Erkko, who represented the right wing of the Progressive Party. Erkko was the owner and editor-in-chief of the country's largest daily paper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, and he had been critical of Holsti's policy. The new foreign minister was described by the Swedish envoy as imperturbable, strong-willed and energetic. He steered Finnish foreign policy through the following year with a firm hand. Like his predecessor, Erkko was an anglophile, but unlike Holsti he was above all a supporter of Nordic neutrality and military cooperation with Sweden. His first action was to involve himself in the negotiations between Finland and Sweden concerning the Åland Islands.[15]

In addition to the main island, Åland comprises over 6000 smaller islands. It belongs to Finland, although the population is totally Swedish-speaking. Its location makes it extremely sensitive strategically, forming as it does a natural bridge between Sweden and Finland and guarding entry to both the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Bothnia. Åland and the surrounding waters were neutralized and

demilitarized in a treaty concluded in 1921 under the auspices of the League of Nations and signed by all the Baltic maritime states (apart from Russia) and by Great Britain, France and Italy. The treaty prohibited the maintaining of military installations, equipment or forces on the islands.

The Åland Islands thus constituted a military vacuum. A hostile great power – Germany or the Soviet Union – could take the islands with a surprise attack and would then be in a position to control Finnish maritime communications and traffic into and out of Sweden's ports on the Gulf of Bothnia; indeed it would pose a threat to the archipelago off Stockholm itself. This was a matter of growing concern for the military leaders of both Finland and Sweden. They considered that the islands should be fortified and that both countries should cooperate to organize their defence. This, however, would entail changing the terms of the international treaty concerning the islands. In January 1939 a draft agreement between the Finnish and Swedish governments was finally produced in Stockholm, according to which Finland would be entitled to undertake defensive measures on the islands. Sweden reserved the right to participate in the defence of the islands at the request of Finland. In this way, it formally preserved its freedom to act as it thought fit. Before the agreement could be ratified, it was necessary to obtain the consent for the proposed changes of the states that had signed the 1921 treaty. The approval of the USSR would also have to be obtained although it was not a signatory to the treaty. This last condition was stipulated by Sweden, because it did not wish to arouse any suspicion in Moscow that the agreement was specifically aimed against the Soviet Union – which in fact, from the point of view of the Finns, it was.

On 31 May, the new Commissar for Foreign Affairs, V.M. Molotov, in a speech to the Supreme Soviet rejected the proposal in strong terms. He argued that the fortifications that were to be built on the Åland Islands could be used against the Soviet Union to blockade the Gulf of Finland, and he criticized the special status that was accorded to Sweden in the defence of the islands. The following day, the Swedish Foreign Minister, Rickard Sandler, informed the Finns that his government had decided to withdraw the bill concerning the Åland Islands from the Swedish Parliament. Moscow thus dealt the fatal blow to a project that Finland had hoped might lead to further defence cooperation with Sweden.

The Soviet attitude to the fortification of the islands is understandable when one takes into account the USSR's strategic interests

throughout the Baltic. The metropolis of Leningrad on the mouth of the Neva remained the Soviet Union's most vulnerable spot in 1939, as it had been as St Petersburg in 1914 and indeed for the past two centuries. Elsewhere its major cities were protected by vast land masses. Only through Leningrad could an enemy reach its heartlands from the sea. With the increased military threat from Germany, the USSR reacted in approximately the same way as imperial Russia had done at the end of the previous century. It strove to tighten its grip on the buffer zone outside Leningrad, which included Finland and the Baltic countries. Although the capital had been removed to Moscow, Leningrad was an important industrial centre, and it was a hub of communications. It had a large port, and all the bases of the Baltic Fleet were located there. However, the situation had altered in that the buffer zone was now made up of small independent states. The frontier with Finland now ran in the immediate proximity of Leningrad, and the Russians knew that the Finns and the Estonians had made preparations to establish a blockade of the Gulf of Finland with their coastal artillery and naval forces. The buffer zone had to be prevented at all costs from coming under German control.

Moscow regarded the international situation in spring 1939 as threatening. In Mongolia, Japan had initiated a serious conflict, which escalated into a military confrontation, and the Soviet Union feared that in Europe the Western powers and Germany would settle their differences to its detriment. On 15 March Germany occupied Bohemia and Moravia unopposed. What would be its next target? The answer came soon. On 22 March, Lithuania capitulated to an ultimatum from Germany and ceded the Klaipeda (Memel) area to it. The reaction of the Soviet government was to issue unilateral guarantees to Estonia and Latvia. It sent diplomatic notes to their governments on 29 March in which it declared that the complete independence of both republics was also in the interests of the Soviet Union. It could not tolerate Estonia or Latvia being pressurized into subjection by a third power.[16] The protests of Estonia and Latvia against these unsought guarantees were in vain.

Moscow's attitude to the fortification of the Åland Islands was governed by the fact that it considered that this offered an advantage to Germany. Finnish assurances that it would defend itself against any aggressor carried no weight. After all, the world had just seen how Czechoslovakia had surrendered to Hitler without a fight despite all its arming and protestations to the contrary. The assessment of a memorandum of the Intelligence Section of the Soviet Navy drafted at the

beginning of 1939 was that, if war broke out, Finland would give Germany the right to establish bases in the Åland Islands and possibly also in the southern coastal town of Hanko, thus permitting it to secure the transportation of iron ore from the Swedish ports of the Gulf of Bothnia and to operate against the Soviet Navy in the Gulf of Finland. From this point of view, the fortification of the Åland Islands would have meant that Germany would obtain, either by agreement or by force, ready built fortifications.[17] In fact, the Soviet government did not wish merely to prevent the enemy from obtaining bases in the north; it soon became apparent that it was itself interested in the Åland Islands and Hanko.

After the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, Britain hastened to offer assurances to Poland and Romania, which were considered to be the next targets of German aggression. Britain and France could no longer ignore the USSR, and began negotiations with the aim of establishing an anti-German alliance. The Soviet government had hoped to remain outside any war that might break out, but on the other hand it wished to avoid being isolated. Therefore, it was willing to negotiate with the Western powers. Moreover, its bargaining position was strong, and it could dictate its own terms. The Soviet government announced that it considered it indispensable that the USSR, France and Britain should conclude an effective mutual assistance treaty which would provide guarantees not only for Poland and Romania but also for Estonia, Latvia and Finland.[18] These states vigorously opposed the guarantees. Finland declared that it would not accept any form of protection, and that it would consider any state that offered it armed assistance without its agreement an aggressor. Great Britain was at first reluctant to extend the protection of the three great powers to the states in question against their express wishes. France showed greater flexibility, and during the course of the summer Britain, too, began to modify its adverse stance.

During the negotiations between the military representatives of Britain, France and the USSR in Moscow in August, Soviet goals in the Baltic became clearer. According to a proposal of the People's Commissar for Defence, K.J. Voroshilov, in the event of a war breaking out Britain and France should send a strong naval force to the Baltic and obtain the agreement of Estonia, Latvia and Finland temporarily to occupy the Åland Islands and Hanko and to set up bases on the coast of Estonia and Latvia. These bases would then be placed at the disposal of the Soviet Baltic Fleet.[19] Since Britain and France had no plans to dispatch large naval forces to the Baltic, nor probably the capability to

do so, their share would certainly have been chiefly limited to seeking the permission of the states concerned while the Soviet fleet would in practice alone enjoy the use of the bases. However, the whole question was forgotten in the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations, and the main bone of contention became Poland's refusal to permit Soviet troops to pass through its territory.

As the international situation grew more tense, Finland endeavoured to stick steadfastly to its Nordic neutrality policy. On the one hand, it rejected the guarantees offered by the three great powers, and on the other it was trying to keep its distance from Germany. Following the examples of Sweden and Norway, Finland rejected a non-aggression pact offered by Germany. The policy of neutrality was staunchly supported by public opinion. Germany's ruthless treatment of its small neighbours appalled many Finns who had previously been sympathetic to it. The seizure of Bohemia and Moravia was generally condemned even on the right. On the other hand, the appeasement policy of the Western powers and their negotiations with the Soviet Union had made the Finns sceptical of Western intentions, and they were frightened by the massive rearmament process going on in the Soviet Union.

In domestic politics, the national reconciliation that had begun halfway through the decade continued. The average national income had doubled in the interwar period, and there was a clear improvement in social conditions, although there was also still considerable poverty both in outlying regions and in the working-class districts of industrial cities. The reinforcement of democracy and the confidence aroused by the achievements in social welfare of the centre-left coalition were reflected in the general election of July 1939. The Patriotic People's Movement, which had fulminated against 'Marxism' and spoken in the name of 'national integrity', lost six of its fourteen seats and was reduced to an insignificant fringe group. The victors in the election were the large government parties, the Social Democrats (with two new seats) and the Agrarian League (with three new seats), together with the moderate right, which won five new seats. In the new Parliament, the government would have a three-quarters majority. With good reason it considered that it had received a strong endorsement for its policies from the electorate.

Despite the tension between Germany and Poland and the negotiations of the three great powers, the mood in Finland in the summer of 1939 was optimistic. The Finnish people were enthusiastically preparing for the Olympic Games, which were due to be held in Helsinki the following summer, and they refused to believe that war might break

out and prevent this great occasion from taking place. Tanner probably expressed the opinion most prevalent among the Social Democrats when he wrote to J.K. Paasikivi: 'I do not believe that there will be a war; the world cannot be so senseless.' But Paasikivi, who was then the Finnish envoy in Stockholm, was one of the pessimists. He wrote back: 'How can you say this, you who have been involved since the beginning of the century? Where have you seen sense prevailing during the last forty years? … You and I have grown up among the liberal ideas of capitalism and socialism, under which it was thought that sense would decide, which is why it is so difficult to comprehend the present way of the world. The only thing that I understand is that things have gone differently from the way we expected.'

Mannerheim was also pessimistic. He considered the developments of the summer of 1939 extremely dangerous from the Finnish point of view, and he regarded the defence appropriations as insufficient in the light of the prevailing situation. Tanner, who as Minister of Finance was reluctant to grant greater funds to defence, suspected that the Field Marshal had lost his nerve: 'Whenever anything happens in the world, he becomes unbalanced and presents demands.'[20] He considered that it would be better to let Mannerheim go. The Foreign Minister, Erkko, was also confident that there would be no war.

Then the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the USSR, concluded on 23 August 1939, brought the Finns down to earth with a bump.

3
In the Shadow of the Nazi–Soviet Pact

The negotiations that had started in April between the three great powers of Great Britain, France and the USSR progressed sluggishly. Impatience in Moscow grew as the weeks passed without any significant progress. The stalemate also presented Hitler with an opportunity which he did not hesitate to use. Underlying his decision to attack Poland was the hope that war could be contained between Poland and Germany. This might best be achieved if an agreement could be reached with the Soviet Union. At first, the Soviet government reacted very cautiously to Hitler's approaches. It had not forgotten what he had said about Germany's aims in the east, but it did not trust the Western powers either and was primarily concerned to prevent the formation of an anti-Soviet coalition of Great Britain, France and Germany. The German Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, assured the Russians that there was no problem between the Baltic and the Black Sea that could not be solved to the complete satisfaction of both countries. Finally Stalin agreed to allow von Ribbentrop to come to Moscow on 23 August 1939 to sign a non-aggression pact and a secret protocol attached to it. The pact was signed the same evening after brief negotiations.

The protocol was based on a proposal made by Germany, according to which Finland, Estonia and the northern and eastern parts of Latvia up to the River Daugava were to be within the sphere of influence of the USSR, while the southern and western parts of Latvia and Lithuania were to belong to Germany's sphere of influence. In Poland the dividing line between the two spheres was to run along the Rivers Narev, San and Veiksel.[1] But this was not enough for Stalin, who demanded the whole of Latvia. He explained that the harbours of Liepaja and Ventspils were indispensable to the Soviet fleet. After

obtaining Hitler's consent by telegraph, von Ribbentrop announced that Germany agreed to this demand. The relevant clause in the secret additional protocol thus took the following form: 'In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the area belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern border of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR.' The position of Finland in this context does not seem to have aroused any particular discussion. (See Map 3.1)

The Ribbentrop-Molotov Agreement and the outbreak of war between Germany and the Western powers on 3 September offered the Soviet Union a unique opportunity to extend its influence in eastern Europe and the Baltic area without the interference of the other great powers. Soviet forces crossed Poland's eastern border on 17 September and, meeting little resistance, occupied the eastern parts of the country. A week later Stalin again raised the question of the Baltic area with the Germans. He proposed that Germany should occupy the area between the Vistula and the Bug, which had been assigned in the additional protocol to the Russian sphere of influence, and that in return it should renounce its claims on Lithuania. He added that if Germany had no objections, the Soviet Union would immediately begin to settle the question of the Baltic countries.[2] Germany had become more dependent on the USSR following the outbreak of war, and Hitler could not afford to reject the proposal. A Boundary and Friendship Treaty between the Soviet Union and Germany was signed on 28 September. It established a new division of spheres of influence, which conformed in the main to the wishes of the Soviet government.[3]

The USSR now needed to act quickly. If Germany and the Western powers made peace after the defeat of Poland – and there were rumours to this effect – then it might become more difficult 'to settle the question of the Baltic countries'. On 24 September, Molotov informed the Estonian Foreign Minister, Karl Selter, who had arrived in Moscow, that the Soviet government required from Estonia effective guarantees to ensure its security. It therefore proposed a mutual assistance treaty which would give the USSR the right to maintain naval and air force bases on Estonian territory. The Commissar for Foreign Affairs put the matter quite bluntly: 'Twenty years ago you put us to squat in this Finnish pond. You surely don't imagine that this situation can continue indefinitely?' Then, he said, the Soviet Union had been weak, but now it was a great power, whose interests had to be reckoned with. It intended to secure its own protection in any case. 'I beg you, do not make us use force against Estonia.'[4]

Map 3.1 Scandinavia and the Baltic in 1939

The concentration of Soviet forces on the Estonian border lent weight to Molotov's words. The Estonian government had no recourse but to yield. No help from outside could be expected, so there was nothing for it but to try and play for time. 'Our most important task is to bring the people and state of Estonia intact through the present great war', said President Päts in defence of his government's decision. It was hoped that the bases would be only temporary. The friendship between Germany and the Soviet Union was not expected to last, and later it might perhaps be possible for Estonia to throw in its lot with Germany, which would not allow it to be turned into a communist state.[5] The Estonians signed the agreement on 28 September. The location of the bases was finally decided by military delegations of the two countries. They were to be located in Paldiski at the mouth of the Gulf of Finland, in Haapsalu on the west coast of Estonia and on the islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa.

Next in line were Latvia and Lithuania. The course of the negotiations was the same as in the case of Estonia. The USSR used its own security to justify its demands for mutual assistance treaties and bases. 'We cannot allow small states to be used against the Soviet Union', Molotov declared to the Latvian Foreign Minister, Vilhelms Munters. 'Neutral Baltic states are too risky.' Pressure was put on Latvia, too, by concentrating troops on its frontier. For Lithuania, the bitter pill was sweetened by restoring to it its old capital, Vilnius, which the Poles had taken from it in 1920. The agreements were made within a matter of days. On 5 October Latvia signed a mutual assistance treaty which gave the USSR the right to establish naval bases at Liepaja and Ventspils. The treaty with Lithuania was signed five days later. Despite the objections of the Lithuanians, bases were located in the vicinity of both the new and old capital cities, Kaunas and Vilnius. In all three countries, the strengths of the Soviet forces stipulated in the treaties exceeded those of their own armed forces.[6] All the treaties concluded with the Baltic republics contained a clause which stated that the treaties in no way concerned their constitutions or their social systems. In his speech at the dinner held in honour of the signing of the agreement with Latvia, Stalin gave his 'word of honour as a Bolshevik' that the Soviet Union would not involve itself in the internal affairs of Latvia.[7]

The fall of Poland and the subjection of the Baltic republics into Soviet protectorates caused deep concern in Finland. The news of Estonia coming under the Soviet Union's military stranglehold quickly arrived in Helsinki, and the Finns saw that the USSR was increasing its

demands as Estonia acceded to them. At the beginning of September, Britain had informed the Finnish government that in the military negotiations in August the USSR had aimed to establish naval bases in the Åland Islands, the Hanko peninsula and the islands of the Gulf of Finland.[8] An invitation to come to Moscow for negotiations was expected.

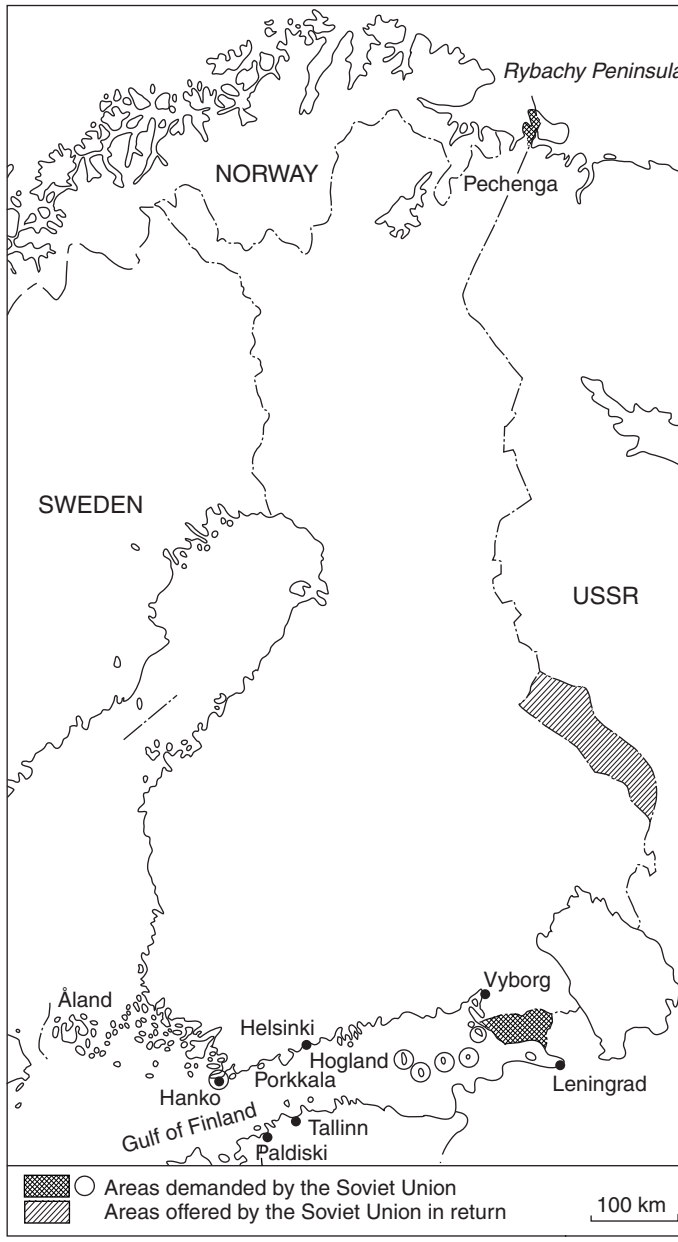
The invitation arrived in Finland on 5 October, the same day that the treaty with Latvia was signed. Molotov asked that the Finnish Foreign Minister or some other person authorized by the government should come to Moscow to discuss 'concrete questions of a political nature'. When he did not receive an immediate reply, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs was displeased. If Finland did not want to discuss questions regarding relations between the two countries, the Soviet Union would have to resort to other means, he threatened.[9] But the Finnish Foreign Minister, Erkko, was in no hurry, and he decided to remain at home. He explained to the Soviet Envoy in Helsinki, V. Derevianskii, that Finland would not agree to the same kind of treaties that the Baltic countries had signed. Erkko persuaded the Finnish envoy in Stockholm, J.K. Paasikivi to handle the negotiations in Moscow. Paasikivi had been the head of the Finnish delegation at the negotiations for the Peace Treaty of Tartu in 1920, and he was considered the country's leading expert on Finnish-Russian relations. He was thus the natural choice for the difficult task.

Paasikivi was then 68 years of age, and he had behind him a long career in politics and banking. At the beginning of the century, during the years of Czarist oppression, he had supported a policy of appeasement, the aim of which was to salvage as much of Finland's autonomous status as was possible by taking the interests of Russia into consideration. In 1918, as Prime Minister, he had been in favour of a monarchy and a German orientation to protect the country against Russia. Later he was one of the architects of Finland's policy of Nordic neutrality. His experience had given him a rather pessimistic philosophy of history. He believed that the great powers had certain permanent interests, which were dependent on factors relating to geography, power politics and military strength. Small states could survive only by taking this into consideration. He believed that the two great powers of the Baltic, Germany and Russia, held a decisive position from the point of view of Finland. It was necessary to try and maintain good relations with both. For him, the Soviet Union was in the end the same old imperial Russia which had regained its position as a great power, and whose attitude to Finland was still mainly governed by military considerations.

For the negotiations in Moscow, the Finnish delegation had received instructions to emphasize Finland's strict adherence to the declared policy of neutrality. Finland would not allow itself to be used against anyone, and it would defend its neutrality with armed force. The delegation was to refuse to discuss the establishment of bases, any redrawing of the frontier or mutual military assistance. As an extreme concession they might discuss the ceding of some small outer islands in the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland in exchange for territory elsewhere. The Soviet government had proposed such an exchange back in March, but the proposal had been rejected by the Finns. Paasikivi was verbally enjoined to make sure that the negotiations did not break down. Mannerheim in particular emphasized that the legitimate interests of the Soviet Union should be taken into consideration, and that an attempt should be made to arrive at a compromise solution on the basis of these.[10] (See Map 3.2)

According to the Soviet naval authorities, the command of the Estonian coast was not enough to guarantee the Soviet maritime position in the Gulf of Finland. The Soviet Union needed at least to obtain bases and coastal artillery batteries in Hanko and Porkkala on the southern coast of Finland. For the talks with the Finns, the Soviet envoy in Helsinki, Derevianskii, had drawn up a proposal which contained two alternative sets of conditions: minimum and maximum. They both required Finland to cede the islands in the Gulf of Finland and to permit a Soviet naval and air base to be built on the Hanko peninsula. The minimum programme also included the surrender of part of the Karelian Isthmus and the western part of the Rybachy peninsula on the Barents Sea, which then belonged to Finland. According to the set of maximum conditions, Finland would have to relinquish the southeastern part of its territory around Vyborg and the whole of the Pechenga region on the Barents Sea. A proposal for a mutual assistance treaty has also been preserved in the archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union. It closely resembles the treaties signed with the Baltic countries – in fact it was drafted by the same officials. The treaty referred to a direct attack, or the threat of such an attack, by the great powers of Europe against the Soviet Union on its maritime frontiers with Finland in the Baltic and the Arctic Ocean.[11]

As soon as Molotov's invitation for talks arrived, Finland started to call up its reserve forces, and there was a voluntary evacuation of the populations of the towns. Full mobilization was put into effect under the name of 'Extraordinary Reserve Training' on 12 October, when the



Map 3.2 The Soviet–Finnish talks, October–November 1939

talks in Moscow got under way. Information had arrived about the concentration of Soviet troops on the Finnish frontier, and it was therefore considered necessary to be prepared for a surprise attack. The full mobilization also sent a message to the Soviet Union that it should not expect Finland to make the same kind of concessions that it had obtained from the Baltic republics.

In the Moscow negotiations the USSR was represented by Stalin and Molotov. They justified their demands by appealing to the need to protect Leningrad. Stalin gave up the idea of a mutual assistance treaty at a fairly early stage after Paasikivi had declared Finland's staunch opposition to it. On the other hand, the five small islands offered by Finland were considered totally inadequate. The bargaining position taken by Stalin resembled Derevianskii's minimum programme. His most important proposals concerned the leasing of the Hanko peninsula for a Soviet naval base and a redrawing of the frontier in the Karelian Isthmus. In return the Soviet Union would give Finland an area twice the size on its eastern border. Stalin and Molotov emphasized that these were minimum conditions. 'We must be able to block entry to the Gulf of Finland. If it were not for the fact that the passage to Leningrad passed along your coast, we would have no need to raise the whole question.' It would be possible to close off the Gulf of Finland effectively between Hanko and Paldiski, where a base had been ceded to the USSR by Estonia, with coastal artillery emplacements. 'We cannot change geography', Stalin said. In the Karelian Isthmus, the Finnish frontier lay only 32 kilometres from Leningrad with its population of three and a half million. Since Leningrad could not be moved, the border had to be. The USSR asked for the border to be moved seventy kilometres away, out of artillery range. When Paasikivi asked what state might attack the Soviet Union, Stalin mentioned England or Germany: 'We now have good relations with Germany, but anything in this world can change.' When the war between the Western powers and Germany was over, he said, the victor's fleet would sail into the Gulf of Finland. They had to be prepared for the worst eventuality.[12]

The Finnish delegation returned to Helsinki, where the Soviet proposals were first discussed by a small inner Cabinet group and subsequently by the whole government. All were willing to make small concessions, but they considered that surrender of the strategically important Hanko peninsula was out of the question. They were also opposed to any concessions in the Karelian Isthmus which would jeopardize national defence in that region. Paasikivi recommended a compromise. He pointed out that if the Soviet Union started a war to

enforce its demands and won it, it would take a lot more, and without compensation. But Erkko, who believed that the Russians were bluffing, took a hard line. He was supported by the Minister of Defence, Juho Niukkanen, and by the majority of the government ministers. The government was prepared to countenance only the surrender of the islands in the Gulf of Finland (and even then not Hogland, the largest of them) and a slight alteration of the border in the Karelian Isthmus.[13]

Before he returned to Moscow, Paasikivi demanded that Tanner come with him to bear a share of the responsibility. He considered that there were matters of such import and gravity at stake in the talks that they required the participation of a member of the Cabinet. Tanner had been in the Finnish delegation at the peace talks in Tartu. He was one of the most influential members of the Cabinet, and as a member of the delegation to Moscow he would represent national unity. Erkko thoroughly approved of the choice of Tanner; he suspected that Paasikivi was too soft, but he knew that Tanner was a hard man.[14]

Stalin and Molotov met the Finnish negotiators again in the Kremlin on 23 October and received the reply of the Finnish government. They considered it quite unsatisfactory. The Soviet dictator placed little value on Finnish assertions that they would defend the country with all their might if some power tried to attack the Soviet Union through Finland. 'Finland is small and weak. They won't ask your permission', he said. And placing his hand over Hanko on the map, he continued, 'One of the great powers will land here and will advance despite your resistance.' The Finnish negotiators returned home.[15]

The talks had reached an impasse. The crucial bone of contention had turned out to be Hanko, the southernmost point of Finland, a 30 km-long promontory of sandy and rocky coastline thrusting itself out into the Baltic with, at its southern tip, an important harbour that was open in the winter. It was there that a German division had landed in 1918 to come to the aid of the Whites in the Civil War. In order to prevent the talks from breaking down, Paasikivi feverishly sought for a compromise and suggested offering the Russians the small island of Jussarö to the east of Hanko as a base. This suggestion had originally come from Mannerheim, who considered that it was imperative to reach an agreement; the army's equipment was so deficient that it would not be capable of fighting a war. But Foreign Minister Erkko was unyielding, and both the President and the rest of the Cabinet were of the same mind. Only over the Karelian Isthmus were they willing to make slight concessions. So far the government had not informed

Parliament about the contents of the Soviet proposals because it wanted to prevent them from becoming public. Now, however, the government thought that it was time for the leaders of the parliamentary parties to be sounded out. In the end, all parties approved the concessions offered by the government, the right-wing groups admittedly only after some persuasion from Paasikivi and Mannerheim. All also opposed further concessions and absolutely refused to countenance the surrender of Hanko.[16]

Once again the Finnish negotiators set off for Moscow. With the deputation still on the way, the USSR made its proposals public. But Stalin still continued to seek a compromise and mentioned a group of islands near Hanko. The Finnish negotiators telegraphed their government for authority to offer the island of Jussarö and also to seek a compromise over the Karelian Isthmus. Having obtained the backing of the government and the leaders of the parliamentary parties, Erkko wired back new directions to the negotiators. They were absolutely forbidden to mention any island in the vicinity of Hanko. If no agreement could be reached on this basis, the negotiators were empowered to break off the talks.[17] The last meeting between the Finnish delegation and Stalin and Molotov was on 9 November. According to Tanner, the eyes of the opposite party widened in amazement when they heard the Finnish response. 'Then it doesn't look as if anything will come of it. Nothing will come of it', Stalin said. The discussions were broken off, and after staying on for a few days in Moscow, the Finnish delegation returned home. Even after this, Paasikivi was convinced that the offer of Jussarö would have allowed the talks to continue and perhaps opened the way to a compromise.[18]

The Finnish negotiation strategy was determined by Foreign Minister Erkko, who defended his unbending policy by appealing to the treaties that had been concluded between Finland and the USSR and to world opinion, which was behind Finland. He did not believe that the USSR would go to war. Rather, he thought that agreeing to the Soviet terms, particularly the surrender of a site for a naval base, would mean the end of Finland's neutrality policy and its inclusion in the Soviet sphere of influence. Erkko had a reputation for not accepting advice: he was the Foreign Minister who 'knew it all'. This was the case here too. Furthermore, he had become accustomed to moulding public opinion, which he did with extreme skill.[19]

On the other hand, the unprecedented unanimity of the Finnish nation in autumn 1939 was not the result of any manipulation. It was a spontaneous reaction – transcending class and language barriers – to

a situation in which the Nordic concept of freedom and the Finnish way of life were threatened. The image of a threat from the east that was intrinsic in Finnish culture and tradition now presented itself as a reality to the national conscience. The novelist F.E. Sillanpää, who had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, encapsulated the spirit of those autumn weeks in the words of a marching song, which was soon being sung all over the country:

> The same of tramping feet the sound,
> Deep in our hearts we hear it pound:
> Our fathers from their graves behold
> Their sons once more come marching bold.

There was hardly any opposition. The accord between Hitler and Stalin had thrown the ranks of the extreme left into confusion just as it had deeply shocked the radical right. Communist sympathizers reported to the reservist mobilization centres just like the rest of the nation. The radical proletarian writer, Olavi Siippainen, described the atmosphere on the morning of mobilization in a small industrial town: 'Now it wasn't a question of whether we were communists or fascists. The walls that we had built and done our utmost to uphold crumbled … Then was the moment, a morning that will never cease to radiate its light on us who experienced it in those dark railway sidings in October 1939.' The far right cursed Germany, while the Soviet invasion of Poland had finally shattered the illusions of the Social Democrats about a 'peace-loving workers' state'. The language dispute was forgotten, and the Swedish People's Party joined the government. When Tanner and Paasikivi had travelled to Moscow, crowds had gathered at the railway stations to cheer them as they passed and to sing the national anthem and Martin Luther's battle hymn 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God'. The government in Helsinki and the negotiators in Moscow felt the pressure of the people's mood. 'They will not sing to us any more if we go home with a poor agreement', Paasikivi said to Stalin.[20]

Nobody now dared to split that unanimity. Certainly Tanner, Paasikivi and Mannerheim questioned Erkko's assessment of the situation, but they only criticized his policy within a small circle. All three hoped for the talks to continue and were prepared to consider further concessions. Initially Tanner had been of the opinion that they should make such concessions as were necessary to avoid a war. In public, however, he was cautious. Even after the breakdown of the talks he did not believe that the USSR would attack – at least not for the time being

– and he hoped that Moscow would still make an initiative for new negotiations. As leader of the largest party in the country, he had no desire to fly in the face of public opinion.[21] For twenty years, the right had accused the Social Democrats of being unpatriotic, and now he did not wish to leave the party open to such charges.

The Finnish intransigence had both a strategic and a political basis. Helsinki considered that giving in to the Soviet proposals would seriously weaken the country's defences in the future. The surrender of territory in the Karelian Isthmus on the scale proposed by the Russians would fragment Finland's main line of defence fortifications. And a base in the Hanko peninsula would make a hole in Finnish sea defences, permit the Soviet Union to control Finnish maritime connections and even pose a direct threat to southern Finland. The Finns also suspected the USSR of ulterior motives. They did not know what demands would come next, and there was no desire to follow the path taken by the Baltic countries. The Minister of Defence, Juho Niukkanen, one of the leaders of the Agrarian League, had a more optimistic view of Finland's defence capability than Mannerheim. He even considered that war would be a better option for Finland than submission to the Russian demands. 'Otherwise, we shall face the fate of Czechoslovakia', he said.[22] The Finns were shocked by the fate of Poland, but on the other hand they believed that geographical conditions in Finland would favour defensive action. The forested terrain and the rocky coast were thought to present tricky obstacles to an aggressor, and it was believed that the mass use of tanks would be impossible there. 'Finland cannot be conquered without a long, costly and bloody war', asserted Captain Wolfgang Halsti of the Propaganda Section of the General Staff in a widely distributed pamphlet published in September.

In the end, however, the Finns did not see submission or war as the only alternatives; rather, they expected the negotiations to continue, and prepared themselves for what might be a long battle of nerves. The view that the Soviet Union would not take up arms against Finland was not a miscalculation on the part of the Finns alone. Very few foreign observers in autumn 1939 believed that it could happen. The press in the democratic countries considered a Soviet attack extremely unlikely and thus may have strengthened Erkko's confidence that his unyielding policy was the right one.[23] London and Paris encouraged the Finns to reject the Soviet proposals by stating that, in their assessment, the Soviet Union would not initiate military action against Finland.[24] From Germany the Finns got conflicting assessments. In early November, Field Marshal Hermann Göring sent a message to

Mannerheim saying that it would be better for Finland to give in over the question of the base, otherwise the USSR would go to war. This was quickly made known to Erkko and President Kallio, but no change was made in the negotiating instructions. Germany's cooperation with the Soviet Union had made the Finnish leaders extremely suspicious of it, and they suspected that in this case too it was acting on behalf of Moscow.[25]

Finland received diplomatic support from the United States and the Scandinavian countries, which each made a démarche on Finland's behalf in Moscow. Molotov refused even to receive the envoys of Sweden, Denmark and Norway. On the other hand, the United States Ambassador, Laurence Steinhardt, was allowed to hand to the Commissar for Foreign Affairs a message from President Roosevelt. In it, the latter expressed his hope that the USSR would not present Finland with such demands as would endanger its sovereignty. Soon afterwards, Molotov made a speech in which in a vexed tone he urged the United States to concern itself rather with the sovereignty of Cuba and the Philippines.

Naturally, it was the attitude of Sweden that interested the Finns most – after all it was from their western neighbours that they particularly expected concrete assistance. On 18 and 19 October, a meeting of the heads of state and the foreign ministers of the four Nordic countries was held in Stockholm. Their speeches contained many fine words addressed to Finland, and President Kallio received an exceptionally warm greeting from the people in Stockholm, but the Swedish Prime Minister, Per Albin Hansson, warned Erkko that Finland should not count on any armed assistance from Sweden. Erkko did not, however, convey this disappointing news to the Finnish government in order not to increase pessimism. The powerful sympathy expressed by the Swedes for the Finns in public served to maintain a more optimistic picture of the availability of help from their western neighbours than was really the case.

In Moscow the final decision to go to war with Finland was made as soon as the talks broke down on 9 November 1939. An attack on Finland had featured in the operational plans of the General Staff of the Red Army ever since 1937. It had been intended mainly as a preventive measure in a scenario in which Finland went to war against the Soviet Union as an ally of Germany.[26] In June 1939, a plan for a 'counterattack' on Finland drafted by B.M. Shaposhnikov, the Chief of the General Staff, was presented to Stalin. In Shaposhnikov's view, this would involve a hard, difficult war of at least several months' duration

which would require fifty divisions and the commitment of considerable artillery power. In the discussion, he emphasized that the war operations ought to be concluded quickly so that Finland should not have time to obtain any appreciable outside assistance. According to evidence from memoirs, Stalin laughed at Shaposhnikov's proposal: 'You're asking for these huge forces and resources to take care of a country like Finland! Such amounts are not needed', he is reported to have said. The Head of the Leningrad Military District, K.A. Meretskov, was given the task of drawing up a new plan with only three-fifths of the forces proposed by Shaposhnikov at his disposal. When they approved this plan at the end of July, Stalin and Voroshilov stipulated that the offensive should take only a couple of weeks.[27]

Concentrations of Soviet troops on the Finnish frontier began in early October and continued as more troops were released from duties in the Baltic countries. On 29 October, the Leningrad Military District presented to Voroshilov, the People's Commissar for Defence, a plan for crushing the Finnish Army with one massive blow from all directions. On 15 November, Voroshilov gave the Military District the order to put into immediate effect the troop concentrations and movements required for the offensive.[28] At the same time, the political preparations began. Those relatively few Finnish communist emigrés who had survived Stalin's purges suddenly became useful once again. The most important of them was O.W. Kuusinen, one of the leaders of the Reds in the 1918 Civil War, who later served as Secretary of the Comintern and was a member of its Executive Committee. On 10 November, with the Finnish negotiators still in Moscow, Stalin summoned Kuusinen and gave him instructions to form a 'People's Government', whose purpose was to disguise the real nature of the war. Molotov and A.A. Zhdanov, the Party Secretary of the Leningrad District, participated in drawing up Kuusinen's proclamation to 'the working people of Finland', and in the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs a draft was made for a treaty of mutual assistance and friendship between the USSR and the 'Democratic Republic of Finland'. Voroshilov for his part gave the order to form the 106th Division from Finnish and Karelian conscripts living in the Leningrad Military District. This was to form the backbone of a Finnish 'People's Army'.[29]

Soon afterwards anti-Finnish propaganda in the Soviet Union rose to extreme levels of fanaticism. Workers in factories passed resolutions condemning Finland. On 26 November it was announced that Finnish artillery had fired several rounds over the border on the village of Mainila, and that some soldiers had been killed and wounded. The

Finnish government denied that any shots had been fired from the Finnish side and proposed that a joint commission should be set up to investigate the incident. The Soviet government rejected this proposal. It unilaterally renounced the mutual non-aggression pact, and on 29 November it broke off diplomatic relations with Finland. At eight o'clock in the morning of 30 November, without any actual declaration of war, the Red Army launched an onslaught on Finland over the whole length of the border, and Soviet aircraft carried out raids on targets in various parts of Finland.

Molotov claimed afterwards that it was the hostile policy of the Finnish government that had prevented an agreement from being reached in autumn 1939, and that the USSR had had no other recourse but to take up arms. Soviet historians, in so far as they dealt with the Finnish war at all, contented themselves with reiterating these claims. They persistently alleged that reactionary circles in Finland, which had maintained open military cooperation with Germany, had just been waiting for an occasion to place Finnish soil and military resources at the disposal of the enemies of the Soviet Union, and that they had engineered provocations on the Soviet frontier, particularly at Mainila, which had forced the USSR to launch a counterattack. This 'frozen' interpretation of the Winter War, as David L. Williams calls it, was maintained for half a century.[30] It was not until the end of the 1980s that Soviet historians began to reassess the events leading up to the Winter War. Previously closed archives also gradually began to be opened up. In 1989 a joint project to study the history of the Winter War involving both Russian and Finnish historians was initiated. Its findings were published in Finland in 1997 and in Russia the following year.[31]

Although the availability of documents from the former Soviet Union is still limited, some information has been made available which sheds more light on the background to the Winter War. Among the declassified documents is a proposal drafted by the Soviet envoy in Helsinki, V.K. Derevianskii, on 17 November for Molotov 'to bring the Finnish government to its senses'. It suggested that in order to put pressure on Finland 'an extremely tense situation' should be created on the frontier. Derevianskii also recommended attacks in the press and organized demonstrations, to be followed at the next stage by cancellation of the non-aggression pact 'with all the consequences that it entailed'. A short list of actions to be carried out on the Finnish border has also been found among the notes of the the Leningrad Party Secretary, A.A. Zhdanov. The list was drawn up before 25 November. This indicates that the intention was that the NKVD (the secret police) would

fabricate an incident, which would then escalate into a war. It also mentions the proclamation of the Finnish Communist Party to the proletariat of Finland. The actual events indeed corresponded to this schema.[32] Contemporary sources thus confirm that the Mainila incident was a sham, something that the Finns have always regarded as obvious.

There has been much retrospective discussion in Finland about whether the Finnish government should have given in to the Soviet demands. Not surprisingly, its unbending stance in the negotiations has been the object of much criticism. Compared with the terms of the 1940 Moscow Peace Treaty and the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, the proposals made by the Soviet Union in autumn 1939 seem in retrospect more than reasonable. One of the main critics was J.K. Paasikivi, who regarded the Winter War as 'Erkko's War'. He thought that it would have been better to avoid war by making concessions and reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union.[33] On the other hand, it was also commonly argued that submission to Soviet demands in autumn 1939 would have taken Finland along the road of the Baltic republics and led to the gradual erosion of its independence.

The outbreak of war on 30 November 1939 could certainly have been avoided if Finland had agreed to the Soviet proposals or to some close compromise. The course of the negotiations in Moscow shows that Stalin really did try to persuade Finland to come to a peaceful agreement – but that had also been his aim in the Baltic republics. The question is: What would have happened then? Would the concessions demanded in the talks of autumn 1939 have satisfied the Soviet Union, or would it have later made further demands, which Finland would have been forced to accept or reject in an even more unfavourable situation? History cannot provide the answers. However, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, from the Soviet point of view, Finland was in many respects in much the same position as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. All four had been part of the Russian Empire. Together they constituted an extremely important buffer zone around Leningrad. In Moscow's eyes, Finland was not a part of the Nordic community, as the Finns themselves liked to think; it was one of the Baltic countries. When Germany and Russia began to take back what they had lost in the First World War, none of the states which were born out of that war in Eastern Europe was able to remain outside the conflict. Finland became involved in the war because it refused to submit to the position that Germany and the Soviet Union had agreed on for it on 23 August 1939.

4
The Winter War

The Winter War of 1939–40 between Finland and the Soviet Union began with two mistakes. The Finnish government believed that the Soviet Union would not attack, and Stalin believed that Finland would not be capable of offering any significant resistance.

It is an irony of history that after fearing a Russian attack for two decades, the Finns were taken by surprise when it finally came. After the breakdown of the talks in Moscow, nothing happened for two weeks, and an atmosphere of complacency spread over the country. The government prepared for the Soviet Union to engage in what would perhaps be a prolonged period of pressure and a war of nerves. Unofficial networks were used by the government to obtain a confidential nationwide survey of morale, which indicated that the vast majority of the people supported the government's hard line in the negotiations. Appraisals of the situation by Finnish military intelligence also suggested that the peace would continue. When the Minister of the Interior, Urho Kekkonen, telephoned Prime Minister Cajander early in the morning of 30 November to report that Soviet troops had crossed the frontier and to demand an immediate meeting of the government, he was greeted with an astonished response: 'Do you mean we actually have to meet before office hours?' The reports that came in from the front during the day and the fires started by bombs in the capital confirmed that the impossible had really happened. A state of war was declared, and the President of the Republic, Kyösti Kallio, handed over his constitutional powers as commander-in-chief of the armed forces to Field Marshal Mannerheim. Parliament met in the evening and gave the government a unanimous vote of confidence.

However, it was decided that the country should have a new government with which Moscow would hopefully be more willing to resume

the talks. It was to be headed by the fifty-year-old Governor of the Bank of Finland, Risto Ryti. Like Cajander, he was a Progressive. Ryti had a long political career behind him and good relations with financial circles in the great powers of the West. The post of foreign minister was given to Tanner. As the most prominent leader of the Finnish workers' movement, he would ensure unity on the home front. Niukkanen of the Agrarian League, the other strong-man in Cajander's government, continued as minister of defence. Paasikivi was made minister without portfolio. Two other conservatives were included, and thus the government broadened its base from a left-centre coalition into a national coalition of five parties.

Any hopes that the Soviet government might agree to talks with Ryti's government proved fruitless. The Soviet Union put the main blame for the talks breaking down on Tanner. This was a claim that Soviet historians were to reiterate time and time again. In fact, Soviet opposition to Tanner had other causes: in the battle for the soul of the Finnish proletariat, Tanner's Social Democrats were the main rivals of the Soviet Union. The feelers that Finland had put out first through the United States and then through Sweden fell on deaf ears. Molotov told the Swedish envoy on 4 December that the Soviet government did not recognize 'the so-called Government of Finland', whose members had fled from Helsinki to whereabouts unknown. It recognized only 'the Democratic Government of Finland', with which it had just signed a treaty.[1]

Immediately after the outbreak of war, the Soviet Union announced that a 'Finnish People's Government' had been established in Terijoki (now Zelenogorsk), a small locality quite near the border which the Soviet troops had occupied. The Prime Minister was O.W. Kuusinen and the other members of the government were émigré communists, most of whom were almost unknown in Finland. Kuusinen's government issued a proclamation declaring the establishment of a 'Democratic Republic' in Finland. It invited the Red Army to provide the necessary assistance as soon as possible and presented a request to the Soviet government that it should fulfil the centuries-old desire of the Finnish nation that the Eastern Karelians be united with it in an independent Finnish state.

The next day, Molotov and Kuusinen signed a treaty of mutual assistance and friendship between the USSR and the 'Democratic Republic of Finland'. According to the terms of the treaty, the USSR ceded to the said republic those areas of Soviet Karelia the majority of whose inhabitants were Karelians, amounting to a total of 70,000 sq. km. In return, the Democratic Republic of Finland ceded to the Soviet Union the southern part of the Karelian Isthmus (approximately 4000 sq. km),

sold to it the islands of the Gulf of Finland and the part of the Rybachy peninsula in the Arctic Ocean that belonged to Finland, and leased to it the Hanko peninsula for the establishment of a base there. The treaty obliged the signatories to mutual assistance if any European state attacked or threatened to attack Finland or the Soviet Union through Finland. It was to be ratified in Helsinki as soon as possible.[2]

Kuusinen's government was not taken seriously in any other country, and it was not recognized by a single state apart from the Soviet Union. Its main effect was to stiffen Finnish resistance. The 'Terijoki Government' convinced the Finnish people that the war was not being fought over minor alterations in the border but to defend the country's independence and its democratic political system. The question of the motives behind the establishment of Kuusinen's government is one that has continued to intrigue historians. The decision to establish a 'People's Government' was ultimately Stalin's, and it has generally been interpreted as an attempt on the part of the Soviet Union to legitimize its attack in the eyes of Soviet citizens. Since a socialist country could not invade another country just like that, it was necessary to have a friendly government to ask for assistance.[3] Moreover, some kind of government would be needed in Finland to run the country after it had been occupied.

On the basis of the proclamation of Kuusinen's government and subsequently declassified papers of Kuusinen and A.A. Zhdanov, the Party Secretary of Leningrad, who worked in the background, it is possible to reconstruct a scenario in which events were supposed to take approximately the same course that they did in the Baltic countries in the summer of 1940. After occupation, the communist government was to be extended to include representatives of other proletarian groups, and new elections were to be called. A temporary civilian administration was to be set up in places 'liberated' by the Red Army by establishing popular front committees. In fact, it turned out that Kuusinen's government was not to be much troubled with administrative tasks. The Russians advanced slowly, and nearly everywhere the local population had time to flee before they arrived.[4]

On 3 December the Finnish government officially turned to the League of Nations with a request that the Council and the Assembly be convened to consider measures to halt the Soviet invasion. It was hoped that the League would agree to broker a peace between Finland and the USSR, or – in the worst case – to urge member states to provide Finland with assistance. In fact, it was the Secretary General of the League of Nations, Joseph Avenol of France, who originally suggested

the appeal. He considered that the USSR constituted an obstruction to his own plans to reform the League of Nations and for this reason wished to isolate it. The Secretary General pursued his goals with ruthless skill. Since Great Britain and the neutral countries of Europe were loath to burn their bridges with Moscow, he turned to the governments of South America for support. A bloc of states led by Argentina demanded the immediate expulsion of the USSR from the League of Nations. The USSR refused to participate in any discussions of the matter, arguing that it was not at war with Finland but on the contrary had just signed a treaty with the country's Democratic Government. Although Britain and France had been unwilling to initiate any move to expel the Soviet Union, they opted to support the South American bloc proposals, mainly in order to create a favourable impression on the neutral countries. The Finnish government did not support the expulsion of the USSR from the organization. However, the measure went ahead irrespective of Finnish wishes. After much intrigue in the corridors of the labyrinthine Palace of the League of Nations, the Assembly and the Council passed a resolution which condemned the aggression of the Soviet Union against Finland and stated that by this act it had excluded itself from the organization.[5]

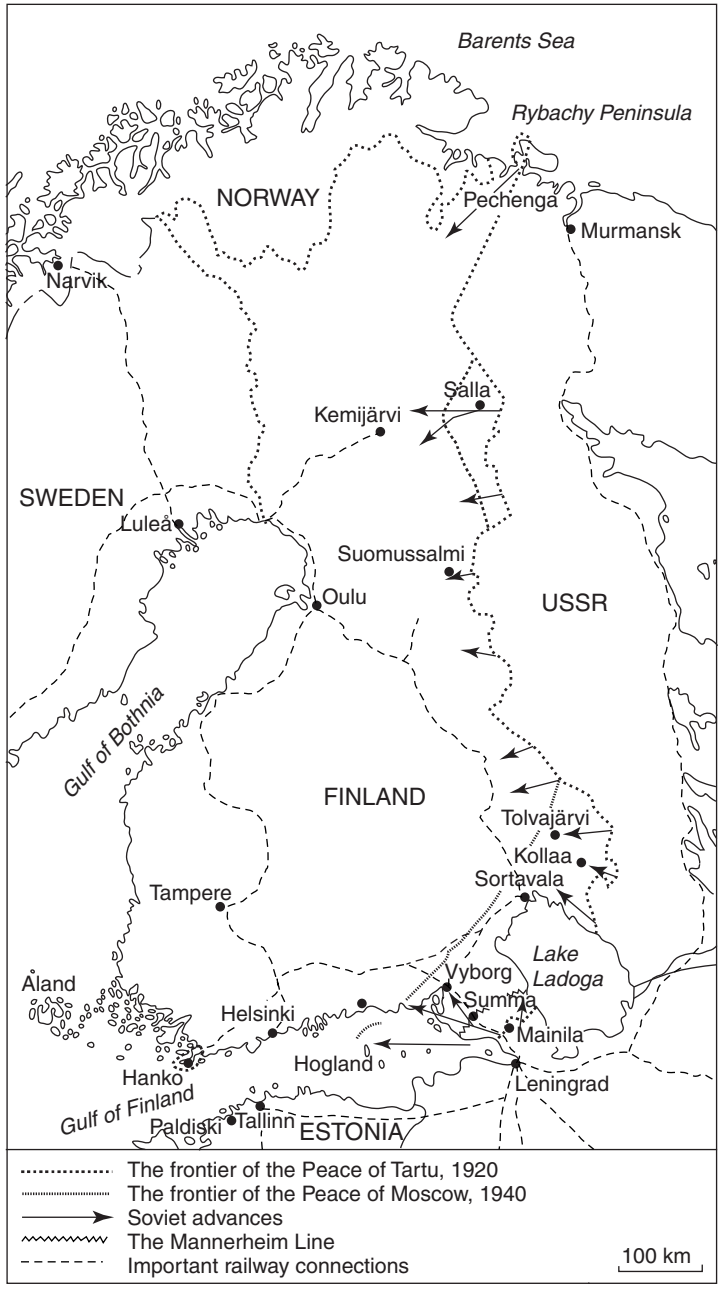
The outcome was naturally humiliating for the Soviet Union. Never before had the League of Nations resorted to such a drastic measure. The expulsion of the Soviet Union was the League's last significant action before it finally fell into oblivion. Moscow, however, did not forget what had happened; the decision of the League of Nations in December 1939 was to cast its shadow over Soviet attitudes to proposals to set up a world organization for collective security in the final stages of the Second World War.

Finland benefited from the decision of the Assembly on 14 December in that it included a recommendation that member states provide Finland with material and humanitarian aid. This was just what the country now needed. It found itself fighting alone against a great power which was not at that time militarily committed elsewhere. The Swedish government rejected a Finnish appeal to participate in the defence of the Åland Islands. The Social Democrat Per Albin Hansson, who had been Prime Minister since 1932, formed a National Coalition government, in which the Social Democratic Party and the Farmers' Union were joined by the right. The portfolio for Foreign Affairs was given to Christian Günther, an independent career diplomat. The aim of Hansson's administration was to keep Sweden out of the war if at all possible. At the same time, however, it wished to do as much as it

could to help Finland. To this end, like Norway, it did not issue a proclamation of neutrality, continued to supply Finland with arms, and permitted military *matériel* to be transported to Finland through its territory. The Åland Islands were occupied by the Finns alone.[6] In fact, during the Winter War the Russians did not mount any significant military operations against the islands. From their point of view, there was no point in putting the strength of Sweden's neutrality policy to the test. (See Map 4.1)

Two very different armies met in the north of Europe at a time of the year when the nights are longest and there are only a few hours of daylight. On one side, there was the modern mechanized army of a great power with almost unlimited technical resources at its disposal and immense human reserves behind it. On the other side was a band of small farmers and lumberjacks, inured to hard work in the bitter cold and deep snow, well-trained, reasonably well-armed with infantry weapons, but utterly under-equipped in artillery and air power. At the beginning of the war, the Soviet Union had deployed along the 1500 km front 21 divisions – about 400,000 men – together with over 2000 pieces of artillery, 1500 tanks and more than 2000 aircraft. It also had the advantage that its air force and navy could operate out of bases in Estonia. The plan drawn up under K.A. Meretskov, the Commander of the Leningrad Military District, aimed at the complete occupation of Finland in one month. The main blow was to be delivered through the Karelian Isthmus, which constituted the shortest route to Finland's vital centres of population and industry and to its capital. This task was entrusted to the Soviet Union's Seventh Army. The instructions issued by the Leningrad Military District set the goal of reaching Helsinki within two weeks. North of Lake Ladoga, the Eighth Army was to attack the defences of the Karelian Isthmus from the rear and to penetrate into the interior of the country. Still further north, the task of the Ninth Army was to cut Finland in two by advancing across the narrowest part of the country to Oulu on the Gulf of Bothnia. On the coastline of the Barents Sea, the Fourteenth Army was to take Pechenga and prevent any landings on the Murmansk coast.[7]

The units sent into action by the Soviet Union against Finland were generally regarded as being among the best troops in the Red Army. However, there were deficiencies in their organization, leadership, training and equipment that partly explain why the projected goals were not achieved. The army was designed mainly for a war in Central Europe, against Germany or Poland. In Finland, the organization proved to be a rigid machine, and the army experienced great



Map 4.1 The Winter War, 30 November 1939–13 March 1940

difficulties in adapting to the special conditions of a land broken up by forests and lakes and with few roads. In Stalin's purges in the late 1930s, over 40,000 officers had been executed or imprisoned, including many of the senior officers in the Red Army. Consequently high-ranking posts were filled with officers who had no experience of leading large units. The operations of the Red Army, particularly in the early stages of the Winter War, were characterized by inflexibility and a reluctance to take risks. Because the campaign against Finland was projected to be a short one, insufficient precautions against winter conditions had been taken, and most Soviet soldiers lacked both skis and the ability to use them.[8]

What was the morale of the Soviet soldiers like when they marched to war against Finland? The propaganda aimed at both the troops and the civilian population justified the war by the need to protect Leningrad, but it also mentioned the liberation of the Finnish people. 'We are going into Finland not as conquerors but as friends of the people of Finland', stated an instruction issued by the political administration of the Leningrad Military District to the troops on 23 November. The available sources indicate that both the troops and the civilian population of the district considered that the war was justified. Only at a later stage, when the deficiencies in the preparations became evident and the decisive victory was delayed, is it possible to discern any dissention.[9] Finnish observations indicate that the Russian soldiers fought with courage and dedication, refusing to surrender even when surrounded. In his memoirs, Mannerheim describes the Russian officer corps as brave and imperturbable, unruffled by losses, and the Russian infantry soldier as courageous, tough, content with little but lacking in initiative.[10]

At the end of 1939, Finland had arms for about 265,000 men. With mobilization it was possible to put out a field army of nine divisions. Most of the arms for the infantry and the weapons of the field and coastal artillery dated back to the First World War. The Finnish field artillery was superior to the Russian in terms of gunnery and fire control. The problem lay in the lack of ordnance and ammunition. There were practically no armoured vehicles available at all. The lack of anti-tank guns was compensated for with Molotov cocktails. Most of the 2000 tanks that the Finns claimed to have immobilized in the Winter War were destroyed with these bottles of inflammable material, the use of which demanded cool nerves on the part of the soldiers. The coastal artillery was relatively strong as a result of the fact that imperial Russia had paid particular attention to this branch of the armed forces in

Finland, and after independence Finland had inherited the Russian fortresses on its coast. It was able to protect the country's long coastline until it became icebound and naval operations were rendered impossible.

There were some other factors that compensated for the deficiencies in the quantity and quality of weapons. The troops were trained for northern terrestrial and climatic conditions. Most of the reservists had undergone annual further training under the direction of the Civil Guards. In the years before the war, particular attention had been paid to the skills and equipment needed in winter warfare. The fact that mobilization had been effected in good time made it possible for troops deployed along the border to acquaint themselves with the terrain and to reinforce their positions. In terms of outward appearance, the army was rather motley, even unsoldierly. There were not enough uniforms to go around. Many reservists fought in their own clothes covered with a snow camouflage smock. On the home front a national movement arose to remedy the deficiencies in the army's clothing. Thousands of women and children knitted woollen mittens, socks and pullovers for the soldiers, which naturally helped to cement the bond between the home front and the fighting troops. A voluntary women's organization called *Lotta Svärd* made a considerable contribution to the army's efforts. Over 80,000 of its members worked during the war in provisioning, nursing and signals duties and as aircraft spotters.

The Finns had concentrated their main forces in the Karelian Isthmus and the area immediately north of Lake Ladoga. In the sparsely populated forested areas further to the north it was estimated that fewer forces would be needed because the small number of roads would make it difficult for the Russians to use large units. These calculations immediately proved wrong. With an overwhelming superiority in numbers, the Russians attacked in the north simultaneously along the three existing small roads in an attempt to break through to the Gulf of Bothnia, and Mannerheim was forced to move a large portion of his reserves north in response. In the first few days of the war in the Karelian Isthmus and north of Ladoga, the Finns withdrew without offering much resistance. The Commander-in-Chief was furious. He demanded that the Finnish forces mount a stubborn defence right at the border. The Commander of the Army of the Isthmus, Lieutenant-General Hugo Österman, on the other hand, wanted to get his troops back behind the main line of defence in effective fighting condition. The Soviet General Staff, too, were dissatisfied. As early as the third day of the war, the High Command of the Red Army saw fit to complain about the slow rate of advance to the commanders of the Eighth and

Ninth Armies: 'We cannot dally long in Finland, advancing only four or five kilometres a day. Our troops must conclude the campaign with a determined attack.' The units fighting against Finland were removed from the command of the Leningrad Military District and placed under the direct command of the *Stavka* (the High Command).[11]

The Finns' main line of defence in the Karelian Isthmus was a still incompletely fortified position which stretched like a band from the Gulf of Finland to Lake Ladoga. Along the 100-km front there were 221 concrete fortifications, mostly machine-gun emplacements. Foreign journalists began to call this the Mannerheim Line, and the name became common currency, although the Field Marshal himself did not like it and never used it, except occasionally when quoting others. It was certainly far from being the equal of the French Maginot Line, but in the excuses of the Russian commanders, and in later Soviet historiography, it took on mythic dimensions.[12]

Russian attempts to break through the Mannerheim Line in the western part of the Karelian Isthmus on 15–22 December failed. Dozens of Soviet tanks lay destroyed before the Finnish positions. The name of a small village called Summa became a symbol of dogged resistance – a Finnish Verdun. At Tolvajärvi, north of Lake Ladoga, the Finns, despite their inferiority in numbers, had launched an attack and smashed two Soviet divisions. On the frontier further north, too, the Soviet forces were experiencing great difficulties. Without skis or the ability to use them, they were limited to the few existing roads, and Finnish units, moving swiftly through the forested terrain, were able to break up the congested columns, surround them in isolated units and destroy them one by one. It was in these battles in the forest wildernesses that the Finns' mobility and skills in winter warfare came fully into their own. Only in the Pechenga area, where the Finnish defence was light, were the Soviet troops able to achieve their objectives and occupy it.

The defensive victories of the Finns had a crucial impact on the course of the war. The realization that 'We can handle it' boosted the morale of the troops considerably. On the home front, the people's confidence that they could cope in the war grew, and abroad there was a growing conviction that it was worth helping Finland. The British and French governments began to calculate how they might use Finland's struggle to their own advantage. And finally, at some point, the Soviet leaders started to wonder whether it might not have been wiser to sit down at the negotiating table with Ryti's government and to abandon Kuusinen.

The Finns, both at the front and at home, regarded the Winter War as a struggle to which there was no alternative, a defence of the very existence of the nation against an aggressor. This created a rare feeling of unity that characterized the period and came to be known as 'the Spirit of the Winter War'. An important precondition for this unity had been the creation of a centre-left government in 1937. The country was taken into the war by a government made up of the workers' and small farmers' own representatives. The national consensus was further strengthened in the autumn before the war by the pact between Hitler and Stalin and the events in the Baltic countries. It was finally cemented by what was felt to be an unjustified invasion by the Soviet Union, the bombing of civilian targets and the creation of the Kuusinen government. For the Social Democrats it went without saying that the country must be defended against the aggressor. They felt that they were defending their native land, in which there existed democracy and social justice, as well as a future for the worker's movement, against a communist dictatorship. The mutual understanding that arose during the Winter War between leaders of the moderate right and the Social Democrats was to last for a long time – throughout the war and well beyond it. Even the majority of the communist supporters took up arms or toiled for long hours over a lathe. Indeed, many leading communists condemned the Soviet aggression as a betrayal of Lenin's principles.

For the international press, the Finnish Winter War was a highly newsworthy event. It took place at a time when there was hardly anything of interest happening on the western front. There were altogether over 300 foreign correspondents in Finland during the Winter War. They reported stories of a heroic nation struggling alone in the snowy wastes to readers who had previously known hardly anything about Finland. In these tales, the war between Finland and the Soviet Union easily turned into a battle between absolute good and absolute evil. There was a ready audience for such an image among influential anti-Soviet circles in the West, but sympathy for Finland was spread far beyond these groups. Ivan Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador in London, wrote that there was 'a freezing void' around the Soviet Embassy and the Trade Mission of the USSR. With a few exceptions, all their friends had vanished.[13]

The sympathy felt for Finland was a political reality which the British and French governments were forced to recognize, and of which they also strove to take advantage They calculated that by presenting themselves as protectors of Finland they would win the sympathies of the neutral nations, in particular the United States and the

Scandinavian countries. On 4 December, the British war cabinet decided to sell Finland 20 Gloster Gladiator fighters. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain quashed the protests of the military, stating that Finland had to be helped 'for political reasons'. The French government under Édouard Daladier felt the pressure of domestic public opinion even more strongly than its British counterpart. At last, a small nation that refused to submit to the dictators and not only resisted but did so successfully – this was something that raised a real storm of fervour! There were those among the anti-Soviet right who would have preferred to see France's enemy in Stalin than in Hitler.[14]

More significant than these psychological factors were the strategic and political calculations of the Allies. Ever since the outbreak of the Second World War, Britain and France had striven to weaken Germany by means of an economic embargo. They focused their gaze particularly on the Swedish iron mines, from which it was thought to be vital for Germany to ensure an uninterrupted supply of ore. The ore was shipped partly through Norwegian territorial waters from Narvik, partly from Swedish ports on the Baltic. Halfway through December, when it was clear that Finland was really capable of offering serious resistance to the Soviet Union, London and Paris began to consider how they might use this war to cut off the supplies of iron ore to Germany and bring Sweden and Norway into the Allied camp.[15] At a meeting of the Allies' Supreme War Council in Paris on 19 December it was decided to afford Finland 'all possible assistance'.[16] The USSR was held to be an ally of Germany, which by supplying it with oil and raw materials compromised the economic embargo. In order to paralyse Soviet oil production, the French began to plan an air strike on Baku. The intention was to ease the pressure on Finland and to prevent Germany from obtaining oil from the Caucasus.[17] They also suggested to their allies that they should assist Finland by effecting a landing at Pechenga on the Barents Sea. The British, however, opposed the scheme; it would not have cut off the supplies of iron ore to Germany, but it would certainly have led to armed conflict with the Russians. The Pechenga enterprise was renounced at a meeting of the Supreme War Council on 5 February. Instead, a British plan to send Finland regular troops disguised as volunteers through Sweden and Norway was adopted.[18]

Thus there was assistance for Finland in the offing. However, the Finnish leaders were appalled by the idea of becoming involved in a war between the great powers. At the turn of the year, Ryti and Tanner began to look for a peace broker. They were principally thinking of

Germany and the United States. They thought that Germany might succeed because at that moment it was the great power that enjoyed the best relations with the Soviet Union. They also believed that peace in the north of Europe was in the interest of Germany. They felt that both the word of Germany and that of the United States would carry weight in Moscow.

The German attitude to the war between Finland and the USSR was determined by the fact that as long as the war in the west continued, it could not risk any conflict with the Soviet Union. Therefore, it was out of the question for it to interfere in any clash between the USSR and a state within the Soviet sphere of influence. German diplomats abroad received instructions to emphasize the view that it was natural for the Soviet Union to endeavour to ensure the safety of Leningrad.[19] The war between Finland and the Soviet Union was to the advantage of Germany in that for the time being it occupied the forces of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, it was detrimental to the German war economy because it weakened the potential of both belligerent states to supply Germany with the products it needed.[20] Finland was almost indispensable as a supplier of copper to the German arms industry, and it was soon expected to supply it with nickel as well. In return for its copper Finland wanted arms. Just before the war, Hitler had sanctioned an agreement to sell Finland anti-aircraft guns and deliver them secretly through Sweden. The deliveries were cut off when information about them was leaked through the Swedish press. Germany also prohibited right of passage for *matériel* purchased by Finland from Hungary and Italy.[21]

In early January, Tanner put out cautious feelers to Germany concerning peace mediation. He asked the German envoy in Helsinki to convey to Berlin an enquiry as to whether the German government might have any advice to offer Finland. The envoy, von Blücher, strongly recommended to the German Foreign Ministry that Germany should accept the role of peace mediator.[22] Berlin disagreed. In accordance with an instruction issued by Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, von Blücher was informed that Berlin considered that there were at the moment no prospects of putting an end to the conflict. However, the German Ambassador in Moscow, von der Schulenburg, was encouraged to test the ground unofficially.[23] When he raised the matter of the war with Finland with Molotov on 25 January, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs explained that the Soviet government could not tolerate a hostile Finnish government in the proximity of Leningrad and the Murmansk railway. Any agreement with the 'Tanner–Ryti' government

and Mannerheim was totally out of the question.[24] From this Berlin understood that the USSR did not wish Germany to act as a peace broker, a stance which the latter continued to respect throughout the Winter War.

The United States had no interests in Finland to protect. On the other hand, the American people felt great sympathy for this small democratic country. Whereas the other states of Europe had lapsed in paying the debts they owed from the First World War to the United States, Finland had continued to pay off its debt. It was only a matter of $8.4 million, which Finland had no difficulty in settling, but as a result the name of Finland became practically synonymous with honesty. During the Winter War, Finland, in its struggle against the giant of the east, was regarded as representing the same values that America was felt to embody and which were now under threat all over the world. To cite the American historian, Michael Berry: 'Finland's debt-paying record and anti-Soviet sentiment combined to mark the zenith of Finland's popular image in the United States.'[25]

In consequence Finland received a great deal of humanitarian aid from the United States during the Winter War. However, despite the moral indignation of the American people, 'the Administration remained almost as parsimonious in deeds as it was in words'.[26] President Roosevelt's main aim after the outbreak of the Second World War was to assist Britain in its struggle against Germany. The strong isolationist sentiment prevailing in Congress and among the general public severely limited his freedom of movement. The Finns hoped to get weapons and loans from the United States. The isolationists, who did not trust the President, suspected that the Finnish case might create a precedent, a short step to taking the United States into a new world war. In the words of Senator Capper, he was 'strong for Finland', but he was staunchly opposed to giving American money 'to any country engaged in war'.

Thus Roosevelt did not know what he could do to help Finland apart from publicly condemning the aggression of the USSR. The stubborn efforts of the Finnish envoy in Washington, Hjalmar J. Procopé, to obtain credit and arms ran up against legislative barriers and bureaucracy. They were also regarded with considerable caution by the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, and ultimately the President was reluctant to anger isolationist opinion just before an election.[27] Finland had to be content with a loan of $10 million through the Export-Import Bank, which, however, was not to be used for buying arms from the United States. Immediately after the Winter War, a further loan of $20 million was issued.[28]

In principle, Hull was willing to consider American mediation in the war between the Soviet Union and Finland. At the end of January, he empowered Ambassador Steinhardt to approach Molotov in confidence to ascertain whether an initiative by the United States would have any chance of success. The reaction of the Commissar for Foreign Affairs was not encouraging. Molotov declared that it was impossible to negotiate with 'the Ryti-Tanner-Mannerheim government'. Steinhardt left Molotov convinced that the Soviet government was not at that moment interested in ending the conflict with Finland.[29]

However, the Soviet Union found itself in an awkward position. The calculations on which its attack on Finland was based had gone badly awry. There were supposed to have been Soviet troops in Helsinki within two, or at the most three, weeks of the outbreak of the war. In fact, within that span of time their advance had been halted at Summa in the Karelian Isthmus and Tolvajärvi north of Lake Ladoga. The Soviet fleet's efforts to isolate Finland from Scandinavia had miscarried. Stalin was furious. 'The whole world has its eyes on us, and the prestige of the Red Army is the guarantee of the Soviet Union's security', he raved.[30] A big offensive to crush Finnish resistance was being prepared, but at best a breakthrough would take weeks if not months. Moscow learnt at an early stage of the Western powers' planned intervention in Scandinavia. On 8 January 1940, Molotov told the German Ambassador that the Soviet government was aware of the danger that would be created if Britain and France started to use Sweden and Norway for their own ends, and that it had delivered a warning to these countries.[31]

We cannot be sure just when the Soviet leaders began to consider ditching the Kuusinen government and returning to the earlier plan of securing the safety of Leningrad by moving the border sufficiently far from the city on the Neva and closing off entry to the Gulf of Finland with a naval base. Viktor Vladimirov, a Soviet diplomat who used the archives of the former Soviet Union, wrote in a book published in 1995 that the reassessment of the war aims of the Soviet Union was made in the first days of January at a special session of the Politburo, at which the High Command was also present. As the goal of the large offensive that was currently being prepared, the meeting set an advance to a position west of the city of Vyborg, which it thought would be enough to force the 'Ryti-Tanner government' to accept the peace conditions of the USSR.[32] This fits well with the actual course of events. The Soviet government used both diplomatic and military means to coerce the Finnish government into yielding to conditions which were approximately the same as the maximum programme of October 1939. But the

Soviet Union would accept neither Germany nor the United States as a peace mediator. Sweden, on the other hand, was acceptable. As the major supplier of aid to Finland, it had the ability to put effective pressure on Helsinki, and it had a strong motive for doing so: peace between Finland and the Soviet Union was in accordance with its vital interests.[33]

Helsinki had little faith in the chances of success of Swedish mediation since the USSR had previously rejected it at the beginning of December. And, in fact, the process was initiated through somewhat unofficial channels: Mrs Hella Wuolijoki, a playwright and businesswoman with radical left-wing views, approached Tanner and offered to go to Stockholm to meet the Soviet envoy, Alexandra Kollontai, with whom she had been friends in her youth. The daughter of a rich businessman, a former celebrated beauty and a spokeswoman for women's sexual liberation, Kollontai was one of the Soviet Union's most experienced diplomats. While most of the old Bolsheviks and Soviet diplomats had perished in Stalin's purges, Kollontai had managed to preserve both her life and her position. Ryti gave his permission, and Wuolijoki set off for Stockholm on 10 January, where four days later she met Kollontai. She asked whether it was possible that the Soviet Union might be willing to start secret negotiations with the Finnish government. Kollontai promised to wire Moscow.[34]

The Swedish Foreign Minister Günther met Kollontai on 25 January. He mentioned the threat of a Franco-British intervention, and offered his services.[35] Four days later, the envoy handed Günther a telegram from Moscow, the contents of which were to be communicated to the Finnish government. In it the Soviet government stated that it was not in principle opposed to a compromise with the 'Ryti-Tanner government'. However, the demands of the Soviet government would no longer be limited to the conditions presented in the previous autumn, because blood had been spilled 'against our wishes and not through any fault of ours'.[36]

Knowledge of the opening of contacts with Moscow was confined to a very small circle. The Finnish leaders were prepared to make greater concessions in the Karelian Isthmus than they had promised in November. However, only Paasikivi at this stage was willing to offer the Hanko peninsula for a base. 'Our reply has not been drafted in a particularly humble tone because, in our opinion, we are not the losing side', was Tanner's assessment. The Finnish response was delivered to Kollontai through Günther.[37]

It immediately became apparent that a base in Hanko was a conditio sine qua non for the Soviet government. Molotov telegraphed Kollontai that if it was not possible to lease the Hanko peninsula, the port of Hanko and adjacent islands, they considered negotiations with the 'Ryti-Tanner government' out of the question.[38] Tanner decided to go to Stockholm to meet Kollontai. Molotov gave her permission to receive the Finnish Foreign Minister: 'Hear what he has to say and report to us.' If Tanner made the same proposal that they had received through Günther, Kollontai was to say that this was not good enough to constitute a basis for negotiation. In order to avoid a complete impasse, Tanner and Kollontai tried to find a compromise. In the end, Tanner proposed the ceding of one island in the mouth of the Gulf of Finland in return for territorial concessions. He said that this was his personal proposal to Stalin.[39] However, Moscow rejected the proposal; the offer of one island instead of Hanko did not in its opinion provide a sufficient basis for negotiation.[40]

In January 1940 there was a comparatively confident mood in Finland. The Mannerheim Line had held. Two Soviet divisions had been destroyed at Suomussalmi in the north. The papers published pictures of huge amounts of war booty jamming the road to Raate. Two other Soviet divisions had been isolated and surrounded north of Lake Ladoga and were unable to break out. The general public was confident that Finland could continue to defend itself successfully. Mannerheim admitted to Ryti that he had initially overestimated the Red Army. He wrote to the British general, Edmund Ironside, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that in his estimation Finland would be able to last the winter if it got fighter aircraft, anti-aircraft artillery, long-range guns and ammunition. But above all it needed regular troops.[41] The Finnish Commander-in-Chief hoped to get Swedish troops who were accustomed to Nordic winter conditions to support his own jaded forces. At the same time, he regarded an armed intervention by the Western powers with suspicion. He considered that it would involve some serious problems and might lead to a counter-intervention by Germany.[42]

The critical turn of events in the Winter War for the Finns took place on 11 February when the Red Army launched a mass offensive in the Karelian Isthmus. The command of the Soviet troops had been reorganized with the establishment of the North-western Front Command. Reinforcements had been transferred from as far as the Odessa, Urals and Siberian Military Districts. The operation was based on the massive use of artillery and tanks. The Russians deployed 23 divisions in the Karelian Isthmus. Opposing them were

nine Finnish divisions and one cavalry brigade. In support of the attacking Soviet troops was a powerful artillery that could provide constant fire coverage with no need to conserve ammunition. The artillery was known to be Stalin's favourite arm of the military. 'In modern warfare you must never save on ammunition and cartridges', he said. 'It is criminal to save on them.'[43] The main thrust of the strike was directed at Vyborg. In the view of Army Commander First Class S.K. Timoshenko, who had been given the command of the North-western Front, Vyborg was the lock that closed off southern Finland. If it were taken, it would open the way to the interior of the country.[44] After three days of fierce fighting, the Soviet troops made a breakthrough at Summa, and over the next few days they managed to extend it. The Finns had to give up the Mannerheim Line.

As early as 10 February, in discussions with Ryti and Tanner, the Finnish Commander-in-Chief had been in favour of making peace even at the cost of the sacrifices involved. Failing that, it was imperative to get regular troops and artillery from Sweden. The process of marshalling volunteers was too slow. The last recourse for Mannerheim was assistance from the Western powers, a measure for which he considered that the ground had not been properly prepared; it might lead to a breach with Sweden and war with Germany.[45] At a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Affairs on 12 February, Tanner placed these alternatives in the same order. As a price for peace he was willing to surrender the island of Jussarö east of Hanko and areas of the Karelian Isthmus. President Kallio together with Ryti and Paasikivi declared their support for this proposal. On the other hand, the Minister of Defence, Juho Niukkanen, and the Minister of Education, Uuno Hannula, strongly opposed it. It was eventually decided to send Tanner to Stockholm to ask for military assistance.[46]

Sweden was the main supplier of assistance to Finland in the Winter War. Partly it was prompted by its own interests and partly by sympathy for its struggling eastern neighbour. If Finland were to come under Soviet control, the strategic position of Sweden would be crucially weakened. Moreover, an unprecedented sentiment in support of the Finnish cause had been aroused in the Swedish people, who regarded Finland as fighting in defence of democratic values and a common Nordic cultural heritage. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, a privately inspired movement had got under way which led to the dispatch of a brigade of Swedish volunteers to the Finnish front. The assistance given by the Swedish government also assumed forms and

proportions that went far beyond its traditional neutrality. It granted loans to Finland and supplied it with war *matériel* directly from Swedish Army stores. The Swedish munitions industry worked night and day to be able to deliver the Finnish Army's orders. But Finland expected even more – it wanted Sweden to join it openly by sending troops. These hopes were encouraged by Swedish activist propaganda, with the slogan '*Finlands sak är vår*' (Finland's cause is ours).

The difficult task of piloting Sweden through this storm of feeling fell to the government of Per Albin Hansson. The biggest threat to this small and militarily weak state was presented by Germany, which had almost complete control of the Baltic. Some messages from Germany were interpreted in government circles in Stockholm as meaning that Germany would act if Sweden made an intervention on Finland's behalf. And even if this did not happen, the leaders in charge of Swedish foreign policy believed that a military intervention on behalf of Finland would make Sweden so dependent on British support that it would be tantamount to taking sides in the world war.[47] The government decided on a fixed policy of helping Finland as far as was possible without any armed intervention and refused the right of passage through its territory for troops of the Western powers. There was considerable agreement within the government on this matter. Even those who in principle were for a more active line were forced to admit that in the end Hansson's policy was the only practicable one. Information received at the end of January that the Soviet leaders were prepared to negotiate about peace with Helsinki naturally only lent greater weight to the government's chosen policy. The most important thing for Sweden was the survival of Finland as an independent buffer state between itself and the Soviet Union. The location of Finland's eastern border was less important. Sweden tried as far as it could to further peace contacts between Finland and the USSR and to encourage the former to accept the conditions offered.[48] Hansson made the position of the Swedish government absolutely clear to Tanner. The sending of regular troops to Finland was impossible. The Swedish people would not understand, he said, if the government decided to go to war. He urged the Finns to make peace.[49]

The Supreme War Council of the Allies had decided on 5 February to send troops to Scandinavia. By snatching the initiative and cutting off the supplies of Swedish iron ore to Germany, the Allies thought that they could crucially shorten the war. Beside this the fact that two small neutral states would thereby be dragged into the battle counted for little. According to the plans that were drawn up, 100,000 British, French and

Polish soldiers were to be sent to Scandinavia by mid-April. The main force was to land in Narvik on the coast of Norway and advance into Sweden. There it was to occupy the Gällivare iron ore fields and secure or destroy the port of Luleå on the Gulf of Bothnia in order to prevent the Germans from using it for the transportation of iron ore when the sea became ice-free again. Most of the forces to be sent would be needed for the occupation of the Norwegian coast and the Swedish iron ore fields. As aid for Finland there would be only 15,000 men without any heavy armaments. Because of the low transport capacity and vulnerability of the railways in northern Scandinavia, this was regarded as the absolute maximum. The troops for Finland were intended to be used only on the northern sector of the front so that in the event of a German invasion they would not be cut off. The intervention also involved diplomatic preparations. It required a request for assistance from Finland as well as the agreement of Sweden and Norway to grant right of passage to the troops. Although they were only two small militarily weak states, it was hardly possible to invade them by force – for both political and technical reasons. The Allies considered that Swedish support was indispensable if the scheme was to succeed.[50]

The Soviet leaders and the Finnish government were now faced with far-reaching decisions. The Red Army's offensive in the Karelian Isthmus had been so successful that Moscow had decided to take advantage of it in dictating terms to Finland. But if Finland refused them and actually asked the Western powers for assistance, the consequences might be unforeseeable. The Finnish government, for its part, had to decide whether it would accept the proffered Western aid at the risk of plunging Finland and the whole of Scandinavia in a world war or agree to a dictated peace.

From the very beginning, Foreign Minister Tanner had regarded the offers of assistance from the West with great suspicion. On 20 February, he turned to Günther and made an official request for Sweden to act as a peace broker.[51] The Swedish Foreign Minister did not need to be asked twice. The new Swedish envoy in Moscow, Wilhelm Assarsson, was enjoined to obtain an audience with Molotov immediately. From the latter, on 20 and 21 February, he ascertained the conditions of the Soviet government: in addition to Hanko, the surrender of the south-eastern corner of Finland including the cities of Vyborg and Sortavala. These were minimum demands over which the Soviet government would not haggle, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs stated. Molotov also said that the USSR was willing to consider an agreement with Finland and Estonia concerning the common defence of the Gulf of Finland.[52]

At approximately the same time as they learned of these conditions, the Finns received more detailed information about the intervention plans of the Western powers. The British envoy, Gordon Vereker, said that it was planned to send a force of 22,000 men to Finland by mid-April. The size of the reinforcements was exaggerated, but even so the Finns considered it too small. Neither the British nor the French were able to say how these troops would reach Finland if Sweden and Norway refused them right of passage.

The choice between the two alternatives was a difficult one. The USSR was demanding the surrender of areas whose population was totally Finnish-speaking and some of which had belonged to Finland ever since the Middle Ages. On the other hand, the penetration of the Mannerheim Line after two months of resistance had made the military situation perilous. The exhausted army was withdrawing slowly towards Vyborg, while the enemy was still bringing new divisions of fresh troops up to the front. The Soviet forces had learned from their mistakes at the beginning of the war. Hundreds of guns were pounding the unfinished fortifications. A great power was attacking. 'I don't think you need to be a soldier to understand that we won't last if the war goes on for very long', said General Walden, Mannerheim's representative to the government. Ryti, Tanner and Paasikivi emphasized the fact that the assistance promised by the Western powers would not solve the situation. Therefore, it was necessary to make peace while Finland was still an eligible party for negotiation, in other words before its defences collapsed. They could save the country by cutting off one limb, Tanner said. At any rate, the Finnish resistance had led to the Soviet Union dropping Kuusinen. The Foreign Minister was particularly concerned with maintaining relations with Sweden, with which he tried to show solidarity, and whose neutral stance he held to be in the interest of Finland. Prime Minister Ryti emphasized that it was imperative to save the army from destruction in order that the territories that they were now being forced to surrender might in more favourable circumstances be won back.[53]

Those who were against making peace believed that the Soviet Union was aiming to overrun the whole of Finland. 'Russia must always be regarded with suspicion', said Niukkanen, the Minister of Defence. The deterioration of the situation at the front since mid-February and the insufficiency of the Western powers' offer of assistance reduced the number of those who were willing to resort to accepting aid from Britain and France. President Kallio had originally been in favour of Western assistance, but the situation at the front forced him too to accept the need for peace. In the end it was only the

two ministers from the Agrarian League, Niukkanen and Hannula, the Minister of Education, who were for rejecting the peace conditions. They had a much more optimistic assessment of Finland's ability to continue its resistance than the military leaders. They also declared that they were confident that the Western powers would win the world war. By allying itself with them and continuing to fight, Finland would eventually take its seat among the victors in the ensuing peace conference.[54] In the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs, in particular Urho Kekkonen of the Agrarian League was in favour of continuing the struggle. He too believed that peace on the terms now being offered was tantamount to surrender and meant that Finland would come under the complete control of the Soviet Union.[55]

The USSR pressed Finland for a decision. Molotov had on several occasions reiterated to Envoy Assarsson that later the conditions would be harsher. The spectre of Kuusinen was again brought forth. If the Finnish government would not accept the conditions, Moscow would end up by making a treaty with Kuusinen, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs threatened.[56] Since Sweden had undertaken the task of mediating for peace, Moscow had turned a blind eye to its supplies of assistance to Finland. Molotov assured it time and again that it had nothing to fear from the USSR. He even said that the Soviet government fully understood Sweden's interest in the Åland Islands and inquired whether it had any aspirations in that direction. Günther rejected the feeler; he was unwilling in the situation that prevailed to embark on anything that might be construed as an attempt to profit from Finland's plight.[57]

On 2 March, Britain and France informed Sweden and Norway that they intended to send reinforcements to Finland, and that they would request right of passage for them. Sweden declared that it absolutely refused right of passage. Norway's response was also negative. 'They have no illusions and are well aware that our landing there will mean war in Sweden. I cannot blame them', wrote General Ironside.[58] Günther's attempts to persuade the Soviet government to alleviate the terms failed; threats that Sweden's policy might change had no effect on Moscow. Consequently Günther did everything in his power to persuade Finland to bow to the conditions. He wondered, he said to Erkko, the Finnish chargé d'affaires, what the Swedish people would say when they were told that Finland was willing to sacrifice Sweden and turn it into a theatre of war in order to save Vyborg and Sortavala, neither of which were of vital importance to Finland. He also observed that it might well be possible to liberate those areas later under more favourable circumstances.[59]

From the Finnish point of view, Western assistance remained an alternative which it would be necessary to resort to if the peace negotiations failed, or if the conditions were felt to be too severe. For the Western powers it was important that Finland should not collapse or make a premature peace. Most enthusiastic about the Scandinavian venture was France. Britain was much more clearly aware of the military risks involved, and it also wished to avoid a final break with Moscow. The differing goals and assessments of the situation caused no little friction between the Allies.[60] In order to encourage the Finns to continue fighting, the French Premier, Daladier, was ready to offer them generous help, unconcerned about whether it was possible to fulfil the promises. France would do all it could to help Finland, he assured the Finnish envoy.[61] The new promises caused the Finnish government to delay its decision. However, the vagueness and contradictions about the number of troops to be sent and the date of their arrival soon undermined the Finns' confidence in the offers. 'Too little and too late' was Mannerheim's comment on the promised assistance. However, total isolation was a frightening prospect and, in the difficult circumstances of those days of March 1940, the Commander-in-Chief changed his mind a couple of times about asking for assistance.[62]

Germany had good cause to hope for a restoration of peace between Finland and the Soviet Union. Soviet control of Finland was certainly not in its interest. The end of the war in the north would secure the military economic advantages of Germany: the supply of Swedish iron ore and the opening up of trade with Finland. While von Ribbentrop's Foreign Ministry, following his earlier policy, continued to refrain from involving itself in the war between Finland and the USSR, the Commander-in-Chief of the *Luftwaffe*, Field Marshal Hermann Göring, strove through different channels to persuade Finland to make peace on the available terms. Otherwise, he thought, it faced destruction. He promised them that Finland would eventually regain what it lost. According to a note that was recorded only much later and is therefore somewhat unreliable, Göring had intimated to T.M. Kivimäki, the former Prime Minister of Finland, who was visiting him, that a war would very soon break out between Germany and the Soviet Union.[63] It is hardly likely that these messages influenced the Finnish government's decision to reject Western aid and accept the peace conditions, although this view has been put forward.[64] Germany was regarded as the ally of the USSR, and to place hopes in possible support from that direction at a later stage would have been a hazardous gamble.

The news from the front told the real situation, and this was what counted most. By mid-March, the Red Army had mounted 58 divisions against Finland. Behind them it had another 14 divisions in reserve. The attacking army comprised altogether 960,000 men, two-fifths of the military strength of the Soviet Union at that time. It had at its disposal over 5000 guns, nearly 3000 tanks and almost 4000 aircraft. It was the aim of Timoshenko, the Commander of the North-western Front, to crush the main forces of the Finnish Army in the Karelian Isthmus without giving them the chance to withdraw into the interior of the country. To this end, he tried to encircle them in Vyborg, which they were stubbornly defending.[65] Deep frost had made the ice on the Bay of Vyborg sufficiently thick to allow tanks and other heavy vehicles to travel over it. Taking advantage of this, the Soviet Army directed its onslaught across the bay at the Finnish flank. The attack by two army corps on the unfortified coast took the Finns by surprise. On 4 March, the Russians managed to establish a bridgehead on the western side of the bay. Even there, the hurriedly assembled Finnish troops put up a stiff resistance. Gradually, however, the Russians succeeded in expanding the bridgehead, and from there they prepared to continue their advance behind the Finnish forces defending the Karelian Isthmus and on into the south of Finland.

After fighting for nearly three months, the Finnish troops were utterly exhausted. There were no more reserves available. The artillery had at its disposal only six to ten shots per barrel a day left. The enemy's supremacy in the air made it almost impossible for troops and supplies to move by day. It was clear to the generals that this situation could not continue. 'Everything hangs on a hair's breadth', reported Major-General Paavo Talvela, the commander of the Third Army Corps, which was fighting in the eastern part of the Karelian Isthmus. In actual fact, the situation in the Karelian Isthmus was probably even worse than the commanders realized.[66] The superiority of the Soviet forces was also becoming overwhelming north of Lake Ladoga. In the Kollaa region further north, a single Finnish division had been holding off five Soviet divisions for weeks on end, but now these were finally breaking through. This would lead to the collapse of the defences on this whole sector of the front. In the far north, the Russians were preparing an onslaught on the Swedish volunteer brigade, which had assumed responsibility for the defence of the front there.

On 5 March, the Government of Finland decided to accept the terms of the Soviet government, and the following day a peace delegation set

off for Moscow via Stockholm. The Finnish delegation was led by Prime Minister Ryti, and it included Paasikivi, General Rudolf Walden and the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs, Väinö Voionmaa. On the other side of the negotiating table sat Molotov, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, A.A. Zhdanov, the Leningrad Party Secretary and Brigadier A.M. Vasilievskii, who was the military expert. The Finns had hoped to get some concessions in the peace conditions. In fact, the opposite happened. The USSR demanded that Finland surrender the Hanko peninsula and south-east Finland, the islands in the Gulf of Finland, and in the north the eastern parts of the Kuusamo and Salla areas and the part of the Rybachy peninsula that belonged to Finland. The claims regarding Kuusamo and Salla were new. The Soviet leaders justified them by the need to protect the Murmansk railway. Molotov poured the blame for the war on to Finland and singled out Tanner for particular criticism. He and Zhdanov accused the Finns of offering their country as a springboard for an attack by the Western powers on the Soviet Union. Haggling was out of the question. The terms were to be accepted *in toto*.[67] It is significant that the defence agreement mentioned by Molotov to Assarsson on 20 February was not included in the conditions.

The Finnish government and Mannerheim hesitated when they learnt of the final terms. Daladier warned the Finns of the duplicity of the Soviets: it was out of fear of an intervention by the Western powers that they had agreed to negotiations in order to destroy Finland later. Unless Finland now made an official request for assistance to the Western powers, they could offer no guarantee whatsoever that its lost territories would be restored to it after the war.[68] Once again Finland received diplomatic support from the United States. Secretary of State Hull gave the US Ambassador, Steinhardt, the task of explaining to Molotov that, although his government did not wish to interfere in the negotiations, public opinion in the United States would be most favourably impressed if the USSR treated Finland generously. In his discussions with the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Steinhardt particularly emphasized the fact that the Americans would not accept any government set up by the Soviet Union in Finland. After prevaricating for a while, Molotov finally said that the Finns would be free to elect their own government. That was of no interest to the USSR.[69]

The peace treaty was signed in the early hours of the morning of 13 March. The Finnish Parliament subsequently ratified the treaty by 145 votes to three. However, 42 members of parliament were absent during the vote. Most of them were from Karelia. To the general public

the terms of the peace settlement came as a shock. They had read in the papers and heard on the radio reports of a successful defensive action and the huge losses of the enemy. Waking up to the reality was all the more bitter. Mannerheim published an 'Order of the Day' written in a lofty style, in which he said that Finland had paid to the last farthing its cultural debt to the West. Emphasizing the insufficiency of Finnish resources and criticizing their western neighbours who only 'took care of themselves', he helped the government to justify its decision and ensured that it avoided significant criticism.

The Finns had lost nearly 23,000 men, fallen or missing. Another thousand civilians had lost their lives in air-raids or gone down with merchant vessels. Estimates of Soviet losses vary considerably. According to the latest studies, they would appear to have been in any case over 100,000 fallen, frozen to death or missing.[70]

In the Moscow Peace Treaty, Finland lost about one-tenth of its national territory and about the same amount of its economic capacity. In the south-east, the new frontier split the important industrial region of the Vuoksi valley, and it cut across the Saimaa Canal, which linked the inland waterways of eastern Finland to the Gulf of Finland. Vyborg, the country's second largest city and the towns of Sortavala and Käkisalmi (now Priozersk) were left behind the new frontier. Finland was compelled to lease the Hanko area for a period of thirty years. The inhabitants of the surrendered territories were all ethnic Finns, and they voluntarily abandoned their homes. Over 400,000 people moved to the western side of the new border. The Soviet Union returned the Pechenga region that it had conquered, apart from the Rybachy peninsula, to Finland, probably because it did not wish to arouse Norwegian unrest. Correspondingly, with Sweden in mind, it refrained from presenting any demands with regard to the Åland Islands.[71]

For the Finns, the country's lone defensive struggle in the Winter War had a unique unifying effect on the nation. The powerful emotional charge associated with it still exists. It is not possible to understand the Finnish mentality unless this is borne in mind. For over three months the Finnish forces had held off the army of a great power and had inflicted heavy losses on it. The fact that Finland managed to mount a successful defence is explained by the high fighting morale of the troops, by their training and tactics, which were adapted to the terrestrial and climatic conditions, and by the enemy's mistakes, the worst of which was to underestimate the ability and will of a small nation to defend itself. 'Thermopylae every day' was how Harold Macmillan described what he saw in Finland in the Winter War

to the House of Commons. But the Ephialtes of this war failed miserably. When it was over, Kuusinen's government was quietly dissolved.

Immediately before the war as well as during it, Finland had, by means of foreign procurements, succeeded in replenishing the army's munitions. The most important source of assistance and supplier of armaments was Sweden. Swedish weapons, such as anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, could also be delivered to the troops quickly because of the short distances they needed to be transported. In second place in terms of the monetary value of the supplies came Italy, third was France followed by Great Britain and Belgium. The United States was only in sixth position. Italy's position on this list is explained by the fact that it charged a high price for its Fiat fighter aircraft, whereas France and Britain donated some of the war *matériel* they sent as gifts. A lot of the imported goods were paid for with foreign loans, and Finland also raised money through selling some of its gold reserves.[72] A very important 'supplier' of *matériel* was the Red Army – the booty obtained from surrounded supply columns was considerable. In fact, the war was mainly financed with government loans from the Bank of Finland, in other words through printing banknotes. The economy of the small country survived the strain because the war was short, and the stocks acquired during peacetime were sufficient to cater for domestic demand.

The greatest weakness of the Finnish Army was the small size of its conscription base. Plans before the war had generally assumed that foreign troops would be obtained as reinforcements. However, when it came to the crunch, none came. Only 11,663 volunteers turned up. The biggest groups were from Sweden (8680 men), Denmark (944) and Norway (695). A Hungarian battalion of over 300 men disguised as skiing tourists set out for Finland via Italy and Britain. The fitting out and training of the volunteers took a long time. Only the Swedish brigade, which included many Norwegian volunteers in its ranks, reached the front. At the end of February the brigade took responsibility for northern Finland, thus releasing the Finnish battalions there for the defence of the Bay of Vyborg. At the very end of the war, a legion of American Finns arrived at the front in the Karelian Isthmus.[73]

The decision to submit to a harsh peace rather than appeal to the Western powers for assistance was perhaps the most difficult and far-reaching one that Finland had to make during the Second World War. It was also an important decision with regard to the course of the whole world war. Scandinavia would probably have turned into a theatre of war – as the British had calculated – when Germany attacked the intervention forces. In retrospect, the inflexibility of Hansson's

government and the stubbornness of Tanner would seem to have saved not only Sweden but also Finland from a catastrophe, for the assistance promised by the Western powers would certainly not have been effective – if it had ever arrived.

At the moment when the Finnish delegation signed the peace treaty in Moscow, the Franco-British intervention force was in the embarkation ports waiting for the order to leave. This order depended on Finland's request for assistance, which never came. In hindsight, the leadership and armament of these forces do not appear to have been adequate for the difficult tasks that awaited them. In particular, the air support and anti-aircraft artillery were insufficient. It is clear that they would have experienced very grave difficulties in the arctic conditions, even without German countermeasures.[74] The peace between Finland and the USSR was a severe blow to the Western powers. It was regarded as a setback almost comparable with the loss of Poland. The British and particularly the French governments were subjected to strong criticism at home. In the Chambre des Députés, the long-felt dissatisfaction with the Daladier government erupted, and caused it to resign. This is probably the only time when the affairs of Finland have in any way contributed to the fall of the government of a great power. The preparations of both the Western powers and Germany for hostilities in Scandinavia continued despite the peace concluded by Finland. On 8 April, the British laid a minefield in Norwegian waters, and the following day the Germans invaded Norway.

Stalin and the Soviet military leaders were anxious to learn from their experiences in the war against Finland. To this end, a meeting summoned by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party was held in Moscow from 14 to 17 April. It was attended by Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov and 44 high-ranking officers who had taken part in the war. The speeches of the officers who had fought on the Finnish front criticized the failures of military intelligence, the lack of experience of the officer corps even at high rank, the troops' insufficient training and above all the low level of proficiency in winter warfare. They also demanded that the authority of the commanders be increased. The weakness of the adversary's artillery and air force was undeniable, so they had to emphasize the strength of the Finnish fortifications. Several speakers admitted that in the beginning the adversary had been gravely underrated. 'All of us, from the High Command and General Staff of the Red Army down, miscalculated the quality of the Finnish Army and the level of its training and armament', stated G.I. Kulik, the Deputy People's Commissar for Defence

and Head of the Main Artillery Directorate. For this reason, he said, they had attacked in insufficient force, and the war had been protracted, although it would have been possible to see off the Finns much more quickly.

Stalin took an active part in the discussion, allotting praise and blame, albeit the latter more than the former. The minutes of the meeting recorded in shorthand show that he was thoroughly familiar with the details of the campaign. At the end of the meeting, he made a long speech in which he justified the necessity and timing of the war against Finland. The security of Leningrad was best settled when the three Western powers were at each other's throats, he said. He criticized the army's 'old-fashioned' methods of warfare and those officers who were still bound by the experience they had obtained during the civil war. Stalin said that the war against Finland was the first 'modern' war that the Soviet Union had taken part in. A 'modern' war required the massive use of artillery, tanks and air support. During the course of the war against Finland, the Red Army had been able to remodel itself. 'It was a stroke of luck that our army had the opportunity to gain its experience in Finland and not against the German air force, for example', he said.[75]

During the following months, the experience gained in the war against Finland gave rise to widespread reforms at all levels of the Red Army. Voroshilov was replaced as People's Commissar for Defence by S.K. Timoshenko, who had distinguished himself as Commander of the North-western Front. Training, equipment and organization were improved. The reorganization of the huge machine had only just begun, however, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941.

The geostrategic position of the Soviet Union was greatly enhanced by the Peace of Moscow. The frontier with Finland had moved to a distance of 150 kilometres from Leningrad, a base had been obtained in Hanko, which together with Paldiski in Estonia could close off the Gulf of Finland from enemy fleets. The USSR had thus achieved all the territorial advantages in the 'maximum programme' of October 1939 apart from Pechenga, instead of which it had obtained parts of the Salla and Kuusamo areas. Speaking at a session of the Supreme Soviet on 29 March, Molotov justified the sacrifices of the war and the abandonment of Kuusinen's government by emphasizing the fact that the strategic aims of the USSR had been achieved. This was true. But at the same time, the Soviet Union had got behind the new border a bitter neighbour anxious about its own security and thirsting for retribution. Hardly six months after the Moscow Peace Treaty was signed, the first German troops set foot on Finnish soil.

5
Finland Throws in its Lot with Germany

The mood of the people in Finland after the Winter War was characterized by bitterness, defiance, uncertainty and fear. There was a strong feeling that Finland deserved restitution for the great wrong committed against her. The injustice of the Peace of Moscow was unendurable, and the country's isolation in the war had left a deep trauma. It was widely believed that the Soviet Union was only biding its time and waiting for a new opportunity to put an end to Finland's independence. Finland's continuing isolation and the fear of a new invasion weighed heavily on people's minds.

A period of peace that lasted a little more than fifteen months after the Moscow Peace Treaty ended with the outbreak of a new war against the Soviet Union on 25 June 1941. Finnish historiography has dubbed this period the 'Interim Peace'. It was a time in which Finland adjusted to the conditions created by the ongoing world war. The guns were silenced, but the state of emergency continued. A considerably greater force of men was stationed along the country's frontiers than in normal times of peace. New young recruits were trained to replace the men lost in the Winter War. There started to be a shortage of foodstuffs, and more and more items began to be rationed. Economically, the country had to bear a double burden: on the one hand, it was important to rebuild the country, take care of the displaced Karelian population and clear new land for farming; on the other, it was necessary to prepare for a new war by rearming and building fortifications. The mobilization of industry and business that these tasks required was carried out under conditions where foreign trade was at the mercy of the belligerent great powers. The crisis necessitated a concentration of power, which was effected during the months of the Interim Peace. Parliament surrendered a considerable portion of its power to the

President and the Cabinet, and civilian authorities were superseded by the military.

Defence of the country came before everything else. Defence appropriations rose to account for nearly half of government spending. Finland's ability to defend itself had been considerably weakened by the territorial concessions that had been imposed on it. On the south-eastern frontier, the Soviet Union had acquired a far more favourable platform for an attack, from Hanko it could threaten Finnish maritime connections as well as the cities of southern Finland, and from the Salla area in the north the road network of Finnish Lapland was now within the reach of the Soviet forces. Little more than a week had passed after the end of the Winter War when the Commander-in-Chief issued an order to fortify the new frontier. This became the largest construction project the country had ever witnessed, ultimately employing over 30,000 men and women. By the summer an unbroken chain of fortifications began to rise in the most crucial areas – between the Gulf of Finland and the Saimaa lake region, and across the Hanko peninsula. Further north, as far as Pechenga, the major roads and the narrows of the lakes were fortified.

After the peace treaty was signed, Ryti formed a new government. He chose its members from the five parties that had constituted the previous government together with leading representatives of industry. It was necessary to find a new foreign minister to replace Tanner, whose name was anathema to Moscow, and who was not particularly liked in Berlin either. Ryti hit on Professor Rolf Witting, who later became identified with a pro-German orientation, although in spring 1940 he was not particularly known for any close associations with Germany. To the Soviet Union he was an unknown quantity. Tanner continued to be a member of the Cabinet as Minister for Public Welfare. General Rudolf Walden, an ex-soldier, an industrial magnate and a personal friend of Mannnerheim, became Minister of Defence. Paasikivi was not a member of the new Cabinet, but under pressure he had eventually been persuaded to accept the post of Finnish envoy in Moscow.

The most urgent of the pending social problems was the settlement of the evacuees. Some 420,000 Finns, nearly all of them Karelians, had left their homes as a result of the war and the new frontier. More than half of them were of farming stock, and they were eager to get back to tilling the land. For this reason, and also to ensure the supply of food for the nation, it was necessary to clear new land for them to cultivate. The Karelians' own associations were extremely active in urging their case, and their representatives carried considerable political weight. In

June 1940 Parliament ratified the so-called Rapid Settlement Act, which aimed at the establishment of over 30,000 smallholdings from state-owned lands or from lands purchased or requisitioned from private owners. The implementation of the law was in full swing when it was interrupted by the outbreak of a new war in June 1941.[1]

The main aim of domestic policy was to preserve the spirit of unanimity that had prevailed in the Winter War. This required the government to distance itself from the White tradition of the 1918 Civil War and to implement some sort of rehabilitation of those who had fought on the Red side. In this respect, Mannerheim's order that the annual celebration of the White Army's victory on 16 May be discontinued had great symbolic significance. Up till then it had been the country's most important official holiday. It was replaced by a Remembrance Day for all those who had fallen both in the Civil War and in the Winter War, and thus wreaths were also laid to pay tribute to the Reds who died in 1918. The Social Democrats were in a key position with regard to national unity. On their initiative, and with the blessing of Mannerheim, the Finnish Brothers-in-Arms Association was established in August 1940. Its aim was to cherish the spiritual heritage of the Winter War, and it constituted an important bridge between the generation of Social Democrats who had fought at the front and the moderate right. The Association with its wide-ranging social welfare activities became the largest civil organization in the country.[2]

The extreme right had lost nearly all significance as a political force in the spirit of national unity and social consciousness created by the Winter War. The extreme left, on the other hand, very soon began to show signs of recovery. Ever since independence, there had existed in Finland a movement that was ideologically left of the Social Democrats and which drew its strength from the Civil War of 1918 and its bloody aftermath. The fact that Communist supporters fought at the front in the Winter War did not mean that they had renounced their fundamental left-wing views. Participation in the war had boosted their self-esteem, and after the war they found it increasingly difficult to come to terms with social structures that had remained unchanged. Another reason for the increased support for the extreme left was the deteriorating economic situation.[3] At the end of May 1940, some left-wing intellectuals who were dissatisfied with the consensus policy of the Social Democratic Party combined with activists in the underground Communist Party to establish the Society for Peace and Friendship between Finland and the Soviet Union. In actual fact, it was a new left-

wing party controlled by the Communists. Its organization soon covered the whole country, and by the autumn its membership had risen to over 35,000. It launched virulent attacks particularly against the Social Democratic Party and demanded the formation of a government that was capable of putting relations between Finland and the Soviet Union on a friendly footing and of improving the people's living conditions. The government feared that the USSR might use the society to interfere in Finnish internal affairs.[4]

Relations between Finland and the USSR remained strained after the peace treaty was signed. Far from inspiring respect, the stubborn struggle of the Finns had caused resentment in Moscow. Relations were poisoned by disputes regarding the implementation of the conditions of the peace treaty. The Soviet government did all it could to keep Finland isolated. Even before the signing of the Moscow Peace Treaty, the Finnish government had proposed to Norway and Sweden that the three countries enter into a mutual defence agreement, and the two Scandinavian states indicated that they were prepared to consider the matter. The project was finally quashed by Moscow, which regarded a Scandinavian mutual defence agreement as serving the attempts of the Western powers to establish an anti-Soviet alliance and as promoting retributive measures by the Finns.[5] A strongly-worded warning by Molotov put an end to any public discussion of the matter.

At the end of the Winter War, Germany had few friends in Finland. It was considered an ally of the Soviet Union, and second only to the Soviet Union as Finland's enemy. People even began to cut their German acquaintances on the street. The government, however, could not afford to give free rein to these feelings, and strove to restore normal relations with Germany. One of Finland's leading politicians, T.M. Kivimäki, was made envoy in Berlin. Kivimäki had served a long term as prime minister during the presidency of Svinhufvud and was well regarded by the Germans. Nonetheless, no assistance could be expected from Germany; after the Peace of Moscow Finland looked for support to the Western powers, and these continued to supply it with arms. The clearest indication of Finland's continued Western orientation in the weeks following the Winter War is provided by the negotiations with Great Britain for a war trade agreement, according to which Britain would do its utmost to protect Finnish maritime traffic, while Finland for its part was to limit its trade with Germany. In actual fact, the agreement would also have entailed Finland binding itself politically to the Western cause.[6]

Germany's invasion of Norway on 9 April changed the situation completely from the Finnish point of view. Britain cut all trade and traffic communications with Scandinavia. The war trade agreement with Finland was renounced. After Germany took the port of Narvik in northern Norway at the end of May, it was able to control all Finnish (and Swedish) maritime connections outside the Baltic. The impotence of the Western powers to help Norway dealt a heavy blow to Finnish confidence in them. On the other hand, the military efficiency of the Germans was noted. When the Germans launched their victorious onslaught in the west on 10 May, a hope was kindled in the minds of the Finns that Germany might prove a counterbalance to the USSR in northern Europe. With the fall of France and the withdrawal of the British from the continent, a Western orientation ceased to be an option in Finnish foreign policy. If it wished to ensure its security and foreign trade, Finland's only remaining alternative was to turn towards Germany.

The world war made trade and politics closely interdependent. Both Germany and Finland were interested in re-establishing trade relations after the Winter War. Germany wished to bring the Nordic countries within its economic sphere of influence – and from Finland it hoped above all to obtain copper and nickel – while for Finland Germany had traditionally been an important trading partner. Now that nearly all connections with Britain were broken, trade with Germany was vital to Finland, and it was seen as a potential source of coal, chemicals and machinery as well as providing new markets for Finnish exports.[7] Negotiations on a trade agreement between Germany and Finland got under way even before the battle for the domination of Norway was settled. Finland was now obliged to show its colours. The Germans refused to meet the Finnish trade delegation until its chairman, Axel Solitander, a captain of the Finnish wood-processing industry, whom they branded an anglophile, had been replaced. The first step of the new chairman, Rainer von Fieandt, was to call on von Blücher, the German envoy in Helsinki on 6 June, two days after the last British troops had been evacuated from Dunkirk. On behalf of Prime Minister Ryti, von Fieandt confessed that the orientation of Finnish foreign trade towards Britain had been a mistake. Finland would be pleased to export as many of its goods to Germany as it could, but it wanted assurances that Germany did not consider that Finland belonged to the *lebensraum* of the Soviet Union.[8] This was an issue that gave the Finns considerable food for thought during the next few months against the background of events in the Baltic republics.

Even after Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had been forced into concluding mutual assistance pacts with the Soviet Union in autumn 1939, their authoritarian governments had remained in power, and the Soviet troops had remained in their bases. The position of these countries was weak, however, and they could only hope to survive if there were some favourable turn of events in the international situation. The President of Estonia, Konstantin Päts, believed that a war would soon break out between Germany and the USSR, and that this would save Estonia. The Lithuanian President, Antonas Smetona, secretly contacted Berlin to offer Lithuania as a German protectorate.[9] Naturally Moscow did not trust the Baltic governments. With Germany's resounding success on the western front, the Soviet leaders were in a hurry to secure those advantages conferred by the secret protocol to the non-aggression pact that were still to be obtained before the Germans found themselves in a position to be able to turn their attention to the east. In early June, they began to strengthen Soviet forces on the borders of the Baltic republics. On 15 June – the day after the Germans marched into Paris – Lithuania received an ultimatum to which an answer was demanded within a few hours. The following day it was the turn of Latvia and Estonia. All three states were required to form governments that were friendly towards the USSR and to allow unlimited numbers of Soviet troops to be stationed on their territories.

The three small republics yielded, and they were occupied immediately without resistance. The Soviet Union dictated who were to be the members of the new governments. With a few exceptions they consisted of left-wing socialists and communists, though the former were more in evidence. When the new Foreign Minister of Lithuania, Vincas Kreve-Mickevicius, rushed to Moscow, he found Molotov in an unusually forthright mood. France had made a critical strategic mistake in not occupying Belgium, the People's Commissar said. The Soviet Union was not about to make the same mistake. And he continued (according to the later account of Kreve-Mickevicius): 'You must be realistic enough to understand that in the future small states will disappear. Your Lithuania together with the other Baltic states, including Finland, will be included within the honourable family of Soviet peoples.' He predicted that the Soviet system would rule the whole of Europe.[10] Elections were held in all three republics under the supervision of the Soviet representatives. 'Enemies of the people' were barred from standing. The new parliaments applied unanimously for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to be incorporated as Soviet Republics within the USSR.[11] At the beginning of August, the Baltic republics

ceased to be sovereign states, and the Soviet system was quickly imposed on them. Romania, too, had yielded to a Soviet ultimatum at the end of June and surrendered Bessarabia and northern Bukovina.

The Finns regarded the events in the Baltic countries as tragic and wondered when it would be their turn. The army was quietly placed on alert. On 23 June Paasikivi was summoned by Molotov. Only a week had passed since the ultimatum had been delivered to Estonia, and the Finnish envoy feared the worst. It came almost as a relief when Molotov 'only' raised the question of Pechenga. He explained that the Soviet Union was interested in the nickel mines in Pechenga and proposed that Finland should grant a mining licence to the Soviet Union or to a joint Soviet-Finnish company to be established for the purpose. It later transpired that the USSR was less interested in the nickel ore than in the Pechenga area itself.[12]

After Finland had obtained the Pechenga area on the coast of the Barents Sea in the Peace of Tartu in 1920, an extremely rich deposit of nickel ore had been discovered there. The licence to mine the deposit was granted to a British–Canadian company, the Mond Nickel Company, and mining operations began in 1940. The port of Linakhamar, which was free from ice all the year round, was also situated in Pechenga. A 500 km long road linked it to the railhead in Rovaniemi. After Germany occupied Norway, this 'Arctic Highway' was Finland's – and for a time also Sweden's – only outlet to the open sea. Hundreds of lorries transported vital supplies purchased from abroad to the south and carried back export goods along a dirt road that was so narrow that two lorries could hardly pass one another on it.

Soon the Finnish government received two new demands. Under Russian supervision, Finland was to destroy the fortifications built in the Åland Islands during and after the Winter War, and on 8 July, the Soviet government announced that it wanted the right to use Finnish railways for transporting troops to Hanko and back. There was nothing in the peace agreement to justify these demands. The demolition of the fortifications in Åland would naturally have seriously impaired Finland's chances of defending the islands, and the right of passage to Hanko would have entailed the risk that the Soviet Union would be able to seize the railway junctions of southern Finland in the eventuality of a crisis. Paasikivi warned the government that the Soviet Union might resort to force if its will was thwarted. The prevailing view in the government, on the other hand, was that concessions would only lead to further demands. Nevertheless, under strong pressure and in order to avoid an open conflict, the government did yield over Åland and Hanko. In

Pechenga, the Finnish position was stronger, for there Britain and Germany also had interests to protect. The Finnish government rejected a solution that would bring the mining area under Soviet control. Thus the Pechenga question remained a lasting bone of contention.

On top of all this, on 24 July Molotov brought up the question of the Society for Peace and Friendship between Finland and the USSR. He accused the Finnish government of persecuting an association that was working to strengthen peace between neighbouring states. His accusations were particularly directed at Tanner; as long as he was a member of the government, there could not be good relations between Finland and the Soviet Union.[13] Soon after this, Molotov came out publicly in support of the society. This was regarded as ominous in Helsinki, where the role of the communists and the rest of the radical left in the destruction of the independence of the Baltic republics had been noted.

During the last days of July, the Society for Peace and Friendship grew more active. It organized demonstrations, some of which turned into riots. At the same time, information began to arrive about Soviet troop concentrations on the Finnish border. In Helsinki and in Stockholm it was feared that the Soviet Union would attack Finland as soon as Germany made its expected invasion of Britain. On 8 August Mannerheim demanded partial mobilization. The government refused in order not to provoke the USSR, considering it better to make more conciliatory gestures. Tanner resigned. Prime Minister Ryti made a speech on the radio in which he affirmed Finland's desire to maintain good relations with the Soviet Union. However, the conciliatory mood did not extend to the Society for Peace and Friendship: the government paralysed its public activities by means of propaganda and police action.

The actions of the Soviet Union in summer 1940 must be seen in the light of the general situation prevailing at the time. After the fall of France it found itself in a precarious situation. It was alone on the continent of Europe with an all-conquering Germany. The demolition of the fortifications in the Åland Islands, the facilitation of transportation for troops stationed in the Hanko peninsula and the demands concerning Pechenga were all aimed at securing Soviet control of the northern border of its sphere of influence. The new plan of operations drawn up by the Soviet High Command at the end of July required the concentration of the bulk of Soviet forces against Germany. Finland and also Sweden were considered likely allies of Germany.[14] The Soviet envoy in Helsinki, Ivan Zotov, had already reported back in June that the stirring up of hatred against the Soviet Union by the Finnish government

was incessant. More men were being called up, the country's borders were being fortified, and those in power nurtured secret hopes that Germany would help Finland to regain its lost territories.[15] The envoy drew urgent attention to the vulnerability of the Hanko base and exhorted his government to demand that it be expanded, and that the building of fortifications by the Finns across the peninsula be terminated. He emphasized that Finland was turning towards Germany, and that it might invite German forces to enter the country. 'Can we surrender Finland to the Germans?' the envoy asked rhetorically in his report on 1 August, and answered himself, 'No, we cannot. We must cut off all roads to the new Finnish orientation.'[16]

Of course, it was not possible to treat Finland like the defenceless Baltic countries. Moscow knew that, however desperate the situation, it would fight for its independence. A military campaign against it would be no walkover this time either. Even in August, the Soviet Union was still not in a sufficient state of readiness to launch an attack. Its plans regarding Finland were for the time being primarily defensive. The troops of the Leningrad Military District were transferred elsewhere during the summer, mainly to Byelorussia. Finnish military intelligence soon became aware that the Soviet troop movements in early August did not constitute a new concentration of forces against Finland. It seems that in mid-August the Soviet Union had lost interest in the Society for Peace and Friendship and the Finnish underground Communist Party. It is possible that at this juncture a decision was taken to resort to more direct methods; on 14 August, the Leningrad Military District received an order from the General Staff to draw up new plans for the deployment of its troops, and in September it drafted a plan for the Baltic Fleet to capture the Åland Islands. At the same time, the NKVD (the secret police) received instructions to set up its own network in Finland.[17] However, during the course of the autumn, a new factor emerged that the Soviet leaders were obliged to take into account: Germany was showing increased interest in ensuring that Finland would remain an independent state.

The demands of the Soviet government and its support for the Society for Peace and Friendship had caused extreme anxiety in Finland. No one, apart from the extreme left, wanted to go down the road of the unhappy Baltic republics. The country's leaders secretly appealed to Germany for political support and weapons. Officially, Germany remained loyal to its Soviet ally, but in actual fact after its victory in the west it was renouncing a strict interpretation of the agreement on spheres of influence. A clear indication of German interest in Finland

was the trade agreement concluded at the end of June, according to which Finnish exports to Germany, in comparison to 1938 figures, would approximately quadruple and imports would double.

On 31 July, Hitler gave the order to prepare an attack to crush the Soviet Union. One immediate consequence of this was that Germany had to reassess the positions of both Finland and Romania. It was naturally in Germany's interest to support and encourage those countries that it calculated might be of use in a war against the USSR. For the time being, however, this had to be done unofficially, without openly questioning the position of Finland within the Soviet sphere of interest or the USSR's interests in the Balkans. Intelligence reports about Soviet intentions to attack Finland caused the Germans to speed up their support for the country. Until then, Hitler had always rejected Finnish appeals to be allowed to purchase arms, but at the beginning of August he changed his mind and decided to allow the secret sale of weapons to Finland. The announcement of the German change of heart was brought to Finland on 18 August by Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Veltjens, an arms dealer who operated as Göring's messenger. He told Mannerheim that Germany was now agreeable to supplying Finland with the arms it needed. At the same time he made a request that Germany might be allowed to transport its troops through Finnish territory into northern Norway. Veltjens' request was quickly accepted. Research has fairly reliably confirmed that this was done on the responsibility of Prime Minister Ryti.[18] No written agreement was made in Helsinki at that time, but preliminary verbal arrangements were confirmed with an agreement between the military authorities on 12 September and finally with an official exchange of diplomatic notes on 22 September, by which time the first German convoy ships had already entered Finnish territorial waters.[19]

The number of German troops transported under the transit agreement from the ports of the Gulf of Bothnia along the Arctic Highway into northern Norway was small, but the right of transit itself had great political significance. In practice, the appearance of German troops on Finnish soil and the German deliveries of arms to Finland meant a redrawing of the border between the German and Soviet spheres of influence that had been agreed in August 1939. The Finnish leaders naturally realized that the country was gradually falling into the German sphere of influence, but they had nothing against this. The Finns did everything they could to facilitate the practical arrangements connected with the right of transit, nor did they in any way conceal the fact that they wished to see as great a number of uniformed

Germans in the country as possible.[20] In a report at the end of November, Zotov affirmed that Finland had made its choice. The Soviet envoy wrote that the presence of German troops had inspired boldness and hope among the Finnish leaders and had strengthened anti-Soviet activity in the country.[21]

Molotov brought up the matter of Finland on his visit to Berlin on 12–13 November. He explained that the Soviet government wished definitely to settle and clarify the Finnish question according to the secret protocol to the non-aggression pact of 1939. Germany must withdraw its troops from Finland and cease to encourage the anti-Soviet sentiments expressed by the Finns. When Hitler finally asked how the USSR sought to settle the Finnish question, Molotov answered that he imagined that it would happen 'on the same scale' as in Bessarabia and the Baltic states. Hitler rejected this. He admitted that Finland still belonged to the Soviet sphere of influence, but he maintained that a new war in the Baltic was not in the interests of Germany. The Soviet Union would have to wait, perhaps for half a year – after which it could take everything that it thought belonged to it. At that moment a new war in the Baltic would place a heavy strain on German–Russian relations. This view was repeated several times by Hitler.[22]

The growth of German influence in Finland had crucially weakened the position of the USSR in the Baltic area. Apparently the Soviet leaders were prepared in the late autumn of 1940 to redress the situation in their favour – if this could only be done without a confrontation with Germany. On 27 November a plan of attack which aimed at seizing the whole of Finland was completed by the Soviet General Staff.[23] But Hitler's words allowed of no misinterpretation. Moscow was now fully aware that war with Finland could lead to a breach with Germany. The Germans for their part provided the Finns through a number of channels with a version of the discussions in Berlin that served their own ends: Hitler had rejected the Soviet demands, and the Finns could rest easy.[24]

President Kyösti Kallio, who had become paralysed in August, resigned at the end of November. In a deviation from normal practice, the same college of electors that had been chosen by the people for the presidential election of 1937 also chose a new president to succeed Kallio for the remainder of his period of office. Molotov intervened in the election on 6 December, which was Independence Day in Finland, by announcing to the Finnish envoy, Paasikivi, that if some such person as Tanner, Kivimäki, Mannerheim or Svinhufvud was chosen, Moscow would interpret this as meaning that Finland did not wish to

abide by the peace treaty. Germany and Great Britain also voiced their opinions concerning suitable presidential candidates. Ryti was the only one of the feasible candidates against whom none of these three great powers raised any objection. At home, too, he had built up considerable support after leading the country for over a year, first as Prime Minister, and then as deputy president after Kallio's illness. The conservatives regarded Ryti with a certain amount of suspicion on account of his Progressive Party background and his anglophile sympathies, but they acquiesced when Mannerheim let it be known that he considered Ryti the best candidate. In the end, Ryti was elected President of the Republic on 19 December almost unanimously. Kallio, who had become a symbol of national unity, was escorted with impressive ceremonial to Helsinki Railway Station, where he was due to board a train to take him to his home in Ostrobothnia. Just before getting on the train, however, he died of a heart attack.

The new President of Finland was a determined and resolute wielder of power. Young (51 years of age), efficient, competent, industrious, analytically acute, politically open-minded and uncommitted is how his biographer has described him.[25] The new government was formed by J.W. Rangell, an economic expert who was one of Ryti's trusted men. The President chose an all-party cabinet – admittedly without consulting the parliamentary parties, which caused a certain amount of criticism. The extreme right People's Patriotic Movement also received one post in the government, that of Second Minister of Transport. Ryti took a much more active role in foreign policy than any of his predecessors. Thus the new Prime Minister, who had little political experience, and Rolf Witting, who continued as Foreign Minister, were overshadowed by him. However, the country's foreign policy was really regulated by an Inner Circle, in which Ryti and Mannerheim were the leading figures. The crisis itself naturally placed the Commander-in-Chief in an exceptionally strong position, but his authority was also due to the great respect that he enjoyed among the people. While Ryti remained a distant figure to the masses, the Winter War had left Mannerheim at the height of his renown and popularity.

In January 1941 a new crisis broke out in Finnish-Soviet relations. In strong terms Moscow demanded arrangements in the administration of the Pechenga mining area which in practice would have brought the area under the control of the Soviet government. However, Finland's position had considerably strengthened since the previous summer. The army was better armed, the fortification of the new frontiers had progressed, and Germany had provided encouragement. Mannerheim

in particular was in favour of an intransigent stance, even to the extent of threatening to resign otherwise. Since Germany, too, now warned them against making concessions, the Finnish government decided to reject the Soviet proposals. In consequence, Paasikivi, who had tried to find some compromise solution, resigned from his post as envoy in Moscow. Admittedly, he too considered that German protection was Finland's only hope of salvation, for as he wrote at the time, to remain under the heel of the Soviet Union would be fatal. However, the leaders in Helsinki had not kept the envoy sufficiently informed of their secret contacts with Germany, and so he placed no faith in obtaining assistance from Germany and considered the government's policy a gamble.[26]

Germany certainly could not countenance Pechenga, let alone the whole of Finland, falling under Soviet control. On 18 December 1940, Hitler had officially approved the plans for Operation Barbarossa, which aimed at defeating the Soviet Union in a short campaign planned to begin at the earliest in the following May. The attack was to advance in three directions: on Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev. Both Finland and Romania were definitely expected to join in the campaign. In fact, the plans for operations in the north assumed Finland's active participation. Unless Germany had access to Finnish territory and territorial waters and had the cooperation of the Finnish armed forces, it would not be possible to eliminate the Soviet base in Hanko and blockade the Soviet fleet within the Gulf of Finland or to cut the Murmansk railway line. Finnish assistance would also make it easier to exert a pincer grip on Leningrad. The plans were drawn up and preparations were made without giving the Finns any more information about them than the Germans saw fit to impart. And in the beginning this was very little. On 16 December, Major-General (Rtd.) Paavo Talvela, Mannerheim's trusted messenger, obtained an audience with the Chief of the German General Staff, Colonel-General Franz Halder, and two days later with Field Marshal Hermann Göring. In these discussions, he found out that Germany was preparing for a war with the Soviet Union. The general outlines of the Barbarossa strategy, particularly in so far as it concerned the Baltic and the role that it was foreseen that Finland would play in this plan were revealed to the Chief of the Finnish General Staff, Lieutenant-General Erik Heinrichs, when he visited Germany at the end of January.[27]

From February on, there were regular contacts between Finnish and German military leaders. From German intelligence activities and requests concerning the building of roads and facilities for storing

supplies, the Finnish military leaders were able to deduce what the Germans planned to do in Finland. Just what would happen in the future was, however, still vague. The Finnish leaders had to be wary of a Soviet pre-emptive attack. They also had to be prepared for the eventuality that there would be no war at all, and even for Germany and the Soviet Union coming together and negotiating a solution that was unfavourable to Finland. Although they would have preferred to remain neutral in the world war, fear spurred them to comply with German wishes.

In late spring, Finland was the beneficiary of a number of goodwill gestures from the Soviet Union, the purpose of which was naturally to prevent Finland from completely throwing its lot in with Germany. The intransigent Russian envoy in Helsinki, Zotov, was replaced by the more flexible Pavel Orlov, and the Soviet government announced that it was no longer opposed to a mutual rapprochement between Finland and Sweden. Stalin received the resigning Finnish envoy, Paasikivi, which was quite exceptional, and promised him as 'a personal favour' that the Soviet Union would deliver 20,000 tons of grain to Finland. The grain arrived at an opportune time in the country, which was suffering from a food shortage.

These belated conciliatory measures had no effect on Finnish policy. On 20 May, Hitler's special envoy, Karl Schnurre, brought Ryti an invitation to send some officers to Germany to discuss the coordination of actions to be taken if the USSR should attack Finland. The Inner Circle decided to accept the invitation. The Finnish delegation was led by General Heinrichs, and in the negotiations of 25–26 May, it emerged that Finland was expected to take part in a war of aggression. The Germans put forward their proposals 'just in case' and in the form of requests.[28] The negotiations with Germany's military leaders were continued in Helsinki on 3 June, when the detailed arrangements for the arrival of German troops in Finland, Finnish mobilization, and the general division of operations between Finland and Germany were agreed. In this way Finland committed itself in practice to Operation Barbarossa, although no formal treaty was signed.[29]

However, the Finnish leaders were not prepared for an open war of aggression, and this was made clear to the Germans. 'We are so unmodern that we stick to the old ideas and go to war only if we are attacked', Foreign Minister Witting explained to the German envoy. The German attack on the Soviet Union began on 22 June. In his proclamation broadcast on German radio that morning, Hitler stated that German troops were protecting Finnish territory in alliance with

Finnish forces. The Finnish government found itself in an awkward position and declared that Finland was not at war. However, the country's neutrality was very superficial: four German divisions had been deployed on Finnish soil, six Finnish airfields had been made available to the Germans, and a German fleet of over forty vessels was lurking in the coves of the Finnish archipelago.

The USSR seems to have striven to keep Finland outside the war, or at least to leave the initiation of hostilities to the Finns. In the afternoon of 23 June, Molotov summoned the Finnish chargé d'affaires, P.J. Hynninen, to demand a direct declaration by Finland stating whether it was on the side of Germany or neutral. He asked whether Finland really wished to make an enemy of a nation of 200 million people, who would never forget that Finland had joined a treacherous enemy in attacking it. For some reason, Hynninen's telegram arrived in Helsinki over a day late.[30] Molotov never received a reply. But there was an abundance of evidence of Finnish cooperation with the Germans. Early in the morning of 25 June, the Chief of Staff of the Soviet Baltic Fleet announced the commencement of hostilities with Finland. On the same day, the Soviet Air Force carried out raids against targets in Finland. There was considerable destruction in many towns, and 23 Soviet planes were shot down over Finnish territory. This offered the government sufficient grounds for claiming that Finland had become the target of a new assault. 'Today our new battle to defend ourselves has commenced', the Prime Minister stated to Parliament. Some criticism was expressed that Parliament had been presented with a fait accompli, but in the end the measures taken by the government were unanimously approved.

The course of events that led Finland to join Germany and then to embark on a new war against the Soviet Union has been the subject of prolonged disputes among historians. Until the 1960s, many in Finland used to stress the point that, in becoming involved in the war, Finland had been carried by the tide of events with little say in its own fate. Subsequently, the generally accepted interpretation has emphasized the active role played by the Finnish leaders in their desperate attempt to steer the country out of the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union by seeking German protection. How far the course of events was dictated by circumstances and how far by the aims of the Finnish leaders is still debatable. The Winter War had taught the Finns that they could not defend themselves without effective external assistance. Finland's decision to throw its lot in with Germany was above all a result of the upheaval that took place in power relations in Europe in

the spring of 1940. From the summer of 1940, Germany was the only power that it could turn to. The efforts of the Finnish leaders were successful to the extent that they fitted in with German plans. Their aims had originally been defensive: they hoped to get arms and political support from Germany. The vision of a rift between Germany and the Soviet Union tempted them to augment their objectives: the abrogation of the Moscow Peace Treaty and the redrawing of the border in the east came to seem feasible goals. They considered that it would be impossible for Finland to remain outside a war between Germany and the USSR, and they thought that Germany was capable of defeating the Soviet Union, which would secure the position of Finland. One day before Operation Barbarossa began, President Ryti stated to a parliamentary delegation that called on him

> If a war now breaks out between Germany and Russia, it could be to the advantage of the whole world. Germany is the only state today that can defeat Russia, or at least considerably weaken it. Nor would it probably be any loss to the world if Germany were to be weakened in the fray … this war is Finland's only salvation. The Soviet Union will never give up its attempt to conquer Finland … if Germany now crushes the Soviet army, we may perhaps enjoy a century of peace.[31]

The decisions were made by a small group of political and military leaders. Of course, the Inner Circle was not alone; it is clear that its decisions accorded with the views of practically the whole political elite and indeed those of the majority of the people.[32] Most Finns in 1941 did not regard it as such a terrible crime to try and get back what they thought was rightfully theirs and had been wrongly taken from them. 'For over a year, many Finns had harboured thoughts of revenge, clenching their fists in their pockets. The assault had force behind it', wrote later the famous Finnish novelist Väinö Linna, who himself had seen active service in the war. For many, in its early stages the new war represented a kind of second round, in which Finland would recover the losses it had incurred in the Winter War.

6
Finland's War of Retaliation

The onslaught launched by Germany on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 seemed at first to be unstoppable. In the south German armoured columns drove a wedge into the Ukraine, in the centre it pushed towards Smolensk and Moscow, while in the north the Northern Army Group advanced into the Baltic countries. There its task was to occupy the harbours and take Leningrad in order to dispossess the Soviet fleet of its bases. The German army crossed the River Daugava on 10 July and was ready to launch an attack on Leningrad. This was the point at which the Finns had agreed with the Germans to begin their own offensive.

In terms of both manpower and weaponry, the Finnish Army was much stronger than it had been in the Winter War. Its total strength rose to 475,000 men, over 100,000 more than at the end of the Winter War. No expense had been spared in rearming during the months of the Interim Peace. The artillery was now relatively strong, and it possessed sufficient ammunition. The firepower of the infantry had trebled since the Winter War. Naturally, there were still deficiencies. There was only one tank battalion, and the lack of motorized transport restricted mobility, although this was to some extent alleviated by equipping some of the infantry with bicycles. It came as a great relief that the Germans took responsibility for defending a 500 km stretch of the front in northern Finland. During the Winter War and the Interim Peace, the defence of Lapland in particular had aroused considerable concern because there simply were not enough Finnish troops to handle it.

Thus the offensive against the enemy of the Winter War was waged with better arms and alongside a victorious great power, and in consequence the self-confidence of the troops was higher. Neither, of course,

was the adversary the same. The lessons learnt from the war against Finland and the German victories in the west had led to an active reorganization of the Red Army. Training had been intensified, the artillery strengthened and new models of tanks had been developed. At the same time, the Soviet Union needed its best units and most up-to-date equipment to fight the Germans on its western front. At the beginning of the war on the Finnish eastern frontier it had only eighteen divisions against fifteen Finnish and four German divisions.[1] The Finns also enjoyed air supremacy in this sphere of operations. They were thus able to establish a military superiority at focal points, which partly explains why initially the campaign was a triumph, albeit an extremely bloody triumph.

The war against the Soviet Union that began in summer 1941 has become known as 'the Continuation War'. This epithet describes the view widely accepted at the outset of the conflict that it was a continuation of the defensive struggle of the Winter War. It was felt that Finland was waging a war alongside Germany against a common enemy, but that it was in a way separate from the ongoing world war in that this battle was being waged to achieve purely Finnish objectives and under the supreme command of a Finnish commander-in-chief. There was no political treaty with Germany, and therefore Finland was not officially an ally of Germany but a 'co-belligerent', although it did comply with the military arrangements that it had made with the Germans. It was important for the government to emphasize the defensive and separate nature of the war in order to obtain the support of a wide spectrum of the population for the war effort. The offensive operations were not necessarily in conflict with the claim of a defensive war as long as they aimed at getting back the territory lost in the Peace of Moscow. But the situation changed when the Finns crossed the frontier of 1939 and began to talk of annexing areas beyond it.

The dream of a 'Greater Finland' had lived on ever since the Peace of Tartu in 1920, particularly among university students and the extreme right. Primarily it meant the annexation of Eastern Karelia (the Finnish name for Soviet Karelia), an area which had never belonged to Finland, but which was inhabited by peoples who spoke Finnish and related languages. As the Soviet Union grew in power in the 1930s, this goal had become irrelevant, but it enjoyed a renaissance in spring 1941 as the possibility of war between Germany and the USSR arose. The national romantic ideal of a 'Greater Finland' came into full bloom when the troops set off on their offensive, and the non-socialist Finnish-language press was caught up in the enthusiasm. Yrjö Jylhä, a

poet and company commander, encapsulated the feelings in the breasts of many front-line officers in the following verses:

> Again we're marching, borders breached, undone.
> Unravelled the shackles' links one by one.
> With bloodied hands, like a raging storm we fall
> On Onega's wide waters and the White Sea's wall.
> Along courses, paths by dreamers marked we now
> With swords advance, swearing a single vow:
> Let this time be the last, the last time of all.

That this ideal became the operational policy of the country's political and military leaders was a consequence of two main factors: one was the lesson provided by the Winter War that the long eastern frontier was difficult to defend and should therefore be pushed further to the east; the other was the view that Finland should concern itself with the affairs of its ethnic brothers over the border when the defeat and dissolution of the USSR made this possible.[2] As German victory began to appear likely, President Ryti envisaged a frontier running from the White Sea across Lake Onega to the River Svir, then on through Lake Ladoga and the Karelian Isthmus, in this way incorporating the Kola Peninsula, Eastern Karelia, and perhaps even northern Ingria into a 'Greater Finland'. Mannerheim, at least on occasions, seems to have entertained some doubts about the feasibility of permanently annexing Eastern Karelia. Even so, he agreed with the idea of taking the enemy bases there. Major-General A.F. Airo, the Quartermaster General, drafted strategic proposals on new frontiers for the government. They were based on the principle that a border running from the White Sea to Lake Ladoga would constitute an advantageous defensive position in the east. In public the proposed frontier was justified by the slogan 'A short border – a long peace'.[3]

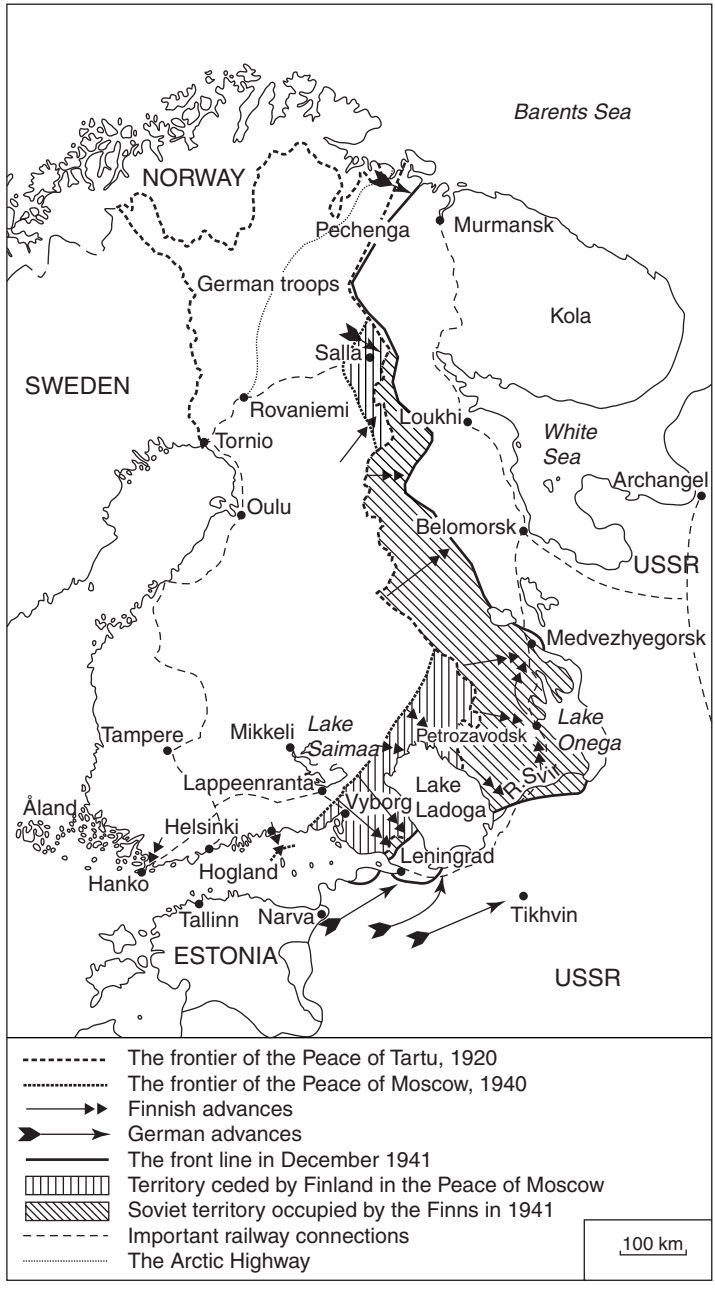
There were also opponents of these expansionist war objectives. They came mainly from among the Social Democrats and the Swedish-speaking section of the population. Most Social Democrats vehemently dissociated themselves from any war of conquest. In their opinion, Finnish rights ended at the 1939 frontier. Väinö Tanner, who had been forced under Soviet pressure to resign from the government in August 1940, had returned as soon as the new war broke out as Minister of Trade and Industry. The first thing he did was to issue a public warning about expansionist aims and jingoism. The war was being fought to save the country's existence, freedom and democratic system, he declared.[4] In

Tanner's opinion, Finnish conquests in the east would in the future turn out to be a dangerous encumbrance on Finnish relations with Russia, which when all was said and done would continue to be its neighbour. He also doubted whether the Finnish economy was capable of supporting the territories beyond the border.[5]

Mannerheim's Order of the Day on 10 July, in which he recalled in highly emotional terms the promise he had given back in 1918 to liberate Eastern Karelia, was an embarrassment to the government. The Social Democrats even threatened to resign. The intention of the Commander-in-Chief was probably mainly to boost the morale of the departing troops. Nevertheless, talk of a war of conquest threatened the national unity on which, the government realised, the people's will to fight depended. The government postponed an official declaration of the country's war aims, and censorship curbed public discussion about them. Ryti placated Tanner with a promise that no decision about the frontier would be made until the war was over. Operations would be dictated by purely military considerations. The power to decide just how far military measures would be extended was in practice left to Mannerheim. Nevertheless, on all major decisions, the Commander-in-Chief consulted the President.[6]

Before the war, the German High Command had expressed the hope that the Finns would support the advance of the Northern Army Group by attacking in a south-easterly direction, either east or west of Lake Ladoga. Mannerheim decided to direct the first main offensive east of Lake Ladoga and down towards the River Svir. This was also the option that best suited the Germans, because their goal was to join up with Finnish forces east of Lake Ladoga at a later stage. In the main area of operations, the Finns had a four-to-one superiority in infantry and a nine-to-one superiority in artillery. They also had the advantage of being mobile in roadless terrain, which allowed them to penetrate deep behind enemy lines and attack from the rear. In the battles of that July, the Finnish troops reconquered most of the territory north of Lake Ladoga that had been lost in the Peace of Moscow. In August it was the turn of the forces between Lake Saimaa and the Gulf of Finland to launch their offensive. The national flag was flown everywhere on 29 August when Vyborg was once again in Finnish hands. Two days later the Finnish forces reached the old frontier in the Karelian Isthmus and then settled into defensive positions about 20 km north of Leningrad.[7] (See Map 6.1)

The German Northern Army Group reached the southern shore of Lake Ladoga on 8 September, thus completely hemming in Leningrad by land. In Finland, the news of the city's fall was expected almost



Map 6.1 The Finnish front in 1941

daily. The Germans requested the Finns to join in operations against the city, but Mannerheim, in agreement with the government, rejected these proposals, appealing to the insufficient strength of his own forces. The reluctance of the Finns was determined partly by a desire to spare their own troops, but also by political circumspection. They thought that the Russians would never forget it if they attacked the city on the Neva. Foreign Minister Witting reported to the American envoy that Finland had decided not to participate in the assault on Leningrad.[8] Later, during the siege of Leningrad by the Germans, which was to last until January 1944, the Finns desisted from beleaguering the city even to the extent of refusing to lend artillery support.

At the same time as the Finnish troops in the Karelian Isthmus dug into defensive positions, their forces in Eastern Karelia launched a new offensive. On 7 September they reached the Svir. If the Finnish and German forces had joined up there, they would have cut Leningrad's lifeline over Lake Ladoga, the last connection between the city and the outside world. This would have made the blockade of the city complete. However, the Germans never got that far. Their advance was halted at Tikhvin, over 100 km south of the Svir. And Mannerheim, for his part, refused to push his attack any further.

The 'Handshake at the Svir' thus never took place. Instead the Finns advanced far enough east and north-east to establish a front along the easily defensible isthmuses between the lakes. Petrozavodsk, the capital of Soviet Karelia, was taken on 1 October. However, the resistance of the Soviet troops had become tougher, and the supply lines of the Finns were stretched. The morale of the troops fell as they plodded along the rain-sodden roads of Karelia with no end of the campaign in sight.

On the northern front, the German objective had been to take Murmansk and seize control of the Murmansk railway, thus cutting off the Soviet Union's only port in the north that was open all year round. The Germans' Lapland Army and the two Finnish divisions in the north that had been placed under German command were incapable of accomplishing this. The German soldiers, who were accustomed to central European conditions, experienced great difficulties moving over a roadless terrain of swamp and forest. Furthermore, they were met by stiff resistance from Soviet forces determined to preserve this vitally important lifeline. At a heavy cost, the Germans managed to advance some distance, but then the advance came to a halt in the tundra and deep forests. Nor did the Finns attempt to cut the Murmansk railway line in the north – after all, they had to take into account not only the depletion of their own resources but also the reaction of the Western powers.

In June 1941 Finland had prepared for a short war. As autumn approached, it gradually became apparent that there would be no decisive outcome that year on the German eastern front. The economic burden of the war was growing ever heavier. Production suffered from a lack of labour; there was a food shortage due to a poor crop and increased prices had caused a bitter public reaction, particularly in towns and cities. The war machine had been kept rolling mainly by printing more money, and now there was a threat of inflation. Moreover, the heavy losses at the front were creating unrest. When Leningrad did not fall, and operations in Eastern Karelia continued, demobilization was postponed. As a result of these problems, the stance of the Social Democrats began to attract more attention. In a joint meeting of the government and the Commander-in-Chief on 28 November, Tanner and Mauno Pekkala, the Minister of Finance, demanded that the advance should halt, and that a large number of men should be demobilized. Otherwise, there was a threat that industrial and agricultural production would halt and the home front collapse.[9]

The advance in Eastern Karelia halted on 6 December after Medvezhyegorsk had been taken. Demobilization of the older men began. The offensive, which had lasted over five months, had taken a heavy toll in human lives. By the end of the year, the total casualties rose to about 75,000 men, of whom 25,500 had fallen. The number of the dead was equivalent to almost a whole age class. There was also a heavy political price to be paid for the gains that had been achieved: a declaration of war had been received from Great Britain, and relations with the USA had become chilly.

The maintenance of good relations with the Western powers was important to the Finnish government. It was confident that Germany was capable of defeating the USSR, or at least of seriously weakening it, but it was by no means sure that Germany would emerge victorious from the world war as a whole. If the war should end with the victory of the Western powers or with a negotiated peace settlement, Finland would need their support. There were also domestic political considerations involved in the desire to maintain good relations with the West at all costs. The Social Democrats in particular, but also many representatives of the country's Swedish-speaking minority, emphasized the fact that Finland was bound to the democracies of the West by common values. The government stressed to the representatives of the Western powers the fact that Finland was fighting as a co-belligerent of Germany only against the USSR and in order to protect its own security, and that in the war between Britain and Germany it observed a policy of neutrality.[10]

Finland wanted to maintain an image of itself as the same democratic, freedom-loving country defending its sovereignty as it had been in the Winter War. It was only 'by chance' that it had become a comrade-in-arms of Germany.[11]

As far as Great Britain was concerned, the message did not get through. Britain had at last got – in the form of the Soviet Union – the great power ally on the continent that it desired, and Britain and the Soviet Union signed an Agreement of Joint Action on 12 July. Finland's participation in the war against the Soviet Union had from the very beginning annoyed Britain. However, it was considered to be in British interests to maintain diplomatic relations with Finland, if for no other reason than to be able thus to oppose German influence there. Moreover, the British Legation in Helsinki offered a valuable source of useful intelligence.[12] Germany, on the other hand, could not allow Finland to continue to maintain official relations with London. When Berlin demanded in strong terms that the Legation of Great Britain in Helsinki be closed as a 'hotbed of espionage and sabotage', the Finns had no alternative but to comply. As a result, diplomatic relations with Britain were broken off on 1 August. The British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, told the Finnish envoy, G.A. Gripenberg, that by breaking off diplomatic relations the Finns had definitely aligned themselves with Germany. This meant that, when Germany was defeated, Finland would find itself in a most unhappy position.[13]

The Finnish claim that it was waging a war of defence lost the last vestiges of credibility when their troops advanced far beyond the old frontier. The USSR tried to get the governments of Great Britain and the United States to pressurize Finland into ceasing hostilities and concluding a separate peace. In a message to President Roosevelt on 4 August, Stalin stated that the Soviet government might sign a new peace treaty with Finland and make some territorial concessions if the Finns would disengage themselves from Hitler's Germany. Naturally, it was realized in London and Washington that German opposition would make it a sheer impossibility for Finland to sign a separate peace. Helsinki was reluctant to respond with a downright rejection: it therefore decided to ignore the whole initiative.[14] When the beleaguered Soviet Union appealed for effective aid, the British had to do at least something to ensure that their ally had the stomach to continue the struggle against Germany. Since there was no immediate hope of opening the second front requested by Stalin, it was necessary to supplement material assistance with political concessions. On 22 September, Britain informed Finland that, if it persisted in invading

'purely Russian territory', it would have to treat Finland as an open enemy not only in wartime but also in the peacemaking process.[15]

The position of the USA was more complicated. The American public remembered Finland mainly as an honest payer of its debts and the brave little democracy of the Winter War. Despite the deluge of news from the Second World War as a whole, the quality press in America devoted a fair amount of column space to what was happening in Finland.[16] Anti-communist feeling was still strong in the USA, and the isolationists used the example of Finland to brand President Roosevelt's attempts to provide assistance for the USSR as immoral. The internationalist press certainly regarded the Soviet Union in a more favourable light than before, because its involvement in the war relieved the pressure on Britain. Even so, it showed considerable understanding for Finland's struggle and offered little criticism even after the Finns had crossed the old border.[17]

The US government was also willing to show understanding for the Finnish cause as long as Finland was satisfied with liberating the territories lost in the Peace of Moscow. But once the Finns had crossed the 1939 frontier, the situation became problematic. Of particular concern was the fact that from Finland it was possible to threaten the northern lines of communication between the Western Allies and the USSR. In September, the USA had begun to supply the Soviet Union with aid under the Lend-Lease programme. There were only three routes by which this aid could be delivered: the Soviet harbours in the Far East, the 'Persian Corridor' in the south and Russia's northern ports, Murmansk and Archangel. Of these northern ports, only Murmansk was ice-free throughout the year. A 1700 km railway line connected Murmansk to Leningrad and just before the outbreak of war a new branch line had been completed. Starting from Belomorsk, it connected the Murmansk track to the central Russian rail network. The Murmansk railway had now come to have focal importance. From September 1941 to June 1942, over 960,000 tons of armaments and raw materials from America were transported through the two ports in the north. This amounted to two-thirds of the total aid supplied to the Soviet Union in that period.[18]

At the request of the British government, the United States agreed to support it in putting pressure on Finland. At first, this was fairly slight in deference to domestic opinion. On 3 October, the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, summoned the Finnish envoy, Hjalmar J. Procopé. Hull congratulated Finland on recovering the territories it had lost in the Peace of Moscow, but he pointed out that the Finns had advanced

much further than the security of their national borders required. The Secretary of State warned that the logical effect of Finland's course would be to propel her onto the side of Hitler into the world war. In this matter, the United States stood alongside Britain.[19] When, despite this warning, the Finns continued their advance, the United States adopted a stronger tone. On 25 October it required Finland to cease all hostilities against the USSR immediately and to withdraw its troops behind the 1939 border if it wished to continue to enjoy the friendship of the United States 'now and later'. If war material dispatched from America via the Arctic Ocean to northern Russia were to be attacked en route from Finnish territory, such an incident must be expected to create an immediate crisis in American-Finnish relations.[20] To reinforce his warnings, Hull made them public.

President Ryti sharply rejected the demands. He said that the Finns were prosecuting their own separate war in order to defend themselves against Bolshevism and had no desire to die in the interests of Britain. He could not understand how the Americans could speak without cynicism of defending the principles of democracy at the same time as they were in league with Bolshevism.[21] The Finnish government defended its policy on the grounds that it was imperative to occupy the Soviet offensive bases. Of course there was another motive for not wishing to break off operations: a desire to occupy an area which, it was hoped, would be incorporated with Finland after the war. However, the warnings of the Western powers did not go totally unheeded. On 5 November, Ryti wrote to Mannerheim asking him on political grounds to halt the offensive along a line that would be advantageous from the point of view of defence.[22] Mannerheim accordingly gave the order to cease hostile operations once Medvezhyegorsk had been taken. He also instructed General Hjalmar Siilasvuo, the commander of the Third Army Corps (which had been placed under German command) surreptitiously to break off the assault on Loukhi, which was intended to cut the railway between Murmansk and Belomorsk. As was mentioned above, the gradual cessation of hostilities was also partly a result of the exhaustion of the Finns' own resources.[23]

As Great Britain prevaricated in declaring war on Finland, the Soviet government became impatient. It had come to regard this question as the touchstone of its British ally's integrity. London wanted to get the matter out of the way before the visit of the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, to Moscow in December. On 28 November Britain presented Finland with an ultimatum, in which it stated that unless Finland ceased from military operations by 3 December and further

withdrew from all active participation in hostilities, His Majesty's Government would have no alternative but to declare war.[24] Churchill appealed to Mannerheim in a personal and private letter: 'Surely your troops have advanced far enough for security during the war and could now halt and give leave. It is not necessary to make any public declaration, but simply leave off fighting and cease military operations, for which the severe winter affords every reason …'[25] Finland was thus no longer required to withdraw behind its former borders. Stalin, too, at least at this stage, would have been satisfied with a cessation of military operations by Finland.[26]

However, the Finnish government's problem was that it was impossible to give an answer that would satisfy both Britain and Germany. The British ultimatum arrived while the government was in the course of conferring with the Commander-in-Chief. Tanner suggested that they might consider the possibility of informing Britain that the Finnish forces would remain in their present positions at the front. However, this proposal was opposed because of the assumed German reaction.[27] In their reply, therefore, the government stated that the Finnish Army was not far from achieving its strategic aims.[28] Unofficially, in fact, the Western powers were informed that the Finnish forces would halt their advance in the next few days and settle into defensive positions without threatening the Murmansk railway.[29] This was not enough. On 6 December, Great Britain declared war on Finland. This was followed by declarations of war from Canada, Australia, India and New Zealand.

The decision to declare war on Finland was made reluctantly in London. Britain had nothing to gain from it; in fact, it was thought that it would bind Finland even more closely to Germany. Both London and Washington knew that there was no longer any immediate threat to the Murmansk railway. The Germans could not reach it, and the Finns had no intention of penetrating that far. The purpose of Britain's declaration of war was simply to satisfy the Soviet Union's demands.[30] The latter benefited to the extent that the rupture with Britain would prevent Finland from appealing for British support in future peace negotiations. When Eden arrived in Moscow, Stalin informed him that he still held to the 1941 border with Finland.[31]

After the new year, the Finns could no longer be persuaded to continue the offensive. 'I shall attack no more. I have already lost too many men', Mannerheim explained to the Germans. In preparing for a protracted war, the Finnish government had adopted a survival strategy intended to ensure the livelihood of the population, to secure

sovereignty over the country itself, and – if at all possible – to obtain some freedom for manoeuvre in its foreign policy. The intention was to spare the nation's human resources and to keep the economy going. In January 1941 Ryti told T.M. Kivimäki, the Finnish envoy in Berlin, that it was necessary to maintain German goodwill in order to obtain economic assistance and support in possible future peace negotiations. On the other hand, Finland should continue to avoid entering into any political agreements with Germany.[32]

Finland's ability to sustain its population and continue the war was completely dependent on foreign trade with Germany and the areas under German control. From there it imported the grain, coal, oil, industrial raw materials and armaments it needed. As a result of the shortage of manpower and unfavourable weather, the domestic harvest of 1941 was insufficient to feed the nation. In October, the Finns announced to Germany that they needed 175,000 tons of grain to tide them over till the next harvest. Although the German authorities considered this estimate greatly exaggerated, the matter was settled at the highest level according to the Finns' wishes. In November, the Finnish government decided to join the Anti-Comintern Pact at the behest of the Germans. It felt that it could go this far because the pact was for the main part merely declaratory in nature. When Foreign Minister Witting arrived to sign the pact, Hitler promised him that Finnish requests regarding grain would be fulfilled.[33] And the German dictator kept this promise, several times ignoring the protests of the German authorities concerned. The subsequent annual grain deliveries from Germany were about 200,000 tons, which amounted to almost half the amount of the total Finnish domestic crop. While other co-belligerents of Germany exported more to it than they imported from it, the case of Finland was exactly the opposite. Finland was the only one of these countries that had a passive balance of payments with Germany. In this way Germany subsidized the Finns' war, which in fact was contrary to the aims of German trade policy.[34]

Hitler's favourable attitude towards Finland was, unsurprisingly, not dictated by any altruistic motives. It arose from the fact that Finnish involvement in the war was in many respects advantageous to Germany. After the Germans, too, suffered a number of military setbacks, their respect for the capability of the Finnish forces grew. Although the Finns were no longer advancing, they defended a front 600–700 km long against the Soviet Union. Even Hitler was forced to admit that the Finns coped better than the Germans in the terrain and climate of the north. Finland was also important for Germany's war

economy. The nickel mines in Pechenga constituted the only substantial nickel deposit in the territories under German control. They supplied Germany with 75 per cent of the nickel it needed for its arms industry. Finnish copper accounted for 13 per cent and Finnish molybdenum for 25 per cent of German imports of these minerals. Finnish timber deliveries constituted about a third of German imports, and they were irreplaceable from any other source.[35]

Consequently, Hitler was willing to let Finland maintain its special position within the German orbit of power. Finland was the only co-belligerent of Germany that did not join the Tripartite Pact concluded in 1940 by Germany, Italy and Japan. The interpretation that Finland was engaged in a separate war was also accepted in Germany.[36] To Hitler the matter was for the time being irrelevant. In his view, Finland had no other option but to continue its battle against the Soviet Union.

Since summer 1940, a strongly pro-German attitude had prevailed in Finland. Friends of Germany were to be found particularly within the army, the Lutheran Church, the intelligentsia and generally among the Finnish-nationalist bourgeoisie. These groups were united with Germany in a common opposition to communism and the Soviet Union. The National Socialist system, on the other hand, did not gain favour in Finland, except among supporters of the Patriotic People's Movement and some other insignificant extreme right-wing groups. The Finnish leaders were always a little fearful that Germany would try and do away with the country's democratic system of government, and they warned the Germans against making contact with the radical right in Finland. The first of such warnings was given in May 1941 on behalf of the government by the Finnish Chief of Staff, General Heinrichs, who told German military representatives that 'any attempt to set up some kind of Quisling government … would immediately paralyse any further cooperation'.[37]

In their own interest, the Germans did, in fact, avoid encouraging the Finnish extreme right-wing groups. Nor was Finland pressurized into handing over its Jewish citizens. It is true that the 2300-strong minority of Finnish Jews were mentioned at the Wannsee conference organized on 20 January 1942 by the German *Sicherheitsdienst*, where the outlines of the 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Europe' were worked out. They were to be transported to Majdanek in Poland. However, this proposal fell through when Prime Minister Rangell informed Heinrich Himmler on his visit to Finland in the summer of 1942 that Finland had no 'Jewish Question'.[38] In Finland there was no attempt whatsoever to interfere with the civil rights of its own Jewish

population, and Jews fought shoulder to shoulder with other Finns in the ranks of the Finnish Army. However, the treatment of the few hundred Jewish refugees who came to Finland from elsewhere in Europe was different. They were interned, and in November 1942 the Finnish State Police handed over eight Jewish refugees to the Gestapo. This aroused considerable adverse comment, and the matter was raised by the Social Democrat ministers, after which no more Jewish refugees were handed over.[39]

The German 20th Mountain Army, which was fighting in the far north in Lapland and on the coast of the Barents Sea, was mainly based on Finnish territory. At its greatest, the number of German troops in northern Finland or in the proximity of its northern and eastern borders amounted to somewhat over 200,000 men, approximately the same as the permanent population of the area. There were hardly any Finnish forces in the area at all, and it fell to the local civilian authorities to protect the interests of the population and Finnish sovereignty. In the background was a constant niggling suspicion of the Germans' motives, and their movements were closely watched. However, in fact there were very few problems. The German High Command showed itself to be the best ally of the Finnish authorities. It was emphasized to German soldiers departing for Finland that they were guests in a friendly country, and that they should behave accordingly. And it was seen to it that these instructions were followed. Colonel-General Eduard Dietl, the Commander-in-Chief of the 20th Mountain Army, explained to both his own men and to the Finns that he expected unqualified respect for Finnish sovereignty. Indeed, the Germans had full reason to avoid trouble with the Finnish authorities: in the middle of the endless forests and the Arctic night they were heavily dependent on the Finns' willingness to help them. The presence of the German troops and the large-scale construction projects carried out by them meant an unprecedented source of earnings for the poor people of northern Finland, who came to regard the visitors as 'good providers'. The relations between the German troops and the Finnish population were cordial, even intimate at the local level.[40]

It was important for the Finnish leaders to obtain German approval for their territorial war aims. This was not difficult. The creation of a Greater Finland was in full accord with Hitler's attempt to weaken and divide Russia. In his plans, Finland had been given the role of Germany's northern ally. The extension of its frontier to the east would bind it to Germany. The areas that the Finnish leaders wanted to annex were of no interest to Germany, apart from the Kola

Peninsula with its natural resources. At first Hitler thought of annexing Kola to Germany, but soon afterwards he offered it to Finland as an incentive to keep up its war effort. In a conversation on 27 November 1941 with Foreign Minister Witting, Hitler proposed a Finnish border which would run from the White Sea to the Svir and the Neva, with the reservation, however, that Germany wanted a share in the exploitation of the Kola nickel deposits.[41]

The Finnish government was still not willing officially to declare its stance on the final frontier. In explaining the government's position to Parliament on 29 November, Prime Minister Rangell stated that it was mainly a question of regaining the area ceded in the Peace of Moscow. The definition of any further aims was a matter for the future. He defended the occupation of Eastern Karelia on strategic grounds, and at the same time he reminded Parliament that it was inhabited by part of the Finnish nation. It was the duty of Finland to do all it could to secure the position of the Eastern Karelians. In the debate that followed, the representatives of the Agrarian League, the conservative National Coalition Party and the Patriotic People's Movement unreservedly supported the annexation of Eastern Karelia. The Social Democrat parliamentary group was represented by Väinö Voionmaa, a historian who had long believed in the ideal of a Greater Finland. Although he phrased his words more carefully than the non-socialist speakers, he demanded 'freedom and self-determination and a place by our side in the community of nations' for the oppressed people of Eastern Karelia. Only the representatives of the Swedish People's Party adopted a clearly reserved stance towards 'the annexation of distant areas'.[42]

On Independence Day, 6 December 1941, the territories ceded in the Peace of Moscow were declared to have been reincorporated with the rest of Finland, and gradually they were brought under the administration of the civilian authorities. Most of the displaced population returned to their homes and enthusiastically began the task of reconstruction. Eastern Karelia, on the other hand, remained under military administration.

According to plans drawn up in the Finnish Headquarters in summer 1941, it was the task of the occupation authorities of Eastern Karelia to prepare the region for permanent integration with Finland. It was necessary to inspire confidence in the local population that they really would become a part of Finland, and that furthermore the Finnish government had a genuine intention to improve conditions in the region. At the same time, the area was to be purged of 'foreign'

elements, in order that those who remained might be regarded beyond all doubt as Finns.[43] The administration of the occupied area was placed in the hands of a military body directly responsible to Mannerheim, although in practice it operated fairly independently. Its staff were mostly members of the Academic Karelia Society or others who had embraced the cause of a Greater Finland. These groups also supplied most of the volunteers who came to work in Eastern Karelia as medics and teachers. They arrived eager to realize their great dream, the fulfilment of which now seemed to be at hand.

Their romantic visions of the Karelia of the Kalevala epic were soon dissipated, however. During the years of Soviet domination, Eastern Karelia had rapidly become Russianized. Stalin's purges had systematically eliminated the top echelons of the Karelian people. The Soviet authorities had evacuated most of the population before the arrival of the Finns. Under the Finnish occupation there remained about 85,000 people, mainly women, children and the old. Less than half of them were Karelians or belonged to other kindred peoples of the Finns. Living conditions, buildings, public health and general hygiene were well below the standards that the Finns were accustomed to in their own country. The Soviet forces had taken the food reserves with them when they departed or had destroyed them. It soon dawned on the occupying authorities that the whole population would be dependent upon Finnish food supplies and welfare for a long time.[44]

The 'Fennicization' of Eastern Karelia got under way immediately. Russian place names were replaced with Finnish ones. The population was segregated into 'nationals' and 'non-nationals' (that is, those who were regarded as foreigners), and the latter were to be deported to Russia as soon as possible. The division was ultimately based on ethnic principles, and Russian-speaking Karelians were also accepted as 'nationals'. The intention was to make the 'nationals' into citizens of the future Greater Finland. The infrastructure established in the Finnish-occupied area was primarily for their benefit. In terms of wages, food rations and health care they were privileged over the 'non-nationals', who were anyway intended for expulsion. For their benefit, a school system based on the Finnish model was established, and compulsory education for children between the ages of seven and fifteen was instituted. By the end of 1942, 110 elementary schools had been established in the occupied area, and over 10,000 children had enrolled in them. This represented in practice all the children of school age belonging to the 'national' section of the population. The education was in Finnish and was characterized by a Christian and patriotic

ideology.[45] Among the adult population, too, there was an intense inculcation of Finnish values. Land was apportioned to those who belonged to the 'national' group to cultivate, and the intention was at a later date to give it to them as their personal property.

One of the aims of the Finns in Eastern Karelia was to revive religious observance, which had been completely repressed under Soviet rule. Religious work among the 'nationals' was to be closely linked to national and anti-communist propaganda. Eastern Karelia had previously been totally Orthodox in religion, but in Finland the Orthodox church was often associated with its age-old enemy, Russia. Thus many Lutheran ministers saw in Eastern Karelia a fertile ground for their own church. A result of this was a severe clash with the Finnish Orthodox priesthood, who for their part were trying to revive Orthodoxy. In the end, the traditional faith of the region carried the day. By the end of 1943, almost 40 per cent of the population of the occupied area had joined one of the churches, and nearly all of them chose Orthodoxy.[46]

The attitude of the Finnish occupiers towards the 'non-national' population was characterized by a sense of racial and cultural superiority as well as by the expectation that 'non-nationals' would be expelled in the relatively near future. In the meantime, however, the people had to be taken care of. Moreover, they represented a source of labour that was, to say the least, significant. The main administrative principle was to keep the Russians and those belonging to Finnish kindred peoples segregated. From the very beginning of the occupation, those Russians living in the sphere of military operations were assembled into camps, which were called 'concentration camps'. This was considered to be the first step towards expelling the 'non-national' population. At its highest in the winter of 1942, the number of persons held in the camps was almost 24,000, equivalent to over half of the 'non-national' population of the area. The 'concentration camps' facilitated the supervision of unreliable elements, but they also made it possible to take care of families that had been left without a provider.[47] They were certainly never the same kind of institutions as the German extermination camps.

The occupation of Eastern Karelia meant a further burden on the Finnish economy, as it was necessary to provide grain, potatoes and even meat to feed the local population.[48] A bad harvest and delays in the supplies of German grain brought real famine to the towns of Finland in the winter of 1941–42. With their own people living from hand to mouth, the Finnish authorities were not able, or indeed always willing, to distribute their dwindling supplies of food to the inmates of the prisoner-of-war camps or the 'concentration camps' of Eastern

Karelia. In the spring, the supply of food to the 'concentration camps' broke down. The internees had already been living on completely inadequate rations, and the destruction of potato stocks by the frost led to a catastrophe.[49] According to Finnish statistics, over 3500 persons, equivalent to 13.75 per cent of the inmates, died in the camps in 1942. The corresponding figure for the free population of the occupied territory in that year was 2.6 per cent, and for Finland proper 1.35 per cent.[50]

In terms of numbers, the fate of the prisoners of war was even more horrible. In 1941 over 65,000 Soviet soldiers had been taken prisoner by the Finns. This was many times the number that had been anticipated. During the first winter, over 10,000 prisoners died of hunger and disease in the overcrowded camps. All in all, over 18,700 men died during the war while in captivity in Finland, most of them in the first year of the fighting.[51] This high death rate is at least partly to be explained by the food shortage that prevailed in Finland – after all, Finnish criminals also died of hunger in prison. But undoubtedly administrative incompetence and reluctance on the part of the authorities responsible was a contributory factor.

As the war continued towards an uncertain outcome, and there was no progress on the expulsion of the Russian population, the occupation authorities in Eastern Karelia were forced to improve conditions for them. Soviet propaganda described the Finnish occupation of Eastern Karelia as equalling the Germans' conduct in Russia in brutality. The international stir that this raised also had a levelling effect on the treatment of different ethnic groups in the occupied territory. When the Finnish authorities realized that the name 'concentration camp' had come into disrepute, it was changed to 'transfer camp', a term which was intended to describe the nature of the institution better. Ethnic discrimination in wages and food rations ceased in autumn 1943, and schools were established for the Russian section of the population. The efforts of Finnish medical personnel also bore fruit. By the end of the occupation, the death rate in the camps had dropped to 1.38 per cent, the same level as in Finland.

The population of Eastern Karelia reacted to the occupation with caution, which was partly caused by their uncertainty about which side would emerge victorious from the war. There was at no time any voluntary initiative on the part of the Eastern Karelians to become a part of Finland. Certainly, there was little active resistance in the Finnish-occupied area – although there were some guerrilla activities organized from the Soviet side of the front.[52] And there is no doubt that those

inhabitants of Eastern Karelia who had been evacuated from there by the Soviet authorities and spent the war in central Russia suffered most. Their plight was worst in the winter of 1942, when the organization of food supplies throughout the Soviet Union encountered massive difficulties after the Germans had overrun the grain stores in the western parts of the country. When they returned home, these evacuees found it hard to accept that those who had remained in the occupied territory had generally fared much better than they had.[53]

As hopes of a German victory evaporated, so also public references to a Greater Finland waned. The occupation of Eastern Karelia was defended on strategic grounds or because it might be used as a kind of pawn in future peace negotiations. The occupation administration, however, continued to promote the cause of a Greater Finland and to improve conditions in Eastern Karelia right up to June 1944, when a massive offensive by the Red Army forced the Finns to withdraw from the area. Then the dream of a Greater Finland was finally buried.

7
A Society under Stress

For two-and-a-half years the Finnish Army occupied the positions it had captured in autumn 1941 in Eastern Karelia and north of Leningrad. Although Finland's war had turned into trench warfare, it still called for considerable resources. The Finnish leaders wished to maintain the army's capability at the highest possible level. When it came to making peace, Ryti reminded Mannerheim, only those countries that had their own armed forces would be taken into consideration.[1] In April 1943, the Finnish armed forces comprised 420,000 men and 26,000 women. This was more than 12 per cent of the total population of 3.7 million. The majority of the women serving in the armed forces were members of the voluntary *Lotta Svärd* organization. The duties they carried out mainly involved nursing, supplies, communications and various administrative tasks. There were about 130,000 people working in the munitions industry, over half of them women.[2] All this labour was thus absent from the normal production on which the nation's subsistence depended.

At that time Finland was still very much an agricultural country. Farming and forestry had constituted over a third of the country's total production before the war, and more than half the population gained their living by them. The towns were small; even the largest city, Helsinki, had only 290,000 inhabitants. The country had reached a state of near self-sufficiency with regard to agricultural produce in the late 1930s, although this was dependent on imports of fertilizers and, moreover, weather conditions in those years had been particularly favourable. Agriculture was unmechanized and thus extremely labour-intensive. In the Peace of Moscow, the fertile fields of Karelia – about 10 per cent of all the arable land in the country – had been lost, and agricultural production fell by about a quarter in 1940. This was partly

caused by the decrease in fertilizer imports and by a drought. In that year, the most important foodstuffs were rationed, first cereal products in May, then fats, meat and milk.

Finland had embarked on the new war in June 1941 confident that it would be a short one. So much of the human work force, the horses and the vehicles had been requisitioned by the army that the country's economy could not last without them for long. But that was no problem – after all they'd all be back in time for the harvest. The crop was again poor because of an exceptional drought, and with most of the workforce away – up to 70 per cent according to some estimates – there were difficulties in harvesting it. By using the labour of women, children and even old men, most of the crop was harvested, but some of the potatoes and other root vegetables got left in the ground because of the early arrival of winter frosts, and only about half of the autumn ploughing was done.[3] The following winter brought a real food crisis to the country, and at times there were only a few days' supply of foodstuffs in the stores. The plight of the people was further exacerbated by bitter frosts and a shortage of heating materials. It clearly demonstrated just how inadequate the Finns' own resources were in a prolonged war.[4]

After coming through the difficult winter, the Finnish economy enjoyed something of a respite. Some of the reservists were demobilized, and resources were allocated to civilian production. The proportion of military appropriations in the gross national product went down from 40 per cent in 1940 to 25 per cent in 1943, which was lower than the corresponding figures of, for example, Great Britain or Canada at that time.[5] Industrial production and supplies were adapted to suit the conditions of a prolonged war. Apart from the rationing of food and clothes, controls were imposed on prices, wages and rents. This did not, however, curb inflation. At home, a kind of wartime 'normality' prevailed. The front was far away, and there were few air raids on Finland before February 1944.

After spring 1942, the food situation became tolerable thanks to imports. The staple foodstuffs of the great majority of the people before the war had been rye bread and potatoes and milk or buttermilk. During the war, too, the sustenance of the Finnish people was to a great extent dependent on bread and potatoes. Agricultural produce was requisitioned, and the procurement quotas imposed on the farmers were strictly adhered to. The distribution of food was carried out by the authorities of the Ministry of Supply in cooperation with Supply Committees established by local councils. Probably no organization in Finland has ever been so roundly abused as the supply

authorities during the war. In that it affected people's daily life, it offered a sufficiently concrete target for them to unload the frustrations caused by the general dearth. In fact, the organization of supplies functioned reasonably efficiently given the circumstances. Rationing mainly applied to cereal produce, milk, fats, meat, sea fish and sugar. The rations distributed to the consumers varied from 1000–1500 calories for those doing light work to 1950–2800 calories for those engaged in extremely heavy labour. The rest of the required energy was obtained from potatoes, which were for most of the time unrationed, turnips and carrots. Townspeople could supplement their rations with produce from their own allotments or supplies obtained from relatives living in the country. Most consumers bought extra supplies from the black market. According to researches carried out by the authorities at the time, as many as two people in three purchased food exceeding the legal rations by a quarter from this source.[6] Those who could not do so, like townspeople with low incomes and prisoners of war in the camps, went hungry.

There were hardly any textile products available. The civilian population shivered in old clothes, as the limited stocks were expropriated by the armed forces. When possible, ersatz products were used. 'Coffee' was made from roasted rye and tea from dried raspberry leaves. Hard liquor was produced from sulphite spirits, a by-product of the cellulose mills. People slept between paper sheets and walked in wooden clogs. Wood was used for many other purposes, too. Most of the country's ageing motor vehicles ran on a gasogene (wood gas) fuel system. Wood was used to fire locomotives and to heat houses. But the trees still had to be felled and the timber cut up and transported to the towns before it could be used for heating. And here the shortage of labour and the lack of rail and road transport created a bottleneck.

There was a mandatory labour duty which in principle affected all persons between 15 and 64 years of age. After agriculture, the forestry industry was the worst hit by the shortage of labour. It was responsible for fulfilling the timber quotas agreed with Germany in the trade agreement and for providing energy on the home front. In peacetime, the farm workers had always gone to work in the forests in winter. Now this was not possible, and female labour could not be used for the heavy work of lumberjacking to any significant extent. There was nothing for it, however, but to do what one could. In 1942 and 1943, the whole adult population – including women – was individually charged with the task of cutting firewood. However, the authorities attempted to solve the question of labour on a voluntary basis as far as

possible, and thanks to the people's determination to defend the country this enterprise was largely successful. The large civil voluntary organizations, especially the women's organizations, campaigned to get the whole population on the home front involved in ensuring that production kept going. To support these efforts, the tradition of 'work bees' to help one's neighbour, which had been a familiar practice in the Finnish countryside, was revived. In particular, a strong appeal was made to school children to get them to help out on the farms and to collect scrap metal and waste paper as raw materials for industry. And, in fact, children of school age did take part with enthusiasm and in considerable numbers in various kinds of work on the home front. Quite apart from their economic significance, these measures also helped to maintain unity among the people. Everyone felt they were doing their bit for the common cause.[7]

Finnish foreign trade was totally dependent on Germany after Great Britain had cut off the passage to Pechenga in June 1941. Trade with Sweden amounted to only about 10 per cent. Finland has no fossil fuels, so coal and oil had to be imported from Germany or from areas under its control. The domestic harvest during the war years was sufficient to satisfy only two-thirds of the demand. And even that was dependent on imported fertilizers. Without imports of grain and fertilizer from Germany the country would have faced famine. As previously mentioned, the delivery of large supplies of grain to Finland was a result of orders issued by Hitler. Bread was scarce in Germany, too, but so crucial to maintain Finland's ability to continue fighting was it that the Germans were obliged to comply with Finnish requests for grain supplies. It is noteworthy that the Germans' exports of grain to Finland were greater than their own grain imports from Hungary, which was one of their major suppliers. To Germany, Finland exported timber, paper, cellulose and copper, nickel, molybdenum and cobalt. Its trade balance continued to show a deficit, but Germany permitted its clearing debt to grow.[8] On the other hand, Finland's economic dependence allowed Germany to keep it in line when the time came for the Finns to consider making a separate peace. The Finnish government was faced with the problem of how it would be able to support the nation when relations with Germany were broken off, and in the end it only became possible to break away from Germany in September 1944 when Sweden promised to supply Finland with the amounts of grain and coal that it absolutely needed.

The high cost of the war could only partly be covered by the state's income. By 1940 state expenditure had almost trebled in comparison

with 1938. Over two-thirds of this was caused by the war. Income now only covered one-third of expenses. The difference was made up with foreign debts and state loans from the Bank of Finland, in other words, by the creation of new money. Out of fear of inflation, the government began to impose heavy increases in income and property tax in 1941. In the following year, a 10 per cent sales tax was introduced, and it was later raised to 20 per cent. When Väinö Tanner replaced Mauno Pekkala as Minister of Finance in 1942, taxation was further increased, and in addition forced loans were exacted from the citizens in order to balance the budget.[9]

However, the war was not as economically catastrophic for Finland as it was for many other European countries. The damage caused by bombing was fairly small, and apart from Lapland, which the Germans laid waste when they left it, the country suffered little other damage. The loss in human lives (including the Winter War) amounted to 84,000, equivalent to 2.4 per cent of the population. The proportion of civilians in this figure was minimal. The war cut off the exports to Britain, which had been the basis of the economy's upswing before the war. The average per capita real income in the years 1940–44 was at approximately the same level as in 1934 and 1935 and almost a quarter lower than it had been in 1938. Before the war, the Finnish state economy had been in good shape. In 1938 the national debt had been only 6 per cent of the gross national product. Inflation had been low. By the end of 1945 the national debt had risen to 67 per cent and the cost of living had more than doubled.[10]

The burden of the war affected different sections of the population in different ways. In terms of the number of the fallen, it was the relatively poor regions of northern and eastern Finland that suffered the greatest losses. The long rows of war graves in many a country graveyard stand as a sad reminder to posterity of this fact. It had become the standard practice of the Finns from the Winter War on to bring back their fallen to be buried at home. Those who shouldered the greatest burden on the home front were the families of small farmers – the man of the house was usually away at the war, and thus even the heaviest jobs on the farm had to be done by the women and children. Industrial workers were less likely to be called up for service at the front, and skilled workers enjoyed increased wages. On the other hand, the conditions of wartime also had a levelling effect on economic and social differences. Taxation was heaviest on the rich, rationing affected the whole consumer population in the same way, wage controls affected small earners less, and the monthly war emolument paid to

the relatives of servicemen brought some income, which was especially welcome in large families that had been used to little. As the nation fought for its survival, factors like distinguished service at the front or doing a good job at home counted more in terms of social status than birth or wealth, and disabled soldiers and relatives of the fallen were accorded a status of honour. All this helped to inculcate an outlook based on equality and the disappearance of the remnants of the traditional class society.[11]

The war accentuated the conflict between agricultural producers and consumers. There was dissatisfaction among the farming population with the strict procurements and the price controls. Consumers, on the other hand, considered that the farmers were taking advantage of the food shortage by selling their produce at a high price on the black market. This conflict was also reflected at the political level and caused tension between the two main government parties, the Social Democrats and the Agrarian League. The influence of Tanner, a Social Democrat, in defending the interests of consumers was particularly criticized by the farmers. On a couple of occasions the government almost broke up over disputes about the price of agricultural produce and the taxation of agriculture.

As the war continued, the people's resilience was put increasingly to the test. Particularly in the beginning, people were more concerned with everyday cares and the fate of their loved ones at the front than they were with the country's foreign policy and the events of the world war, but as the course of the war turned against Germany, there was growing public concern about the position of Finland. The fact that the government comprised representatives of all parties was of major importance for maintaining national unity. Democracy showed its strength: the political support for the war effort was broader in Finland than it was in any other country on the German side – which partly explains the fact that for Finland disengagement from the war was easier than anywhere else. The unity of the people during the Continuation War was certainly not comparable to the spontaneous unanimity that had prevailed during the Winter War. The relationship with Germany and the occupation of Eastern Karelia certainly aroused conflicting feelings, but this new war was also felt by many people to be a struggle for the existence of a free Nordic social order and the survival of the nation. The achievements made in building the country during the period of independence had to be defended, the memories of the Winter War were still fresh in people's minds, and there was a deep-rooted fear of the Soviet Union.

It is difficult to say just how far the people's attitudes were in the end affected by Finnish propaganda. The State Information Office monitored the morale of the nation and churned out material for the media and for its extensive network of agents. The Finnish Broadcasting Company was the most effective and direct channel for the dissemination of information – people listened to the radio everywhere. Censorship supervised the press, but it was not so strict as to prohibit the publication of differing opinions. Naturally, it tried to prevent anything that was anti-German or defeatist. The supply of news was dominated by German war bulletins until in 1942 the State Information Office started to transmit the Allies' war news. However, the consistency of the information given to the public was more a result of the press voluntarily acquiescing in the dictates of the situation, particularly with regard to foreign politics, than to manipulation from above or censorship. To offset the picture painted by the Finnish press, there were the Finnish-language broadcasts of the BBC, which people listened to avidly. On the other hand, the exaggerations of Soviet propaganda transmitted to Finland mainly provoked mirth among the Finns. All in all, there prevailed particularly in the countryside a calm mood of trust in the government right up to the end of the war.[12]

The united national front was upheld by both the church and the trade unions. About 96 per cent of the population belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and it held a strong spiritual grip especially on the country people. The clergy was patriotic, not to say nationalistic, and very anti-communist. During the war, the church was closely involved in the fate of the nation and encouraged the people to believe that the country would survive and to have faith that right would prevail. It was there to offer them comfort in their grief; in many parishes it fell to the minister to bring the sad news to the families of the fallen.[13] The clergy were also perfectly disposed to see the German 'crusade' against the Soviet Union as a battle on behalf of Western culture against atheist Bolshevism. Fear and dislike of the Soviet Union were so strong that they made the clergy close its eyes to any unpleasant things that were going on in the areas controlled by Germany.[14]

It fell to the trade unions and employers' organizations to look after important matters concerning the economy and social welfare, so much so that during the war they became semi-official extensions of the state authorities. In particular, the influence of the Confederation of Finnish Trade Unions grew both as a builder of national unity and as a guarantor of industrial production. The self-confidence of the labour movement was strengthened by a consciousness that the contribution of the workers was critical to the national struggle. The union

movement also made it quite clear that in the post-war society it would no longer be satisfied with the humble position it had held in the 1930s. However, some conservative circles among the employers put up a strong resistance to its demands for collective labour agreements. It was not until April 1944 that the first general agreement between the unions and the employers' organizations was reached. The most important constituent was the acceptance of the principle of collective bargaining.[15]

In the autumn of 1939, Finnish society had been permeated by a comprehensive social awakening. It is not possible to explain the spirit of the Winter War without it, and it provided the basis for the nation's survival strategy in the Continuation War as well. A feeling of social responsibility not only for those who suffered as a result of the war but also in a wider sense for all the underprivileged united the political parties, the church and the trade unions. It was seen both in domestic policy and in charitable organizations' volunteer work and collections. People's Aid, the central organ of these voluntary associations, which was set up to organize mass collections and to distribute aid, took on a sort of semi-official status. The new social attitude was reflected above all in the veterans' movement. The work of the Finnish Brothers-in-Arms Association, which was established in summer 1940 and became the biggest civil organization in the country, concentrated on providing practical assistance for the families of men at the front and those of the fallen and for disabled veterans. In the Brothers-in-Arms Association, as in other voluntary aid organizations, the Social Democrats and the non-socialist parties found a common mission.[16]

The widespread confidence of the people in the political and military leaders was of crucial importance for maintaining national unity and for the survival of the nation. Here there were two key figures: Mannerheim and Tanner. The Marshal of Finland – Mannerheim had been given this title on his seventy-fifth birthday on 4 June 1942 – enjoyed a popularity and respect among the people that not even military setbacks could diminish. Unlike in the other belligerent democracies, the position of the Commander-in-Chief in Finland was extremely powerful; indeed it was to all extents and purposes beyond political control. Despite his advanced age, Mannerheim had kept his energy and his mental alertness. His style of leadership was perhaps at times old-fashioned; according to the Chief of the General Staff, General Erik Heinrichs, Mannerheim's skill as a commander was based more on instinct and experience than on military science. At the General Headquarters, however, he held a position of sovereign power. He was no mere

figurehead, but a true military leader who insisted on being kept informed about everything and taking his decisions independently.[17]

The General Headquarters also had a strong say in many questions that closely affected civilian life, such as matters concerning labour and transport. The politicians responsible often felt that there were two governments in the country – the official one in Helsinki and the Commander-in-Chief at the General Headquarters in Mikkeli. Mannerheim had become a national symbol, and it was not easy to oppose him over matters that he considered important. On the other hand, his long experience and his open-mindedness were respected in the government. Thus no important foreign policy decisions were ever taken without first consulting the Marshal.[18] As Finland's international position became more difficult, Mannerheim's political authority increased. In the end, the ageing and ailing Marshal was the country's last trump card, and it was thanks to his prestige that Finland managed to disengage itself from the war with its internal unity unbroken.

Tanner's influence was based on the fact that the participation of the Social Democrats in the government was considered indispensable. The party's position in shouldering the responsibility of government during the war was not an easy one. As a result of the Winter War and the events of the Interim Peace, the leaders, and indeed the members of the party in general, were strongly anti-Soviet. Tanner, too, believed that fascism was a lesser evil from the Finnish point of view than communism. On the other hand, the Social Democrats constantly emphasized the fact that Finland was fighting a separate war to preserve democracy. In the shadow of German victories and the prevailing right-wing atmosphere in Finland, the party was fearful for its future existence. This imposed on it a certain caution with regard to Germany and restrained its public criticism of the expansionist war objectives. Tanner loyally supported Ryti's policy, but he continued – as he had in the summer of 1941 – by way of the president to try and set a curb on the war aims. To members of his own party, he emphasized Finland's dependence on grain supplies from Germany and the need to avoid antagonizing it. Another influential Social Democrat, the Minister of Finance, Mauno Pekkala, had for some time been critical of Tanner's policy. Pekkala's views cannot be considered in any way radical, but he believed that the Allies would emerge as victors in the world war. This had to be taken into consideration and, irrespective of any possible German reactions, Finland ought in its public statements to emphasize the fact that it sought peace. Pekkala had not been a particularly successful Minister of Finance and had come in for some criticism. In

May 1942 he decided to resign from the government, and he was replaced as Minister of Finance by Tanner. By the autumn of that year, an internal split in the Social Democratic Party was clearly evident as opponents of Tanner's policy gathered round Pekkala. However, in both the party organs and in the parliamentary group, Tanner still retained the support of a majority who believed that the party should remain in the government in order to be able to resist the danger from the right and, when the moment presented itself, to influence Finland's detachment from the war.[19]

Ryti's term of office as President came to an end on 1 March 1943. The new President had to be chosen by a college of electors who had been elected by the people in 1937, as it was not possible to hold a new election during the war. There was some dissatisfaction with Ryti in the Agrarian League, which considered that he had capitulated over Tanner's economic policy. Consequently it supported Mannerheim's candidature, as did some politicians of the left who hoped that the Marshal would be able to lead the nation to a separate peace. However, when the Marshal realized how wide the support for Ryti was, he refused to stand, and Ryti was re-elected President of the Republic almost unanimously. The government of J.W. Rangell then resigned, as was the custom in those days at the inception of a new presidency. The formation of the new government was influenced by a changed assessment of the international situation. The defeat of Germany was on the horizon, and many Finns were considering the possibilities of the country detaching itself from the war. The new Prime Minister was Edwin Linkomies, the most prominent figure in the right wing of the conservative Coalition Party parliamentary group. The President knew that he was a tough, cool-headed man who had no illusions about the final outcome of the war. It was not easy for the Social Democrats to accept a staunch right-winger as Prime Minister, but the party's dissatisfaction was assuaged by giving it an extra seat in the Cabinet. With five seats, it was now the biggest party in the government. The Social Democrats and the Coalition Party were joined by the Agrarian League, the Swedish People's Party and the Progressive Party. The extreme right-wing Patriotic People's Movement would no longer sit in the same government as the Social Democrats and went into opposition. The former Foreign Minister Witting was ousted; he was regarded as the personification of pro-German attitudes, and the United States would have nothing to do with him. The new Foreign Minister was Henrik Ramsay, who had the reputation of being an experienced trade negotiator, and who was known for his Anglo-Saxon sympathies.[20]

The new Prime Minister was an energetic and exceptionally self-confident man, who even dared to disagree with Mannerheim. President Ryti continued to enjoy great respect among the people, but the Prime Minister now took the reins of policy-making into his own hands. The view that Linkomies presents in his memoirs that the President had become passive after the turn that the war had taken would appear to be correct.[21] Major decisions on foreign policy continued to be made in the unofficial 'war Cabinet', consisting of the President, the Prime Minister, Tanner (who had kept his portfolio as Minister of Finance), Minister of Defence General Rudolf Walden and Foreign Minister Ramsay.

Outside the national consensus, there were extreme elements on both right and left, but support for the extreme right was small, as was its political significance, and the extreme left had been forcibly silenced. There was no resistance movement in Finland. The communists who operated underground were isolated, and they lacked the most important thing of all – the support of the masses. The majority of communist supporters took part in the joint war effort either at the front or working in industry.[22]

After the turn of events in the world war, new cracks began to appear in the national consensus. They were a result of differing attitudes to the signing of a separate peace with Russia. On the one hand, there came into being a 'Peace Opposition', which wished to speed up the peacemaking process, while on the other there was a diehard front which absolutely demanded that the struggle go on and was opposed to making any separate peace.

8
Putting out Peace Feelers

'All the leading Finns are beginning to change their views about the final outcome of the war', wrote Wipert von Blücher, the German envoy in Helsinki, to Berlin on 5 December 1942. The envoy's assessment was correct. Back in early autumn, the general opinion in Finland had been that Germany would emerge from the world war as the victor. The survival of a powerful Germany was considered to be in the interests of Finland, for it was regarded as the only power that offered a sufficient counterbalance to the might of the USSR. Even if Germany should ultimately be defeated in the war against the Allies, it was hoped that before that it would crush the Soviet Union and thus rid Finland of any Soviet threat.[1] Then the turn of events in the world war forced the Finns to reassess the whole situation. The Allied landing in North Africa in November strongly affected the mood in Finland, and an even greater impact was made by the destruction of the German 6th Army at Stalingrad early the following year. According to the confidential surveys of public morale carried out by the State Information Bureau, in September 1942, 95 per cent of the supporters of the conservative Coalition Party, an equal proportion of Agrarians and 65 per cent of the Social Democrats still believed in a German victory. In February 1943, the corresponding figures were 50, 46 and 19 per cent.[2] The strength and tenacity shown by the Soviet Union surprised the Finns. Worst of all was the prospect that its success would make it the dominant power in eastern Europe. Väinö Voionmaa, the Social Democrat chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, described the mood in Parliament to his son, who was the Finnish envoy in Bern: 'In the corridors there is much unrest as a result of the great successes of the Russians … We thought that in this war for Europe Russia was but the henchman of the Allies, but now it

seems possible that Russia is the principal actor, and the Allies but its henchmen.'[3]

On 3 February 1943, four days after the surrender of the beleaguered Germans in Stalingrad, a meeting was held at the behest of Mannerheim in the General Headquarters in Mikkeli. Present was the government Inner Circle: President Ryti, Prime Minister Rangell, Minister of Finance Tanner and Minister of Defence Walden. They considered that Finland should find a way to disengage itself from the war at the first opportunity that presented itself. If at all possible, this should take place in agreement with Germany, which otherwise was capable of causing Finland untold damage. Normal relations were to be established with the USSR. The basis for the peace was to be the 1939 border, but they should try to keep control of Eastern Karelia as a bargaining counter for any future peace negotiations.[4] On 14 February, the Social Democrat Party Council issued a declaration in which it emphasized the fact that Finland was waging a separate war and was free to decide to disengage itself from the war when the right moment arose. This brought the debate about a separate peace into the public domain.

The government formed by Edwin Linkomies in March began to put out tentative feelers about the possibility of making peace. However, the Finnish leaders felt that Finland still had time, and that undue haste might lead to a dangerous situation. They knew that Germany was still extremely powerful, and that the war would probably continue for a long time yet. They also had a profound suspicion of Soviet intentions, and they now looked to the United States for some kind of guarantees for a peace with the USSR.[5]

Soviet war aims included the restoration of its entire 1940 European border. Moreover, it wanted the establishment of a zone of 'friendly' states west of this border, which it would also supervise militarily. When the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, visited Moscow in December 1941, Stalin made these aims clear to him. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which had been incorporated in the Soviet Union in 1940, the territories ceded by Finland in the Peace of Moscow, the eastern part of Poland and Bessarabia must be recognized as permanently belonging to the USSR. In addition, the Soviet Union demanded the Pechenga area from Finland, military bases in Romania and Finland and treaties of mutual assistance from these two countries as well as reparations not only from Germany but also from its 'satellites'. According to information that came to Ryti by way of Stockholm, Stalin had also demanded that the government in Finland be changed.[6]

Moscow thus made a distinction between the Baltic countries and Finland with respect to their future status. It claimed that the Baltic states 'had always been historically part of Russia'. Moreover, possession of them was necessary for security reasons. The USSR did not wish to subjugate Finland, but it wished to see there 'a healthy, independent country', the Soviet Ambassador, Litvinov, explained in Washington.[7] The USSR was willing to enter into peace negotiations even with the 'Mannerheim-Ryti-Tanner government', but as the aggressor the latter had to make the initiative. Finland had shown itself to be a threat to Leningrad, and it must bear the consequences.[8] After the government of the United States in March 1943 offered to act as intermediary in bringing about a peace between the Soviet Union and Finland, Moscow informed the USA of its terms, which it described as minimum conditions. Finland must sever its relations with Germany forthwith, and German troops must be removed from Finland. The 1940 peace agreement must be restored 'with all the consequences arising therefrom'. The Finnish Army must be demobilized and reduced to its peacetime strength, and Finland was to pay war reparations. Washington considered it totally out of the question that Finland would agree to peace on such terms and let the whole matter drop. The Finnish government was not informed of the conditions.[9]

Officially the United States and Great Britain were not willing to accede to the Soviet Union's territorial demands, which in their interpretation conflicted with the principles of the Atlantic Charter. However, neither did they wish to let the affairs of small countries interfere with relations with the Soviet Union, which were important from the point of view of winning the war and building the post-war world. President Roosevelt and Foreign Secretary Eden noted during the latter's visit to Washington in March 1943 that the Western powers had no way of preventing the Soviet Union from absorbing the Baltic states when the war was over. As for Finland, both considered the 1940 border 'reasonable'.[10] Having declared war on Finland in December 1941, the British government was not much concerned about the country and, in order to avoid arousing Soviet suspicion, it did not undertake any special measures to facilitate Finland's detachment from the war. This would have involved organizing food supplies for Finland, which the Allies could not do, and providing guarantees for a peace agreement between Finland and the Soviet Union, which they were not willing to do. London's attitude was that if the Finns wanted to discuss peace, then they had better approach the Russians.[11]

During 1942, relations between the USA and Finland deteriorated considerably. The American envoy, Arthur Schoenfeld, was recalled. However, the US chargé d'affaires in Helsinki maintained contacts between America and Finland – the only state fighting on the German side with which such relations were upheld – in order to put pressure on the Finns to refrain from new aggressive measures in the east and to be able to influence public opinion in Finland. In the long run, the American aim was to see that Finland would remain an independent democracy in the post-war world. During the years 1943–44, the United States tried, through a number of channels, to convince the Finns that it was in their own best interests to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union before it was too late.[12] At the same time, it warned Finland that any greater rapprochement between Finland and Germany would rupture the last ties between Washington and Helsinki. After March 1943, there were no new US initiatives to bring about peace contacts between Finland and the USSR. It was Stockholm that now assumed the key role in Finland's aspirations for peace.

Relations between Sweden and Finland had cooled after the latter began to cooperate with Germany. The sympathies of the vast majority of the Swedish people lay with the Allies, and Finnish government policy met with little understanding there. The occupation of Eastern Karelia and talk of a Greater Finland were particularly strongly criticized. On the other hand, many Swedes still wished to help the Finns. There were numerous contacts at the local level, and over 53,000 Finnish children were evacuated to Swedish homes. All of this helped to remind people in both countries of the fact that Finland was still one of the Nordic countries. As the defeat of Germany loomed ever closer, the position of Finland aroused growing concern in Sweden. Correspondingly, the Finnish government started to emphasize the importance of good relations with Sweden, and Henrik Ramsay, who had assumed the portfolio of Foreign Minister in March 1943, soon managed to restore confidential relations with Stockholm. It was undoubtedly also vitally important to Sweden that Finland should remain an independent state, and so it did what it could to help Finland pull out of the war although fear of German reactions caused it to proceed with caution.[13]

During the summer of 1943, the German position deteriorated on all fronts. The German summer offensive against Kursk was halted by Soviet forces in July. After that, the initiative passed permanently into the hands of the Russians. The Western Allies landed in Sicily, and on 24 July Mussolini was overthrown. These events drew considerable attention in the Finnish press, and they were interpreted as augurs of

the defeat of the Axis forces. The first secret contact between Helsinki and Moscow took place at the end of July through the Belgian envoy in Stockholm. Finland was asked to propose a basis for peace negotiations. The response formulated by the Inner Circle of the government said that Finland was prepared to discuss peace on the basis of the 1939 borders, to which some adjustments could be made in the Karelian Isthmus in return for territory in Eastern Karelia. The contact was broken off. Clearly the offer did not satisfy the Soviet government.[14]

In Finland there came into being a so-called 'Peace Opposition', whose purpose was to speed up the making of a separate peace. It included well-known Western sympathizers from different parties, mostly the Swedish People's Party and the Social Democratic Party. Among the leading figures in this group were two Social Democrats, Väinö Voionmaa, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, and the former Minister of Finance, Mauno Pekkala. The Peace Opposition tried to exert an influence on public opinion, the President and the government, which it accused of dragging its feet. It maintained contacts with the US Legation in Helsinki. The basic aspirations of the Peace Opposition and the Inner Circle of the government were much the same. Both were trying to find a way out of the war. The Peace Opposition also entertained suspicions about Soviet intentions, and it too was unwilling to accept the conditions of the 1940 treaty as a basis for peace negotiations. The main difference between the two was that, where the Peace Opposition gave priority to the maintenance of good relations with the United States, the government wished to avoid jeopardizing relations with Germany before the opportunity of making peace really presented itself. The Peace Opposition had no contacts whatsoever with the only real opposition, the communists. The most conspicuous measure taken by the Peace Opposition was the presentation to the President on 20 August of an address signed by 33 prominent citizens, in which they urged the government to take immediate steps to facilitate Finland's detachment from the war by means of negotiations.

In his own way, J.K. Paasikivi, the former Finnish envoy in Moscow, also emphasized the urgency of making peace. In 1941 and 1942, he had supported Finland's German orientation because he believed that Germany would emerge victorious from the world war. In autumn 1942, however, he changed his mind and began to ponder the chances of Finland making a separate peace. It would be impossible to avoid negotiating with Stalin and Molotov, and, he used to say, the longer this step was delayed, the heavier would be the conditions. To the question of just how it would be possible for Finland to pull out of the war, he too had no answer.[15]

Another person who had changed his mind was Urho Kekkonen, the former Minister of the Interior, now a member of Parliament. He too had been confident that Germany would quickly defeat the Soviet Union, and that Finland would receive full restitution for its losses in the Winter War. Kekkonen was a former member of the nationalistic Academic Karelia Society, and like many other non-socialist politicians in the early stages of the war he had supported the idea of a Greater Finland. However, by November 1942, he and some of his friends had come to the conclusion that Germany was facing defeat, and that Finland should get out of the war as quickly as possible and establish friendly relations with the Soviet Union. In his own party, the Agrarian League, he was almost alone in this opinion.[16]

Counteracting the Peace Opposition was a powerful and widespread body of opinion that strenuously opposed the making of a separate peace. Its adherents believed that it was impossible to make peace with the Soviet Union on reasonable terms, and that anyway there was no telling just how long such a peace would last. These 'diehards' generally put their faith in Germany and the Finnish Army, and they were of the opinion that the defensive positions on the Svir and in Eastern Karelia should definitely not be abandoned. Most supporters of the Agrarian League and the National Coalition Party, and of course of the Patriotic People's Movement, thought this way. The idea of a separate peace was also generally rejected by the officer corps of the army and the clergy. Naturally, the Karelian evacuees, most of whom had returned to their homes, strongly opposed any idea of again surrendering the territory that had been won back. They were represented in nearly all parties, most strongly in the Agrarian League.

Quite apart from the opposition to a separate peace at home, the Finnish government had to consider Germany. Despite its setbacks on other fronts of the world war, it was still the dominant military power in the Baltic and Scandinavia. In northern Finland it had seven divisions of the 20th Mountain Army, south of the Gulf of Finland it had the Northern Army Group, and it maintained a powerful navy in the Baltic. The German leaders were naturally not willing to countenance the idea of Finland ceasing to fight alongside the Third Reich. Finland constituted an irreplaceable and vital cornerstone of its tottering eastern front. If Finland were to withdraw from the war, the position of the 20th Mountain Army would become untenable. Moreover, it would make it impossible for the German navy to maintain the blockade across the Gulf of Finland. This blockade had shut the Soviet navy into the easternmost end of the gulf, thus securing both the undisturbed shipment of Swedish iron ore across the Baltic and the supply lines for the armies fighting in

Lapland and the Baltic countries, as well as providing peaceful training waters for German submarine crews. Moreover, the nickel from the mines in Pechenga was regarded as vital for the German war economy. The fact that Finland was fighting alongside it was also of considerable political and propaganda importance for Germany, and its defection might encourage Germany's other allies to consider a similar step.

Germany's trust in the Finns, whom it had up till then considered faithful co-belligerents, was dealt a crucial blow in the winter of 1943 by the talk of a separate peace in Finland.[17] The Inner Circle of the Finnish government wanted to be open with the Germans, and in March they sent Foreign Minister Ramsay to Berlin to inform them of the United States' offer to act as a peace broker. Hitler and von Ribbentrop said that they considered any attempt to negotiate with the Soviet Union on the basis of the American offer a direct betrayal and demanded that all dialogue be broken off immediately. In addition, they required that Finland sign a political pact with Germany in which it should pledge itself to continue to fight on the German side.[18] To lend weight to its demands, Germany started to reduce grain exports to Finland, whose food supplies were totally dependent on them. However, the Finnish leaders rejected the pact, which would have meant abandoning the concept of a separate war. Mannerheim in particular warned direly against the country committing itself to a Germany that was facing defeat. For their part, the Germans also realized that it was important for them to maintain Finland's ability to fight, and thus that it was not in their own interest to weaken its economy. So, for the time being, they settled for the public assurance of Prime Minister Linkomies that Finland would fight to the bitter end before it threw itself on the mercy of the Soviet Union. In June economic relations with Germany were restored to their former level.[19] However, the Germans did not forget their demand for a treaty of alliance.

As their retreat on the eastern front continued, and Italy surrendered, the Germans began to prepare for the possibility that Finland might give way and make peace with the Soviet Union. The Führer issued a directive on 28 September to ensure that in such an eventuality the supply of nickel from Pechenga would be maintained and that German troops would not be trapped in Finland. The 20th Mountain Army was ordered to prepare to withdraw to northern Lapland and to keep control of the nickel mines. It was to use a scorched earth policy to make the task of pursuing forces as difficult as possible. These plans were kept secret from the Finns, whose fighting spirit would naturally not be enhanced by a knowledge of the fact that the Germans were planning to pull out.[20]

The Germans were naturally exasperated by both the public debate about a separate peace and criticism in Finland of the Germans' conduct in occupied Norway and Estonia. Hitler wrote a letter to Ryti strongly condemning Finland's attitude to Germany. The Finnish envoy, Kivimäki, was summoned to the German Headquarters for a reprimand. Hitler explained to him that a logical corollary of the Finnish idea of a separate peace would be to permit Germany, too, to conclude a peace agreement on terms advantageous to itself without regard to the small states that fought alongside it.[21] Indeed, it was one of the nightmares of the Finnish leaders that Germany and the USSR might sign a treaty in which Finland was sacrificed as the price of peace, as had happened in 1939. Mannerheim, who on the one hand wanted Finland to detach itself from the war, was on the other worried about provoking Germany. In a meeting with the political leaders on 21 October 1943, he asked where Finland could expect to find support and protection if Germany abandoned it. At that moment, all it could do was shut up and wait, grumbled the Marshal.[22]

When the leaders of the Western powers and the Soviet Union met at the end of 1943, the Soviets tried to secure for themselves an exclusive position in eastern Europe. At the Casablanca Conference in January that year, Roosevelt and Churchill had determined that Germany, Italy and Japan must surrender unconditionally. In the Tripartite Conference of the foreign ministers of the great powers in Moscow in October, this principle was extended to cover the 'satellites' of Germany as well. The American Secretary of State, Hull, certainly pointed out that the United States could not demand unconditional surrender from a country with which it was not at war, meaning Finland. Otherwise, Eden and Hull were prepared to let the Soviet Union decide on questions concerning Romania, Hungary and Finland. Molotov stated that no halfway measures or negotiations with these states would be any use. They must be required to surrender unconditionally.[23] Although the Western powers in principle opposed the formation of spheres of influence, in effect these decisions made at the Moscow Conference meant that Finland, Romania and Hungary would belong to the area of Soviet supremacy. Such were the dictates of the world war. 'Russia is our ally, and we can't risk having the big lines disturbed by helping the Finns', the US Secretary of State told the Swedish envoy in Moscow.[24]

The meeting of the Big Three in Teheran between November and December 1943 was mainly concerned with the great invasion that the Allies announced they would make in May the following year, the

foundation of a new world organization and the treatment of Germany after the war, but questions concerning eastern Europe also arose. The Western leaders had in actual fact already come to accept Soviet expansion in the area. President Roosevelt told Stalin in confidence that for reasons of domestic policy he could not at the present time publicly take part in any arrangement whose purpose was to incorporate the eastern part of Poland and the Baltic countries into the Soviet Union. However, he said that he fully realized that the three Baltic countries 'had in history and again more recently been a part of Russia'. Jokingly, the President added that he did not intend to go to war with the Soviet Union over them.

The question of Finland did not arise until the last day of the conference. Churchill said that he considered the security of Leningrad important and was willing to accept the position of the Soviet Union as the leading naval and air power in the Baltic Sea. He then went on to say that he would greatly regret to see anything done to impair the independence of Finland. Stalin reassured the Western leaders by explaining that he had no intention of subjugating Finland or of making it into a province of the Soviet Union if peace could be achieved with it on the terms presented by the USSR. He felt that any country which fought with such courage for its independence deserved consideration. But Finland must compensate the Soviet Union for half of the damage it had caused it and expel the Germans from its territory. He strenuously rejected Churchill's doubts about whether it was at all reasonable to demand war reparations from Finland and Roosevelt's suggestion that Finland should be allowed to keep Vyborg. There would be no separate peace with Finland that compromised Soviet interests, he said. Stalin assured them that he was willing to negotiate with Ryti, indeed with the Devil himself, and he presented his demands regarding Finland: the restitution of the 1940 Peace Treaty, the surrender of the Hanko base or the permanent incorporation of Pechenga into the Soviet Union, war reparations, the expulsion of German troops and the demobilization of the Finnish Army. The Western leaders did not resist. Churchill said that the British government would leave the whole matter up to the Russians.[25]

In this way, the Soviet Union ensured that Finland would not be able to get support from the Western powers. Negotiations could commence. First the Finns were given to understand that they were not required to surrender unconditionally. On 20 November, Alexandra Kollontai, the Soviet envoy in Stockholm, who had played a central role in the negotiations leading up to the Peace of Moscow in 1940,

asked Erik Boheman, the General Secretary of the Swedish Foreign Ministry to convey to the Finns the information that a Finnish negotiator would be welcome in Moscow, and that it was hoped that before then Finland would propose a basis for a peace agreement. The Soviet government gave its assurance that it had no intention of limiting the independence of Finland in any way unless Finland's future policy forced it to do so.[26]

This initiative led to confidential discussions, which continued through Stockholm. The Swedish government saw an opportunity to further Finnish efforts to achieve a separate peace and at the same time to improve Swedish relations with the Soviet Union. The Swedes strongly urged Finland to seize the opportunity that presented itself. Helsinki was still optimistic about the terms of peace. In its reply, the Finnish government stated that it sought peace and good-neighbourly relations and announced that it considered that the basis for a peace agreement should be the 1939 border, to which certain adjustments in favour of the Soviet Union could be made. This did not satisfy Moscow. However, neither side wished to break off the contacts.[27]

In early 1944, the strategic position of Finland weakened ominously. An offensive launched by Soviet troops on 14 January broke through the blockade of Leningrad, and over the following weeks it drove the Germans more than 200 km westwards. Now that communications with Leningrad were open, the Soviet Union could at any time concentrate large numbers of troops in the Karelian Isthmus. If the Germans were forced even further back and lost all the Baltic countries, then connections between Finland and Germany would be cut. Mannerheim was extremely worried. The Finnish Army could not successfully defend itself against an attack by large Soviet forces for very long, he said. Ryti and Prime Minister Linkomies were ready to agree to the 1940 border, but they were also aware that there was strong opposition to this at home.[28] The Agrarian League threatened to leave the government if the terms were accepted. On the other hand, the United States was also applying pressure. A strongly worded note was received from Secretary of State Hull on 31 January. In it he warned Finland that the longer the war went on, the more unfavourable the peace terms would be. The note was also made public.[29] In order to soften up the Finns, the Soviet Air Force carried out three heavy air raids on Helsinki in February. Thanks to effective anti-aircraft action, however, the material and human losses were small.

Urged on by Sweden, the Finnish government decided on 9 February to send Paasikivi to Stockholm to meet Kollontai. The choice of this

statesman, who had already retired from public life, was influenced by the fact that he possessed unrivalled experience of negotiating with the Russians, and also the impression that he was still considered *persona grata* in Moscow. Paasikivi's trip to Stockholm 'to buy books' naturally did not remain a secret; indeed it aroused considerable speculation in the foreign press. On 21 February Kollontai presented the Soviet preconditions to Paasikivi. They had to be accepted before the actual armistice negotiations could begin. Finland must sever its relations with Germany, it must reinstate the 1940 Peace Treaty and it must return Soviet prisoners of war. The Finns were also to intern the German forces in the country, in which task the Red Army was ready to lend its assistance. When these preconditions had been accepted, it would be possible to negotiate in Moscow about the demobilization of the Finnish Army, the war reparations and the surrender of Hanko or Pechenga. By leaking the conditions to the Swedish press, the Soviet government publicly committed itself to them.

The purpose of the preconditions set by the Soviet Union was to get the Finns irrevocably committed before the peace negotiations proper began. After Finland had started to intern German troops, possibly with the assistance of the Soviet Army, there would be no turning back. The Finnish leaders naturally wished to avoid getting into such a position before they knew the final terms. The Finns remembered only too well how, soon after the Peace of Moscow was signed in 1940, the Soviet Union had started to make new demands. Paasikivi recommended that the preconditions be accepted. 'We only have bad alternatives to choose from any more', he urged, 'and of those bad alternatives this is the best.' Mannerheim, too, thought that they should try to make peace on these terms because he feared a Soviet attack. On the other hand, Prime Minister Linkomies doubted whether his government would ever get Parliament and the people to accept the 1940 border. The only way might be to use Mannerheim's prestige to persuade them, but the Marshal refused. As in 1940, he felt that the politicians must take the responsibility for the decision. His job was to withdraw the troops from their present positions if the government so ordered.[30]

In spite of everything, the Finnish government wanted to keep the channel of communication open. Therefore, it decided to ask Parliament for a mandate to continue the dialogue although it could not agree to the terms in their present form. In a closed session on 29 February, Parliament gave the government the necessary authority by a vote of 105 to 80. The narrow majority that supported continuing the peace negotiations consisted of the Social Democrats, the Swedish

People's Party, the Progressive Party and three members of the Agrarian League, among them Urho Kekkonen. In its response, the Finnish government explained that it could not accept the preconditions until it was sure how they would be interpreted. The Soviet government had no wish to be held responsible for breaking off the negotiations either, and to the Finns' surprise it announced that it was prepared to provide the clarifications required by them in Moscow. On 26 March, Paasikivi flew to Moscow via Stockholm accompanied by the former Foreign Minister, Carl Enckell, who had been the first diplomatic representative of Finland in Bolshevik Russia in 1918.

Alexandra Kollontai, the Soviet envoy in Stockholm, had held out the hope that some relaxation in the conditions might be obtainable in Moscow. Paasikivi doubted this, and it turned out that he was right. Molotov, who led the Soviet delegation, put on the table the demands agreed by the great powers in Teheran. He announced that the key question was the internment of the German troops in Finland, and he refused to discuss any adjustments to the 1940 frontier. These were the minimum conditions for the Soviet government, he said. 'I don't understand why we should make concessions to you. Germany has already lost this war, and you are allies of Germany, so you can just accept a position that befits a defeated country.' The Soviet Union was, he said, strong enough to enforce any conditions it wished. Paasikivi reminded him that Finland had not started the war in 1939, but Molotov refuted this argument. Finally he presented the Finns with his government's detailed conditions. When Paasikivi and Enckell explained that in practice it would be impossible for the Finns to intern the German troops, the Soviet government accepted the expulsion of the Germans by the end of April as an alternative. Within that time limit the Finns must also withdraw their forces behind the 1940 border; their army was to be demobilized by the end of July. As war reparations, Finland was required to supply the Soviet Union with goods to a value of US$600 million over a period of five years. The Soviet government renounced its rights to the base in Hanko, but Finland was to surrender Pechenga permanently to the Soviet Union.[31]

The terms brought back by Paasikivi and Enckell finally convinced the Finnish government that peace could not be made at that juncture. Apart from Paasikivi, there was hardly anybody who thought that the conditions should be accepted. For the Peace Opposition they came as a shock. The Swedish Foreign Ministry had tried to use its influence in Moscow to obtain some concessions in the terms. Having failed in this, it did not feel that it could recommend Finland to accept them.

Boheman, the General Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, noted that there were no guarantees that the Russians would not ultimately attempt to destroy Finland.[32]

That was exactly what the Finnish leaders thought. 'These conditions will destroy our independence', said President Ryti, 'It couldn't get any worse.' The Inner Circle had already come to accept the 1940 frontier, but the other conditions seemed insuperable. In the first place, it was clear that the internment or expulsion of the German troops within one month was a sheer impossibility. The Germans had over 200,000 men firmly entrenched in northern Finland and the bulk of the Finnish forces were far away in Karelia. The Soviet leaders certainly realized this. They also estimated that the German troops were better armed and trained than the Finns. For their part, the Finns suspected that the time limit had been intentionally made too short so that they would be compelled to ask for assistance from the Soviet Army. Second, the size of the war reparations that were demanded was considered impossible: the government's economic experts calculated that it simply exceeded the country's economic capacity.

The government also had to take public opinion at home into account. The staunchest opponents of a separate peace were stirring up hostility against the government. Making peace without regard for Germany was branded as dishonourable. But nor were the Social Democrats, particularly at grass roots level, prepared to accept peace on the terms offered. Tanner was of the opinion that it was only possible to detach Finland from the war with the support of the broad majority of the people. At any rate, the Agrarian League would have to be behind it. When the government put the question of peace before Parliament, it emerged that all parties considered the conditions too harsh. Parliament unanimously approved the government's resolution, according to which the conditions did not constitute a basis for making peace. In the speeches of the Social Democrats and the members of the Swedish People's Party, the hope was nevertheless expressed that the negotiations should continue.[33] On 15 April the Finnish government told its Soviet counterpart that it did not consider it possible to accept the proposed conditions.

The Germans were throughout kept aware of the Finns' peace feelers by their informers. Von Ribbentrop ordered the German envoy, von Blücher, to make it clear in Helsinki that Germany would consider the signing of a separate peace by Finland an act of treachery 'with all the consequences that it entailed'.[34] On 16 February Hitler gave the order to occupy the Åland Islands and Hogland Island immediately if

Finland should pull out of the war. If the Åland Islands were to fall into hostile hands, it would be possible for the enemy to intercept the shipments of Swedish ore and cut the supply lines to the German troops in Lapland. The occupation of Hogland Island was important in order to be able to maintain the blockade of mines across the Gulf of Finland. The 20th Mountain Army in the north was ordered to hasten its preparations for withdrawal.[35] The Finnish leaders were worried about the possibility of German counter-measures. The Finns were on the qui vive particularly after the Germans had occupied Hungary – which had also been thinking of making a separate peace – on 19 March. The defences of the Åland Islands were strengthened, and preparations were made to defend Helsinki against attacks from the sea or attempted landings by air. However, Hitler correctly calculated that Finland would not bow to Stalin's demands. Even before the contacts between Finland and the USSR were broken off, Germany cut off deliveries of grain, coal and arms to Finland to punish it for negotiating with the enemy.

The Finnish government rejected the Soviet conditions for an armistice in April 1944 because, according to its assessment of the situation, the rupture of relations with Germany, withdrawal behind the 1940 frontier and the demobilization of its army would leave the country completely defenceless, and the burden of war reparations would break it economically. Even if it had wanted to do so, the government would not have had sufficient authority to push through the acceptance of the conditions without shattering the national unity on which its policy had been based throughout the war. In making its decision, it chose what at that moment seemed the lesser of two evils. Germany was still strong enough to strike back, and in retrospect it is difficult to imagine that it would have been possible for Finland to withdraw from the war at that point in time without the country being turned into a battlefield.[36]

It was to the government's advantage that, because of the harshness of the conditions proposed by the Soviet Union, public opinion was fairly united behind it. However, Finland was in a perilous position. Relations with Germany were strained to breaking point. The Soviet government blamed it for rejecting terms that in its opinion were reasonable and just. Great Britain and the USA maintained solidarity with the USSR by joining in a declaration on 12 May that called on Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Finland to sever relations with Germany if they wished to avoid grievous sacrifices. The Finns certainly realized that the Soviet Union might now try to impose its

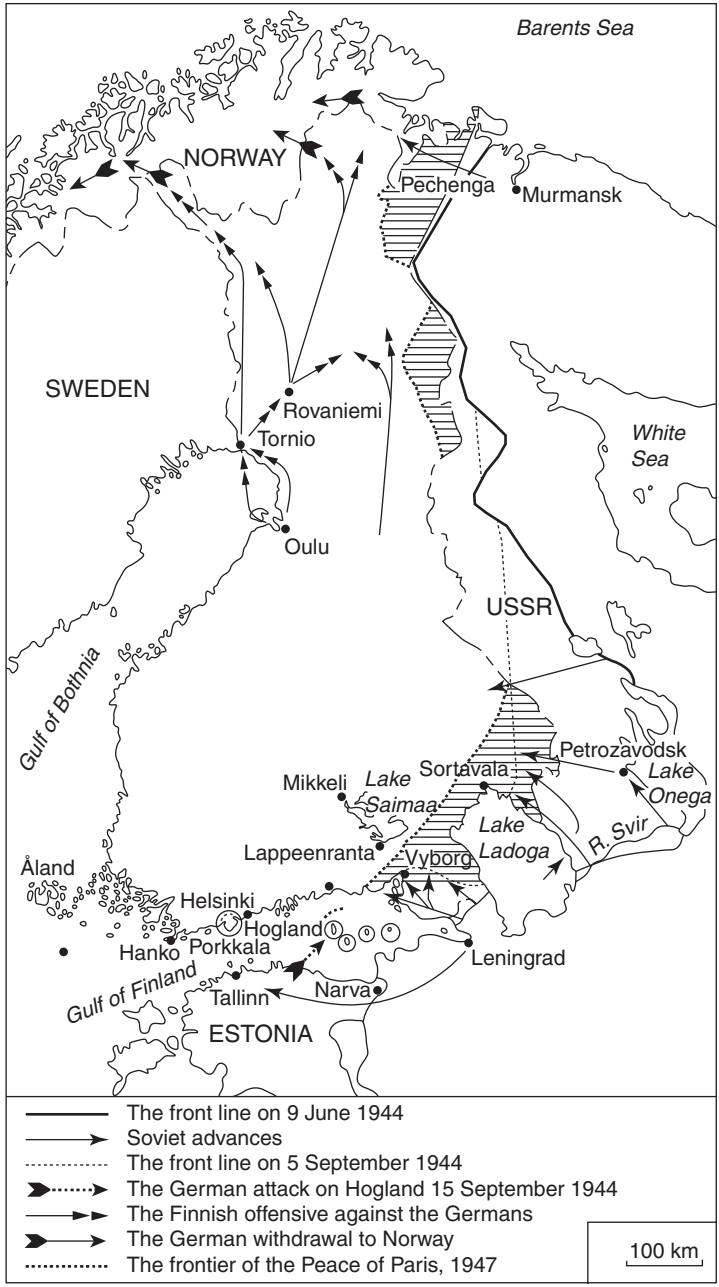
demands by force. On the other hand, it was thought possible that because the outcome of the world war would be decided in central Europe, Russian attention might be distracted from Finland, which then might survive until a general peace was implemented. Then the Western powers would have a say in matters – and the Finns refused to believe that the West had totally abandoned them. At the end of April, Foreign Minister Ramsay wrote to Kivimäki in Berlin: 'I am of the opinion that the question of time is an extremely important question. The closer we can get to the big settlement with our army intact and our people united, the better are our chances.'[37] A few weeks later, it became apparent that time had run out.

9
Finland Pulls out of the War

'They are a serious, stubborn, blunt people and sense must be hammered into them', Stalin said of the Finns to the US Ambassador, Averell Harriman, on 10 June 1944. On that very morning, Soviet artillery had begun pounding the Karelian Isthmus.

The Soviet High Command had given little attention to the northern theatre of war after the Finnish and German offensives there had come to a standstill in late 1941. It had concentrated its efforts on defeating the Germans with a succession of massive attacks along the main front from Lake Ladoga to the Black Sea. In the winter of 1944 Soviet forces forced the Germans back from the outskirts of Leningrad to the River Narva, and during the following spring they drove the enemy out of the Ukraine and overran the Crimea. But the Finns continued to hold the positions on Soviet territory that they had occupied for two-and-a-half years. On the River Svir, the Finnish front line reached deep into the east, and in the Karelian Isthmus it was only 20 km from Leningrad. Moreover, the Finnish and German armed forces were together blockading the Soviet navy in the easternmost end of the Gulf of Finland. A massive Soviet offensive intended to crush the German forces was due to begin in Byelorussia at the end of June 1944, after the Western Allies had landed in Normandy. Before that, the Russians wanted to make sure of their northern front. If they defeated Finland, they could threaten the southern flank of the German 20th Mountain Army in Lapland and northern Norway, protect the right-hand flank of their own forces as they advanced into the Baltic countries and clear a way for their fleet into the Baltic Sea. (See Map 9.1)

The plans for an assault on Finland took final shape on the desks of the Russian staff officers in spring following the collapse of the peace talks between the USSR and Finland. The offensive was to be carried



Map 9.1 The northern theatre of war in 1944

out in two waves: the Leningrad Front under the command of General L. Govorov was to launch the first onslaught, and with victory secured there the Karelian Front led by General K.A. Meretskov was to attack across the Svir. The political goal was to knock Finland out of the war. There was not a lot of time to carry out this offensive on the periphery of the greater war; the troops needed for this operation would be required further south as soon as the offensive in Byelorussia got under way. The Russians were confident that they could achieve their military objectives in Finland quickly thanks to their superiority in numbers and above all in armaments. 'The Finns are no longer what they used to be. They are exhausted in all respects, and seeking peace', Stalin told Colonel-General S.M. Shtemenko, the Chief of the Operations Department of the General Staff. This did not mean that the Russians underestimated Finnish resistance. They prepared for the offensive thoroughly, relying on their experience of earlier successful operations against the Germans. The troops were trained especially for this mission for weeks, the Finnish positions were reconnoitred carefully, and the preparations were kept a close secret in order to preserve the element of surprise.[1]

The offensive in the Karelian Isthmus did in fact take the Finns by surprise. The bulk of the Finnish forces were away in Eastern Karelia, men had been sent on leave to do agricultural work, and the civilian population had returned and settled in the area. Just how the blame for the deficient defence of the Karelian Isthmus, the 'front door' to the cities and industrial centres of southern Finland, should be apportioned is one of the most disputed questions in Finnish military history. Naturally, the main responsibility lay with Mannerheim, who had gathered all the reins into his own hands. Finland's advantageous military position had up till the beginning of 1944 been based on the grip that the Germans had south of the Gulf of Finland and in the Leningrad region. All this had altered once the siege of Leningrad was broken, but the Finnish High Command was slow to react to the change. In the spring, Mannerheim had expressed concern about the possibility of a Soviet attack, and the defence of the Karelian Isthmus had been strengthened by deploying more troops and speeding up the building of fortifications. In June 1944, however, only a quarter of the army was in position there. Because it was considered important to keep Eastern Karelia as a buffer zone, large numbers of troops were still deployed in its defence. Mannerheim's reluctance to relinquish Eastern Karelia was influenced by his conviction that it might be a useful pawn in peace negotiations. The Finns' own intelligence service had warned

the Finnish High Command on several occasions that the Russians were preparing an offensive, but they were not convinced by these reports.[2] The vigilance of both the troops and their leaders had been lessened by two-and-a-half years of inactivity in the trenches, and there had been negligence in training, in building fortifications and in intelligence work. The offensive carried out by a highly motorized Red Army hungry for victory was met by an army ill prepared in both morale and equipment for confrontation on the massive scale that was being fought in 1944.

On 10 June, Soviet tanks and infantry broke through the Finnish defences in an important sector of the Karelian Isthmus. Twenty-four Soviet divisions supported by almost a thousand aircraft attacked six Finnish divisions and two brigades. The bombardment by the Soviet artillery was one of the most intensive of the Second World War. In the main area of operations along a strip of coast on the Gulf of Finland there were over two hundred guns to every kilometre of the front. The worst shortcoming in the Finnish defences was that its anti-tank artillery was obsolete. Effective German short-range anti-tank weapons had reached the country, but they had not yet been supplied to the troops. The heavy Soviet tanks ruthlessly smashed their way through the Finnish lines. The morale of some Finnish units collapsed, and the men fled in panic. Others offered a stout resistance, but before long they, too, were forced to withdraw in the face of overwhelming material superiority. The Soviet forces advanced 70 km in ten days. Surprisingly, the defences of Vyborg crumbled, and on 20 June Soviet forces overran the city almost without a fight. To be able to bring more forces to bear in the Karelian Isthmus, Mannerheim issued an order on 16 June to evacuate Eastern Karelia. However, the Soviet forces launched a massive attack on the Karelian front on 20 June. The value of Eastern Karelia as a buffer zone now became apparent. In a series of delaying actions over the next three weeks, the Finnish commanders managed to extricate their troops from the threat of encirclement and withdraw them in fighting condition to a line of defence hastily drawn-up north-east of Lake Ladoga. This halted Meretskov's advance on 10 July.[3]

The Soviet offensive had come as a complete surprise to Finland's political leaders, and they were ready to make peace quickly even on harsh terms. On 15 June, Linkomies and Tanner decided that there should be a change of both government and President, and that the new government should sue the Soviet Union for peace. Ryti should be replaced as President by Mannerheim, whose prestige they thought would be sufficient to prevent the dissolution of the nation and per-

suade the people to accept the inevitability of peace on unfavourable terms. Ryti was willing to stand down, but Mannerheim categorically refused to accept the post of President. His place, he said, was in General Headquarters.[4] Initially, he supported the proposals for a change of government and suing for peace, and he even tried to expedite the project, as he considered the country's military position hopeless: it was not a question of days, but of hours, he urged. Soon, however, he changed his mind. The front had started to hold, and assistance had been promised from Germany. The Commander-in-Chief now insisted that it was risky to discuss peace with the situation at the front in such a critical situation. First the fighting spirit of the troops had to be restored. The front could only be consolidated if help was obtained from Germany, and to start peace negotiations meant burning one's bridges in that direction. 'Keep a cool head – don't do anything stupid', was the Marshal's new advice.[5]

For Germany, it was extremely important that Finnish resistance should continue. In answer to Mannerheim's urgent request for assistance, the Germans sent anti-tank weapons and a detachment of seventy aircraft with all possible dispatch to Finland. When it appeared that this was not enough, Mannerheim with Ryti's agreement asked Germany to send troops as well. The Northern Army Group, which was fighting in the Baltic countries, was ordered to send one assault gun brigade and one infantry division to Finland. More the Germans could not spare, beleaguered as they were from east and west. However, the government and Mannerheim were both well aware that German assistance afforded only a temporary respite. And it was doubtful whether it would even be enough to consolidate the front sufficiently for them to enter peace negotiations on a more favourable standing. On the other hand, it was by no means certain that Moscow was willing to discuss peace at all. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the government decided to find out. On 22 June, an unofficial enquiry was delivered to Alexandra Kollontai, the Soviet envoy in Stockholm, asking whether the Soviet government was willing to discuss peace with a new Finnish government and to receive a delegation from it.[6] The reply from Moscow came the following day. It referred to previous fruitless negotiations and required from Finland a declaration signed by the President and the Foreign Minister that Finland was prepared to surrender and to sue the Soviet government for peace. On receipt of such a document, Moscow was willing to receive a Finnish delegation.[7]

At the same time, the government of Finland received another ultimatum. With Mannerheim pleading for effective military assistance,

Germany at last had the chance to pressurize Finland into a political alliance, which had been its aim ever since the spring of 1943. Hitler sent Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop to Helsinki. He arrived there on 22 June, just a few hours after the Finnish enquiry about peace had been sent to Stockholm. He brought with him a demand from Hitler that Finland publicly declare that it was still fighting on the side of Germany. That was the condition of any assistance that would be given. Von Ribbentrop promised arms, aircraft and even troops, but in return Finland must enter into an agreement with Germany that it would not make a separate peace without German agreement. Otherwise any promised aid, and indeed any assistance already afforded, might be withdrawn.[8]

Thus the Finnish government was left to choose between the surrender demanded by the Soviet Union and the undertaking required by Germany. There were no other alternatives, for it was clear that Finland's resources were not sufficient to enable it to continue fighting without continual German supplies of armaments. The loss of Vyborg had dealt a telling blow to Finnish morale. The Soviet forces were continuing their offensive from there, advancing northwest on the town of Lappeenranta. Mannerheim emphasized the absolute necessity of obtaining German assistance. Von Ribbentrop waited in Helsinki, and Hitler pressed for a rapid reply by telephone. In the government, Tanner opposed making any commitment to Germany. He stressed that if Finland continued the war, the country would be destroyed, men would die, the political advantage of waging a separate war would be lost, and in the end it would have to surrender anyway. He proposed that negotiations with the Soviet government should be continued. To start with, Ryti also supported this view. Prime Minister Linkomies, on the other hand, strongly opposed any talk of surrender. Now was the time to fight, surrender could come later, he said. The majority of the government shared his views. It was decided to leave the Soviet demand unanswered, and consequently the German demand had to be accepted. It was left to the Foreign Minister, Ramsay, to do what he could in negotiations with von Ribbentrop to limit the extent of commitment entailed by the undertaking.[9]

President Ryti first told the government that he would give no undertaking to Germany without the approval of Parliament. He suspected that it would be unconstitutional to act otherwise. But when it began to appear that there would be a majority in Parliament against giving the undertaking to Germany, Linkomies refused to take the matter there and threatened to resign otherwise. He may also have thought that it was not wise to commit Parliament to the undertaking

to Germany as this might offer a loophole for getting out of it later on. In the end, Ryti agreed to give the undertaking in his own name alone. He justified his decision by appealing to the fact that the army could not be left without assistance. On 26 June, von Ribbentrop left with a letter from the President of Finland to Hitler assuring him that he would not make peace with the Soviet Union or allow a government named by him or anyone else to undertake peace negotiations without German agreement. The letter also promised that Finland's commitment to Germany would be made public in a speech by the President. In the government, the Social Democrats and the lone representative of the Progressive Party voted against giving the undertaking.[10]

Thus the Finnish government had finally succumbed to issuing an undertaking that it had previously resolutely opposed. Ryti had done so on his own responsibility and against his initial conviction. Those who had been most strongly in favour of giving this undertaking were Linkomies and Mannerheim. The Commander-in-Chief had insisted on German assistance, and he was of the opinion that Finland had no choice but to accept Germany's terms. They all agreed that, once the situation at the front had been consolidated, Finland would have to get out of the undertaking. At that moment, however, it was a guarantee of continued military aid from Germany. And although no more reinforcements were forthcoming from there, arms were supplied in abundance.

The 'Ryti-Ribbentrop pact' put the internal unity of the country to a severe test. It almost split the government. The parliamentary group of the Swedish People's Party announced that it was withdrawing its support for the government. The Social Democrat parliamentary group, on the other hand, decided by 36 votes to 26 after a heated debate to allow its representatives to remain in office for the time being. The minority held that the party should not take any further responsibility for the conduct of the war in order to be able to take office after peace was made. They were also concerned about the attitudes of the USA and Sweden. Those who supported remaining in the government feared that its dissolution would have an adverse effect on the morale of the troops. They argued that if the Russians were in control in Helsinki, the Social Democrats would not have much of a say in matters anyway. Those who wavered were influenced by Tanner's speech, in which he said that, if the group wished to render a personal service to the Social Democrat ministers, it would withdraw them from the government, but if it wished to render a service to the country, it should bid them remain in it. Everyone in the party agreed that the Social Democrat ministers should put pressure on their colleagues in the government to make peace.[11]

In terms of foreign relations, Finland was to pay a heavy price for its undertaking to Germany. The image of Finland in the West was tarnished. The Swedish papers talked about 'Ryti's coup' and 'a German dictatorship' in Finland. For more than two years, the United States had held the threat of severing diplomatic relations over the Finnish government. After the collapse of the armistice negotiations between Finland and the Soviet Union in April, Secretary of State Hull had in fact proposed such a measure, because in his opinion the United States had exhausted its means of influencing the Finnish government. He thought it would also reduce the risk of the United States becoming embroiled 'in the final settlement which must take place between Finland and the Soviet Union'. On that occasion, President Roosevelt had rejected the proposal.[12] But this time he, too, had had enough. After obtaining the President's approval, on 30 June Hull delivered a note to the Finnish representative in Washington which stated that Finland had ignored the repeated warnings of the United States and had entered into a hard and fast military partnership with Nazi Germany with the intention of fighting against the allies of the United States. This had rendered the maintenance of relations between the two countries impossible.[13]

In Moscow, Stalin told the American Ambassador that the Finns had not responded to the Soviet Union's demand for surrender. He said that the leading members of the Finnish government were agents of Hitler and completely under the control of the Germans.[14] The terms of surrender for the 'satellites' of Germany had been drafted by a committee under the presidency of Marshal K.J. Voroshilov. The secretary of the committee had sent a draft of those conditions that concerned Finland to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 26 June. They stipulated that Finnish territory should be occupied partially or completely as deemed fit by the Supreme Command of the Soviet armed forces, that the Finnish Army was to be disarmed, that the Civil Guards be interned, and that the civilian administration and the entire economy of Finland be placed under the control of the Soviet Union.[15] These terms were never presented to Finland, because it refused to discuss capitulation. The Finns learned of them only fifty years later, when the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and its archives began to be opened up to researchers.

At the end of June, the decisive battle between the Soviet forces and the Finnish Army began north of Vyborg. Govorov now had a marshal's stars on his epaulettes for his successful breakthrough in the Karelian Isthmus. His aim was to defeat the Finnish Army between Vyborg and the River Kymijoki and then penetrate the interior of the country. This time, however, he met with staunch resistance. Mannerheim had got his

main forces – eleven divisions and four brigades – in position in terrain that was favourable for defensive operations. The troops were deployed along approximately the same line to which the Finnish Army had withdrawn at the end of the Winter War. They were supported by a relatively strong artillery force. The Finnish Air Force and the German air support that had been sent to reinforce it were enough together to offer a challenge to Soviet supremacy in the air. The Finnish troops had recovered from the shock caused by the overwhelming superiority in arms of the enemy, and their self-confidence had grown when they were supplied with effective German anti-tank weapons. On the other hand, the Soviet troops had spent themselves in the offensive. Their main onslaught was halted at Ihantala, north-east of Vyborg, by the skilfully concentrated fire of the Finnish artillery, the tough resistance of the infantry and the precision bombing of German dive bombers. With good reason, the Finnish people believe that this defensive victory, the 'Miracle of Ihantala', saved the country.

As a result of its offensive against Finland, the Soviet Union removed the threat to Leningrad and expelled the occupier from Soviet Karelia. However, the massive Soviet offensive against Germany in Byelorussia had begun on 22 June, and it could not afford to send the reinforcements needed to break Finnish resistance to a peripheral theatre of war in the north. On the contrary, troops began to be moved from the north to the south and on 11 July Stalin ordered Govorov to halt his attack. Soon messages began to arrive in Finland from Kollontai in Stockholm stating that the Soviet government was once again willing to discuss peace with the Finns. However, it refused to have anything to do with Ryti or Tanner. It also rejected the idea of negotiating with some Finnish government in exile in Stockholm of the kind that various opposition circles in Finland had entertained. Whatever was done, had to be done in Finland.[16]

Tanner, under pressure from his own party, began to push through a solution. He returned to his proposal of a couple of weeks earlier for a change of government and a new President. If all else failed, the Social Democrats would have to leave the government and thus force it to resign.[17] In the latter half of July, Mannerheim had also reached the conclusion that the moment had come for Finland to detach itself from Germany. All was relatively quiet on the war front for the time being, and Germany was withdrawing the reinforcements it had sent to Finland. The Commander-in-Chief stated that the main object of giving the undertaking to Germany had been achieved with the consolidation of the front.[18] After considerable persuasion, he finally

agreed to shoulder the responsibility of head of state. On 28 July, Ryti and Tanner travelled to General Headquarters and agreed with Mannerheim that Ryti would resign as President of the Republic and that the Marshal would make himself available to follow him.

Ryti had to resign so that he could be replaced by a man who had enough prestige to lead the nation united into peace. At the same time, Finland would regain its freedom of movement in foreign politics, for it was thought that the new President would not be bound by the undertaking that Ryti had given to Germany. It was also believed that the USSR would accept Mannerheim as a partner in negotiations.[19] By an emergency law, the new President was elected by Parliament. The vote was unanimous. Those who were in favour of a separate peace saw in the election of Mannerheim an opportunity to extract Finland from the war, and the 'diehards' did not have the nerve to oppose the revered Commander-in-Chief, although they suspected what was up. The leader of the new government was a conservative from the National Coalition Party, Antti Hackzell, who in the 1920s had been the Finnish envoy in Moscow and in the 1930s Foreign Minister. The Foreign Minister's portfolio went to Carl Enckell, who had travelled to Moscow with Paasikivi the previous March. Both spoke Russian well. The political composition of Hackzell's government was the same as that of its predecessor. It contained – in addition to Mannerheim's trusted associates – members of the main parliamentary parties from the Social Democrats to the National Coalition Party. Some of the leading figures, most importantly Tanner, had excluded themselves from the Cabinet.

The change of President in Finland aroused the worst premonitions of the Germans. Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel was sent to Finland by Hitler. He arrived on 17 August to bestow a high German decoration on Mannerheim and assure him that Germany would continue to do what it could to help Finland both militarily and economically. However, Mannerheim gave his visitor to understand that he did not consider himself bound by the undertaking that had been coerced out of his predecessor. Finland would continue to fight only as long as its own interests required it to do so.[20] At the end of June a contingency plan had been hastily drawn up in the High Command of the *Wehrmacht* which proposed that, in the event of a Finnish surrender, its political and military leaders were to be deposed, and the southern and western parts of the country were to be defended by troops sent from Germany together with those units of the Finnish Army that still wanted to fight on. A German occupation government for Finland had also been planned in outline.[21] However, by August Germany's chances of taking effective

countermeasures had dwindled. It had even had to transfer the troops that had been specially equipped and trained to occupy the Åland Islands and Hogland Island in the eastern Gulf of Finland to other duties. The most important task for the German leaders was to rescue their own forces in Finland, above all the 20th Mountain Army in the north. The SS and the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (the State Security Service) had made plans for measures designed to create dissension in Finland and to incite at least part of the army to rebel against the government if it made peace with Russia. Himmler issued an order on 8 August to do everything to strengthen those Finnish circles that desired to fight on. The plan fell through when the Germans failed to find any collaborators.[22]

After taking office as the new President, Mannerheim prevaricated for three weeks before taking the crucial step. He was perfectly aware that the Russian forces would be able to break through the Finnish defences if they began a new offensive in the Karelian Isthmus, but the decision was a difficult one for him. Extending the hand of friendship to the Soviet Union was completely at variance with his anti-communist background. For its part, the government lacked strong figures like Linkomies and Tanner to give a direction to the country's policy, although it did undertake some preparations, such as requesting Sweden to supply Finland with essential foodstuffs after it had broken off relations with Germany, to which request the Swedish government responded favourably. Moreover, defence of the Åland Islands was strengthened as soon as Keitel left Finland; Mannerheim was still wary of countermeasures by the Germans.

The German position now deteriorated rapidly in both the east and the west. Bulgaria and Romania decided to detach themselves from Germany. Through Stockholm the Finns got a message from Moscow that they should speedily make an initiative for peace negotiations. The terms would be reasonable, and the Soviet Union did not aim at annihilating Finland's independence. There began to be signs of nervousness in Finnish political circles. On 24 August Hackzell and Tanner finally persuaded Mannerheim that any further delay could result in a difficult internal situation.[23] A message was sent to the Soviet envoy in Stockholm, Alexandra Kollontai, requesting the Soviet government to receive a Finnish peace delegation. Foreign Minister Enckell authorized the Finnish envoy in Berlin to inform the Germans officially that the undertaking made by Ryti was not binding on his successor because it had not been submitted for approval by Parliament. Not surprisingly, the German diplomats protested loudly.[24] The preliminary conditions of

the Soviet government were received on 29 August. They stated that the Soviet government was willing to receive a peace delegation on the sole condition that Finland immediately and publicly declared that it was severing relations with Germany and demanding that Germany remove its troops from Finnish territory by 15 September. After that date any German troops remaining in the country were to be disarmed and handed over to the Allies as prisoners of war. The Soviet Union stated that it had agreed with Great Britain on this response and had also made it known to the USA. Neither had suggested alterations in the terms.[25]

Surrender, therefore, was no longer demanded. Compared with the conditions that had been presented in the previous March, these represented a significant alleviation in that it was not necessary to start interning the Germans immediately. Even so it was a jump into the unknown for the Finns; they had to sever relations with Germany without knowing anything about the peace conditions. Mannerheim hesitated once more but finally acquiesced. The ultimatum of the Soviet government, which gave 2 September as the deadline for the Finnish reply, put an end to the prevarication in Helsinki. In a hastily convened closed sitting of Parliament, the government proposed that the preliminary conditions presented by the Soviet government be accepted. It was assured in advance of the support of the majority of the members. However, it wanted to have the broadest possible backing for the decision in order to ensure that the nation was united as it moved from war onto a peace footing. Even so, most members of the National Coalition Party and the Agrarian League as well as the whole of the Patriotic People's Movement voted against it. The preliminary conditions were eventually approved by 113 votes to 43. On the same evening, Foreign Minister Enckell presented the German envoy with a note demanding that Germany remove its troops from Finland within two weeks. The Soviet Union announced that it agreed to Mannerheim's request for a ceasefire. The guns finally fell silent on 5 September.

In accordance with the decision of the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Moscow in October 1943, the peace negotiations with Finland were to be conducted by the USSR. The Soviet Union's intention was to keep its Western allies outside matters concerning Finland. It did not even respond to a British proposal that the conditions of peace with Finland should be handled by the European Advisory Commission, a preparatory body set up by the Conference of Foreign Ministers.[26] The Western powers settled for a very modest role in handling the Finnish question. London considered that Finland belonged to the Soviet sphere of influence, and the British expressed no demonstrations of sympathy

for it, which they felt would serve to arouse Moscow's suspicions about Britain's motives and that would certainly not help the Finnish position.[27] 'Although we shall no doubt hope that Finland will be left some real degree of at least cultural and commercial independence and a parliamentary regime, Russian influence will in any event be predominant in Finland and we shall not be able, not would it serve any important British interests, to contest that influence', Foreign Secretary Eden wrote to the War Cabinet on 9 August.[28] The United States remained aloof from the peace discussions on the grounds that it was not at war with Finland.[29]

It was not until 6 September that Molotov informed the British and American Ambassadors in Moscow of the conditions that had been drawn up for Finland. The Soviet Union's proposal was based on the assumption that the peace treaty that was now to be signed with Finland would be final. It clearly wished to keep the settlement with Finland as a purely bilateral agreement. However, the British felt that the USSR was going too far in completely excluding them from the drafting of the peace conditions and in order to get the matter settled quickly, the Soviet government agreed that for the time being only an armistice would be signed with Finland, as also with Romania. After this, the USSR and Great Britain rapidly concurred on the contents of the agreement.[30]

The negotiations began in Moscow on 14 September with the Finns in a very awkward situation. Just before the first meeting, the leader of the Finnish delegation, Prime Minister Hackzell, suffered a stroke (which left him paralysed) in his hotel room. The Foreign Minister, Enckell, had to hurry to Moscow to assume leadership of the delegation. The conditions presented to the Finns were in many respects much harsher than those that had been offered half a year earlier. Then the demands had been for the restoration of the 1940 border, the expulsion of the Germans, the Pechenga area, war reparations and the demobilization of the Finnish Army. The September conditions included all these and a great deal more. A new, threatening demand was for the lease of the Porkkala promontory – situated close to Helsinki on the south coast of Finland – to the Soviet Union as a naval base. The new conditions also included stipulations which would make it possible for the USSR to interfere extensively in Finnish domestic affairs. Finland was to commit itself to cooperating with the Allies in punishing war criminals, it was to dissolve forthwith the pro-Hitler elements and other anti-Soviet organizations in the country and to repeal the discriminatory measures directed against left-wing groups.

Compliance with the agreement would be supervised by an Allied Control Commission. The only relief with respect to the March conditions was a halving of the war indemnity demanded to $300 million, which was probably due to an intervention on the part of the British.

All attempts by the Finnish delegation to obtain changes in the conditions proved futile. Molotov was adamant. For form's sake, he would occasionally ask the opinion of Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, the British Ambassador in Moscow, who was a member of the Allied delegation, and the latter almost without exception would reply that he agreed with Molotov. Time and again, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs pressed the Finns for an answer about what measures they had taken to disarm the German troops. In fact, he had good reason to be suspicious of the Finns' willingness to implement this condition, which perhaps partly explains the brusqueness of his manner. When Enckell sought a private meeting with Molotov on 18 September, the latter made harsh accusations against 'the bloody and criminal government' of Finland. The Finns must sign the armistice agreement immediately, he insisted. Otherwise the delegates could go home, and the country would be occupied. 'It was the most frightful thing I have ever experienced', said the Finnish Foreign Minister, ashen faced as he came out of the meeting.[31]

In Finland the armistice conditions were felt to be crushing. 'Dreadful! Dreadful! The [1940] Peace of Moscow was many times better than this – Porkkala, control, interference in our internal affairs, etc., etc.', wrote Paasikivi in his diary. Mannerheim told Tanner that he suspected that the terms meant that Finland would come almost completely under the control of the Soviet Union. From the military point of view, the worst thing was the demand for the lease of the Porkkala promontory. The base would be only 17 km from Helsinki. The Marshal believed that the capital should be transferred to another city. Once more he considered the possibility of resistance. However, Tanner and Ramsay advised him to give in.[32] Under the leadership of the President, who wavered to the very end, the government decided to accept the conditions in the early hours of the morning of 19 September.[33] In a sitting that began at six o'clock in the morning, Parliament approved the conditions without a vote. Even before news of this reached Moscow, the Finnish delegation had signed the armistice agreement on its own responsibility.

The about-face in Finnish policy was made in an abashed mood under Mannerheim. 'The bitterest moment in the life of our nation', said Ernst von Born, the acting Prime Minister. However, Mannerheim's personal prestige proved sufficient to prevent the country's feared internal dissolution. As a result of the defeats suffered

by Germany and a period of several weeks of relative inactivity at the front, public opinion had come round to the idea of peace. Those who had resisted it to the very end were embittered, but they remained loyal. The army followed their Commander-in-Chief with unbroken ranks, although many an officer rebelled in his heart of hearts.

It came as a great relief to the Germans when they realized that the Finns would do their best to get German troops out of the country as peacefully and as quickly as possible by 15 September, which was the deadline for internment according to the armistice conditions. When Romania had laid down its arms, the German 6th Army, which had been fighting there, had been trapped and destroyed. Above all, the Germans wanted to avoid the same fate in Finland. There was just enough time to save the military staffs, the medical personal, the wounded and civilians in southern Finland. Hitler immediately issued an order on 3 September that relations with Finland should be handled in a spirit of 'friendly accord'. By avoiding any kind of conflict with the Finns, the Germans also gained the time to extract the 20th Mountain Army from northern Finland.[34]

When the time limit ran out on 15 September, the Germans made a surprise attack and tried to seize Hogland Island. In accordance with his instructions, the commander of the Finnish forces on the island gave the order to open fire. The invasion was repelled, and over a thousand Germans were taken prisoner. The battle of Hogland demonstrated that the Finnish Army was willing and able to fight against its recent brothers-in-arms. This to some extent eased the position of the Finnish government at a time when matters in Moscow were delicately balanced.

When Finland withdrew from the war, the 20th Mountain Army found itself in an untenable position. Its southern flank was left completely open, and its supply lines to the harbours of Finland were cut. The order that Hitler had given in September 1943 to withdraw to northern Lapland but to keep control of the Pechenga nickel mines in the event of Finland pulling out of the war was still in force. The Germans expected the Russians to give pursuit, and in order to make this pursuit more difficult, it would be necessary to lay waste wide tracts of land. The withdrawal of the Mountain Army began at the beginning of September 1944, a few days after the armistice came into force. In northern Finland and adjoining areas, the Germans had over 200,000 men – mostly unmotorized infantry – and large stores. Nobody imagined that it would be possible for them to pack up and go in a couple of weeks. According to calculations previously made by the Finnish military authorities, three months would hardly suffice. The Finns were weary of the war and

wanted to save their land from devastation. The Germans, too, wished to avoid an armed confrontation as far as possible. Thus there was a certain unity of interests although official relations were severed, and this resulted in a secret agreement between the Finnish and German military authorities in which the Germans agreed to limit the devastation of the country and the Finns to facilitate the Germans' withdrawal even after 15 September. At first, the Finnish forces followed behind the retreating Germans in accordance with an agreed timetable in such a way as to avoid contact with them. Wide tracts of the country were spared from destruction, and the people of Lapland were successfully evacuated from the war zone to areas further south and to Sweden.[35]

At the beginning of October, Hitler finally renounced the earlier plan for the Germans to hold northern Lapland and ordered the 20th Mountain Army to pull out into Norway. He was prompted to do this by difficulties in maintaining supplies to the German forces as well as by the realization that the nickel from Pechenga was no longer indispensable to the German war economy. The Germans might have left northern Finland without a fight, but this did not suit the Russians. The phoney war that the Finns were conducting in the north was glaringly at odds with the terms of the armistice agreement, and it placed the whole country in jeopardy. The Allied Control Commission, which had arrived in Finland at the end of September, intervened sharply and demanded effective measures against the Germans. Finally, on 30 September, the acting Chairman of the Control Commission, Lieutenant-General Savonenkov, presented the Finns with a direct ultimatum. The Finns had now got their troops into position in northern Finland and Mannerheim ordered their commander, General Hjalmar Siilasvuo, to do something spectacular enough to satisfy the Russians. 'The fate of Finland now rests on the shoulders of the general!' he said.[36]

The Finns' war against the Germans began with Siilasvuo's daring landing behind German lines at Tornio on 1 October. His advance northwards was slow, however, as the Germans blew up the bridges and mined the roads. In this they no longer showed any scruples, and they also burned down all dwellings. Soviet troops did not take part in the war operations conducted on Finnish soil. On the other hand, they did launch an offensive of their own on the coast of the Barents Sea, taking Pechenga and advancing into northern Norway. By the end of the year, the Germans had withdrawn from Finnish territory completely, apart from the extreme north-western corner. The Finns were left with a devastated Lapland, which only slowly came back to life as the population returned to their burned villages.

Finland succeeded in making peace much more easily and with less damage than the other states that had fought alongside Germany. The Soviet Union occupied Romania and Bulgaria in its prosecution of the war, Hungary remained a theatre of war for a long time, and in the end it, too, was occupied by the Soviet Union. All three ended up with communist regimes as a result of the occupation. Finland never became a field of battle between the great powers, and it was never occupied. Losses among the civilian population were small, and the major centres of population and industry together with the road and rail network survived intact, except in Lapland. However, in the autumn of 1944, the Finns were prepared for the worst. Surrender was out of the question. The army prepared to continue the struggle by means of guerrilla warfare if the country was occupied. Under cover of the darkness of autumn, intelligence personnel, technical equipment and files were shipped to Sweden, and arms for nearly 35,000 men were hidden in caches around the country.

The USSR indeed threatened to occupy Finland if it did not comply with the armistice conditions. However, Stalin probably thought that the armistice was enough to secure Soviet interests in Finland. The Soviet Union held all the trump cards. Above all, it had the base in Porkkala. The central part of the 'Sea Fortress of Peter the Great', which had been built in the last years of the Czars to defend the capital of the empire, was constituted by the heavy gun emplacements in Porkkala and on the Estonian coast, which could close off access to the Gulf of Finland by means of cross-fire. Porkkala was to serve the same purpose again in 1944. And just as in the days of the last czar, the Russian coastal fortifications had another function: to curb the unreliable Finns, whose capital was now within the range of their heavy guns.

Although the immediate threat of occupation had been avoided, the post-war situation frightened many Finns. The communists would come out into the open. They would be able to take advantage of the people's economic plight and their frustration at defeat in the war. 'From now on, Aaltonen is the commander-in-chief', Mannerheim is reported to have said. Aleksi Aaltonen was the Social Democratic Party Secretary. The battle would go on, but the front line would now be inside the borders of the country.

10
The Years of Peril

The period immediately following the armistice of September 1944 is frequently referred to as 'the Years of Peril' in Finland. Although the appropriateness of the name has often been questioned, it nevertheless reflects the uncertainty and fear of the Finnish people at that time. An Allied Control Commission came to Finland, as to all of the other defeated states in the war, to supervise the implementation of the armistice conditions. It functioned directly under the Soviet High Command. The Chairman was Colonel-General A.A. Zhdanov, who reported directly to the Kremlin. There were also British members of the Commission, but they were little more than observers. As an instrument of Soviet foreign policy, the task of the Control Commission was to ensure that Finland remained within the sphere of influence of the USSR, that is, in the words used at the time, to pursue a foreign policy that was friendly to the Soviet Union.

The Finns regarded the Control Commission as a mysterious and menacing power. Its members evoked the threat of occupation whenever the occasion demanded. The choice of chairman alone was enough to inspire forebodings. Andrei Alexandrovich Zhdanov came straight from the summit of the Soviet hierarchy. As former Party Secretary for Leningrad he was surmised to have been a major influence behind the provocation of the Winter War and the establishment of Kuusinen's puppet government, and he was known to have been in charge of the imposition of the Soviet system on Estonia in 1940. In fact, however, the Control Commission adopted a fairly cautious policy in Finland. It was clearly Zhdanov's policy to dispel Finnish doubts. He immediately made it clear to those under him that the principle of the Control Commission was to ensure that the conditions of the armistice were implemented, but that they should otherwise refrain from

interfering in the country's internal affairs. In practice, it must be admitted, this principle was applied extremely loosely.[1]

The Control Commission naturally regarded the willingness of the 'reactionary government' of Finland to obey the stipulations of the armistice with some suspicion. Even before the Finnish war operations against the Germans in Lapland had been concluded, Finland had been given an extremely tight schedule in which to reduce its army to peacetime strength. The abolition of the 'pro-Hitler' organizations required by the armistice posed no difficulty in so far as the extreme right-wing groups were concerned. They were either insignificant, or the new situation had made them obsolete. However, the Control Commission was not satisfied with the suppression of these; it also demanded the dissolution of the Civil Guards and the *Lotta Svärd* organization. It is totally unjustified to regard either of these as 'fascist' organizations. The Civil Guards, whose membership ultimately rose to nearly half a million, had been partially incorporated within the army during the war. However, Mannerheim and the cabinet had realized that the new situation made it impossible for the organization to continue its activities and had in fact already decided to dissolve it when the demand of the Control Commission came. They were also required to dissolve the Brothers-in-Arms Association. As a patriotic organization that went beyond class and party boundaries and performed extensive work of a social and charitable nature, it was regarded by the Control Commission and the communists as an obstacle to the changes that they wished to implement in Finnish internal politics.

A new government had been formed immediately after the armistice was signed. It was the last attempt of the political circles that had borne the responsibility of government during the war to hold on to power in the changed circumstances. The Prime Minister, U.J. Castrén, was one of the leading lawyers in the country, but he had no political experience. The Control Commission was not satisfied with the government, and when internal pressure also mounted, it had to resign. It was now the turn of Paasikivi to take up the reins of leadership. President Mannerheim had sidelined him because he suspected him of being too conciliatory towards the Russians. However, the 73-year-old statesman was indispensable in the eyes of the parliamentary parties, which regarded him as the only person with sufficient prestige among the different sectors of society to make a suitable Prime Minister. He was respected in the Kremlin, and he was recommended by Zhdanov. Mannerheim had no alternative but to capitulate. In 1918, Paasikivi had been Prime Minister of a monarchist government

with a pro-German orientation. But times had changed. On the basis of his long experience, he realized that Finland must now reconcile itself to a situation in which the Soviet Union was the leading power in the Baltic. The former Peace Opposition was strongly represented in Paasikivi's Cabinet in November 1944. The portfolio for justice, which was crucial with regard to the implementation of the conditions of the armistice, went to Urho Kekkonen. After a fierce battle of wills, Mannerheim finally agreed to name one Communist minister: Yrjö Leino, who had engaged in underground activities during the war, was made the Second Minister for Social Affairs.

After the naming of Paasikivi's government, Mannerheim gradually withdrew from active decision-making, although he continued to be President until March 1946. He still possessed a great symbolic value in maintaining public morale. The Russians apparently tolerated the old aristocrat in office because they regarded him as a kind of guarantor that the conditions of the armistice would be fulfilled. However, the political scene was now dominated by the powerful personality of Paasikivi. Cautiously but steadily, he set to work to gain the confidence of the Soviet leaders and in this way to win back the country's sovereignty. His Independence Day speech as Prime Minister on 6 December can be considered a kind of manifesto. He said that Finnish foreign policy was above all governed by its relationship with its great neighbour in the east. The conditions of the armistice must be faithfully fulfilled, but it was necessary to establish good and confidential relations with the USSR that went beyond that. It was in the fundamental interests of the Finnish people that its foreign policy should be directed in such a way as not to thwart the Soviet Union.

Finnish society was in a state of agitation after the country's defeat in the war. The workers' organizations attracted many new members. The trade union movement demanded a say in deciding about working conditions and democracy on the shop floor. For the first time in Finnish history there was a Communist in the government. By taking advantage of the people's weariness with war, the dissatisfaction of the underprivileged and the bitter memory of 1918, the Communists managed to win ground. Even so, it was from a distinctly disadvantageous position that the Finnish Communist Party set out to legitimize its activities. In the countries of eastern Europe and the Balkans, the mass support and rise to power of the communist parties had their origins in anti-fascist resistance movements. In Finland there had been no resistance movement. Most of the cadres of the Finnish Communist Party had perished in Stalin's purges in the 1930s. Those who had been

in Finnish prisons, on the other hand, had survived. It was thus a somewhat motley crew, completely lacking in experience of public political activities, that emerged from exile and prison to take up leadership of the party.

Zhdanov immediately disappointed those Communists who dreamed of a traditional proletarian revolution backed by the Soviet Union. There would be no Soviet tanks in Helsinki, he said. The Finnish Communists would have to achieve their victory by themselves. Under the direction of Moscow, they set as their goal the creation of a 'national democratic front', like their brethren parties in eastern Europe. Their activities aimed at the comprehensive 'democratization' of society, at working towards cooperation with 'progressive' bourgeois elements and at gaining control of the workers' organizations. The ultimate goal both in Finland and in the countries of eastern Europe was the establishment of a 'people's democracy', which meant imposing complete communist control on society. Part of the tactics was to unite the left into a broad-based co-operative organization under the leadership of the Communists. To this end a new party, the Finnish People's Democratic League, was founded in late October 1944 in the hope that the Social Democratic organizations would also join it. This hope was not fulfilled.

The Social Democratic Party, which had held office during the war, found itself in a difficult position when the war was over. In workplaces and workers' associations the Communists savagely attacked the Social Democrats, whose own ranks were also badly split. A strong opposition within the party, consisting mainly of those who had belonged to the Peace Opposition during the war, pressed for good relations with the Soviet Union and was ready to cooperate with the Communists. They believed that the Communists had 'changed', and they wanted to give them political responsibility, partly for tactical reasons. They certainly wished to stop the Communists from obtaining control over the workers' movement, and they certainly did not wish to question the desirability of preserving democracy. However, Tanner and his supporters demanded that the Communists be resisted. They were convinced that it was the Communists' intention to establish a dictatorship and to promote the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union. Tanner still enjoyed strong support at grass roots level in the party, where it was generally considered that the party had done the right thing in the war – after all, the country's independence had been saved. In the party conference held in November that year, the Tanner faction constituted a clear majority and filled the key positions within the party. As a result, the cooperation proposed by the Communists for

the coming general election was rejected. The opposition was split. One group, including the former Minister of Finance, Mauno Pekkala, joined the People's Democrats with the Communists. The rest remained loyal to the Social Democratic Party.[2] In view of subsequent events, the decision of the Social Democratic Party to remain independent was of far-reaching importance. The plan to unite the whole left into a single organization under Communist leadership fell through, and the Finnish People's Democratic League became little more than a parliamentary front for the Communists.

The Finnish general election on 17 and 18 March 1945 was the first to be held in Europe after the war and brought many new faces into Parliament. The People's Democrats won 23.5 per cent of the votes and 49 seats out of 200. Thirty-eight of these were Communists. The biggest loser was the Social Democratic Party, which, with 50 seats barely scraped in as the largest party. In the 1939 election, the party had won 85 seats. On the other hand, it had managed to preserve the loyalty of its core supporters. Rivalling these two parties was the Agrarian League with 49 seats, although it, too, suffered losses. After the election, Paasikivi formed a new government on the basis of these parties, known as 'the Big Three'. In it the Communists and their allies held the strongest position. Above all, they got the coveted portfolio of Minister of the Interior, which went to Yrjö Leino.

On the one hand, the government of 'the Big Three' corresponded to the Communists' conception of a common front of 'democratic forces', on the other, Paasikivi aimed to preserve peace in society and to save democracy by integrating the Communists into the prevailing system. They had to be familiarized with lawful practice and parliamentary procedure, and to this end it was necessary to make concessions and let them hold various offices in the administration. Many difficult problems awaited solutions. The country had been impoverished by the war. It was only thanks to the food supplies obtained from Sweden that the nation survived the first winter after the war in a tolerable condition. In order to placate the workers, the government and the employers judged it best to accede to their excessive demands for wage increases. The consequence was inflation, and in 1945 the value of the Finnish mark collapsed. Moreover, the two most difficult of the stipulations of the armistice still remained to be fulfilled: the prosecution of alleged war criminals and the payment of war reparations.

In article 13 of the armistice agreement, Finland had undertaken to cooperate with the Allies in prosecuting those who were guilty of war crimes. In the autumn of 1944, the Communists began to demand the

prosecution of the country's wartime political leaders as well. The Control Commission brought up the matter officially after the Allies had signed an agreement in London on 8 August 1945 in which the concept of war crime was extended to include initiating and waging a war of aggression. It became a matter of national pride to the Soviet Union to prove that its wartime policy with regard to Finland had been justified. Therefore, the Finns must be compelled to convict their wartime leaders. The major responsibility for carrying out this unpleasant task devolved on Paasikivi, the Prime Minister, and Kekkonen, the Minister of Justice. Under severe pressure and a threat of resignation by the Prime Minister, Parliament passed a bill concerning the punishment of those persons who as members of the government had been instrumental in taking Finland into the war in 1941 or who had had prevented peace from being made.

The war guilt trial was held in a provisional court constituted on political grounds. The Control Commission watched it closely, named the persons to be prosecuted and in the end also dictated the sentences. Ryti and Tanner were branded as the 'main war criminals'. The latter had been the principal target of Soviet condemnation ever since the beginning of the Winter War, and after the war the Soviet Union and the Communists regarded it as important to put an end to his influence in the workers' movement. Mannerheim, who had influenced Finnish policy during the war more than anyone else, was not prosecuted. The Soviet government did not consider that its interests required that the aged marshal be put in the dock. The accused politicians – in addition to Ryti and Tanner, five former cabinet ministers and T.M. Kivimäki, the Finnish envoy in Berlin – received long prison sentences. The public at large felt that the retroactive law profoundly violated Nordic principles of justice, and it considered the accused to be men of honour. Nevertheless, the judicial procedure was less difficult in Finland than it was in other countries. Nobody was sentenced to death, and as the situation changed those who were condemned were gradually released one after another. Most of them returned to leading positions in public life.

In the armistice agreement, Finland had undertaken to make war reparations to the USSR to the value of US$300 million in commodities over a period of six years. It soon emerged that the Soviet government demanded that the goods should be priced according to 1938 levels. The prices of goods had risen considerably during the war, and the Finns calculated that the real value of the goods that they would have to supply would be $600 million. In view of the country's productive

capacity this was a heavy obligation, and initially the Finns considered that it was unachievable. During the first two years, the war indemnity burden would amount to 4.5 per cent of the country's GNP. The amount that Finland was obliged to pay was the same as that for Romania and Hungary, countries with considerably higher national incomes. On the other hand, they also had the burden of supporting the occupying forces, and their industrial plants had suffered considerable damage, unlike in Finland.

It came as an unwelcome surprise to the Finns to learn that three-quarters of the reparations were to be in the form of metal-working and machine industry products and not the country's traditional export products, timber and paper. From the point of view of the Soviet Union this was understandable; it had plenty of wood itself, but it lacked machines and ships. Finland now had greatly to expand its metal industry and start manufacturing totally unfamiliar products. The biggest problem was the acquisition of the machinery and raw materials needed by the metal industry from abroad. In the end, Finland benefited from the fact that the products of the wood-processing industry were left free for export. Once reconstruction had got under way, there was a big demand for timber and wood pulp in Western Europe, particularly in Britain. The latter was willing to buy all the timber that Finland could supply, and London was by no means displeased that the bulk of Finland's reparations consisted of the products of the metal industry.[3]

As a consequence of the war reparations, the metal industry grew into an important sector in the Finnish economy. After the deliveries got under way, the Soviet Union showed some flexibility in various arrangements, and it extended the period of payment and reduced the final sum. Alongside the reparations, normal trade developed between the two countries, and the Soviet Union became an extremely important trade partner for Finland. By 1952 Finland had paid off its war indemnity. The final amount has subsequently been estimated as $444.7 million at the price level of the time of delivery.[4] The positive terms of trade with the West and foreign loans had played a major role in helping Finland to discharge its obligation. Nevertheless, it would not have been possible without the total dedication of this small nation, which had just been defeated in a war and was now struggling with the huge problems of reconstruction. It was due, in the words of the American economist, Charles Kindleberger, 'in major part to the intangible reality of a national effort of will, something that ordinary economic analysis is reluctant, and perhaps unable, to take into account'.[5]

Apart from the payment of its war indemnity, Finland was faced with another great struggle: the largest settlement project in the country's history. Most of the people who had left their homes in the territory ceded in 1940 had returned during the Continuation War. In 1944 these people had to leave once more, this time, it was realized, for good. There was already a model in existence for resettling the agricultural population: the Rapid Settlement Act of 1940. The veterans had also been promised land during the war. Among them there were large numbers of poor people from the countryside who now waited impatiently for the promises to be honoured. In spring 1945, Parliament passed the Land Acquisition Act, on the basis of which 120,000 families were resettled in the years after the war.[6] Because of the large number of those who received land, the size of most of the holdings was small, and in the later rationalization of agricultural production many of them turned out to be unviable. In the current situation, however, there was no other obvious solution to the resettlement problem.

In March 1946, Mannerheim resigned as President. His health had been failing for some time, and he found it very difficult to adapt to the new political situation. On 9 March, on the basis of an emergency law, Parliament elected Paasikivi as the new President. He was widely supported across a broad political spectrum, and he was also known to have the backing of the Kremlin. A coalition of the Big Three was considered the obvious basis for the new government. Kekkonen had aspired to the premiership, but he was rejected by the Control Commission. He was able and energetic, and with the support of Paasikivi he would be too tough an opponent for the Commission in its implementation of 'Finland's new democratic course'. Consequently, the Communists refused to participate in a government under his leadership. In the end, Mauno Pekkala, who had left the Social Democrats for the Finnish People's Democratic League, but who was considered harmless by the other government parties, was made Prime Minister. 'Too lazy to make a revolution', was the assessment of the new premier by Juho Niukkanen, one of the leaders of the Agrarian parliamentary group.[7]

As the Cold War began to have an increasing influence on international relations, the USSR tightened its hold on those countries that lay within its zone of interest. The Communists had achieved what was in many respects a relatively strong position in Finland. The Finnish People's Democratic League, which they controlled despite its ideological heterogeneity, had the largest number of ministers in the Cabinet. Yrjö Leino, Zhdanov's man, continued to hold office as Minister of the Interior, and the State Police were under Communist

control. On the other hand, the demands for purges in the armed forces, the civil service and the ordinary police had been practically ignored. Following Zhdanov's advice, the Communists had initially behaved in a moderate way and attempted to demonstrate their ability to cooperate with other 'democratic' groups. This was now to change. Zhdanov was permanently transferred to Moscow at the end of 1945. However, he continued to have special responsibility for Finland as one of Stalin's inner circle. When leading Finnish Communists visited Moscow in April 1946, he strongly criticized the Finnish comrades for their 'unbelievable ineptitude'. They were instructed to expedite the purging of the administration and the nationalization of key sectors of the economy.[8]

In conformity with these instructions, the Communists arranged a large number of mass meetings in the early summer of 1946 in which they demanded the 'democratization' of government and the nationalization of banks and big industry. The move misfired; it only stirred up strong opposition. Paasikivi, who had striven by means of special concessions to integrate the Communists into Finnish society, now took a firm stance against them, using the extensive powers accorded to the President by the constitution. By continually asking for more statements and reports, the President prevented the drafting of a proposed bill that would have allowed civil servants to be dismissed on political grounds. In nominations to posts in the administration he was guided above all by formal qualifications, and the Communists had few candidates who possessed these. The nationalization of private enterprises, for its part, was buried in a committee, which eventually produced 2500 pages of written text but nothing else. To the Communists the President was the staunchest pillar of 'reaction'. 'There's a pitch black man', wrote Hertta Kuusinen, a leading Communist, of Paasikivi to her father O.W. Kuusinen, the Prime Minister of the 1939 'Terijoki government', in Moscow.[9]

The decisive battle for the course that Finland would take was waged within the workers' movement. First the Communists had obtained the upper hand in the workplace and in the workers' associations and taken over Social Democrat associations, workers' halls and sports clubs. The opposition within the Social Democratic Party emphasized the need for cooperation between the workers' parties. However, the war guilt trial and the condemnation of Tanner were a traumatic experience for the majority of the Social Democrats, who saw in these an attempt on the part of the Communists to break them.[10] A group of young men who came to be known as 'Brothers-in-Arms Socialists'

now rose to leading positions within the Social Democratic Party. Most of them had served at the front as reserve officers or had been engaged in propaganda duties during the war. Their ideological background was the Brothers-in-Arms Association, in which the Social Democrats had had a central role. They received their support mainly from workers who belonged to the generation that had served in the war. They now launched a ruthless counterattack against the Communists.

In an extraordinary party conference in summer 1946, the 'Brothers-in-Arms Socialists' strengthened their hold on the party leadership. Väinö Leskinen, a charismatic speaker and an exceptionally able organizer who, after being wounded in the war, had been Secretary General of the Brothers-in-Arms Association, was made Party Secretary. 'Against us there had been a communist world power; now we were face to face with the communists of our own country. In this situation, too, we had to fight. The directness and ruthlessness of our methods derived directly from the war', Leskinen later wrote. With incredible speed, the party leaders built up a nationwide network of volunteer agents to spread propaganda in workplaces and to assume control of local associations. The Social Democrats were faster, abler, better organized and better funded than the Communists. They effectively exploited the mistakes of the Communists and their prominent role in the government. They used modern American opinion poll methods to sound out the views of the workers. A campaign waged with the slogan 'Enough of price increases, false promises, the repression of opinion and imposed democracy' culminated in the spring of 1947 with the elections of the Confederation of Finnish Trade Unions, in which the Social Democrats won a clear majority. The struggle for control of the trade unions also united the party's own ranks. The leading opposition politician, K.A. Fagerholm, who was the Speaker of Parliament, publicly came out against the Communists in autumn 1946, claiming that their victory would mean 'the Finns drowning in the sea of nations', that is, the loss of independence.[11] The decisive victory won in the trade unions, the sports organizations and the cooperative movement halted the Communist onslaught and ensured the leadership of the workers' movement for the Social Democrats.

President Paasikivi and the Cabinet wished to make a final peace treaty as soon as possible so that the Control Commission would leave the country and its sovereignty would be restored. However, a peace conference of 21 states that was convened to consider the peace treaties with the 'satellites' of Germany did not meet until the end of July 1946 in Paris. In Finland, it was fairly widely hoped that the peace

treaty would contain at least some relaxation of the conditions of the armistice. The Finns realized that the restoration of the 1939 border was out of the question, but they thought that Vyborg might be returned, and that some correction to the border of the Porkkala base was feasible. Since this concession depended on the Soviet Union, a delegation under Prime Minister Pekkala set out for Moscow in good time before the Paris Peace Conference. Stalin strongly rejected the idea of any changes in the borders. Despite this response, Paasikivi and the government saw it as their duty to make the peace conference aware of the wishes of the Finnish people. They thought that it would be understood neither in Finland nor abroad if the government simply announced that it was satisfied with the conditions. The delegation under Prime Minister Pekkala took with it written instructions signed by the President to express itself as discreetly as possible, bearing in mind that the maintenance of good relations with the USSR was the foundation of Finnish foreign policy. Under no circumstance must the Soviets be given the impression that the Finns were plotting behind their backs. However, the delegation was also instructed to mention the economic and historical significance of Karelia and Porkkala and to attempt to get a reduction in the amount of the war indemnity.[12]

Before the peace conference, the USSR had reached an agreement with Great Britain about the contents of the peace treaty to be signed with Finland, and thus it had no reason to make any concessions. At a session of the conference, Foreign Minister Enckell presented his government's wishes to a half-empty hall. Although the speech was extremely carefully worded, it came in for harsh criticism from the Soviet delegation. Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, explained that the security of Leningrad and the previous aggression of Finland made it impossible to make any territorial concessions.[13] The peace treaty with Finland was signed on 10 February 1947 in Paris together with those of the other 'satellites' of Germany. It contained no changes to the territorial conditions of the armistice. A reference in the Preamble to the Treaty to 'principles of justice' caused particular bitterness in Finland, where the memory that the Winter War had been started by the Soviet Union's attack on 30 November 1939 was very much alive. But for the time being it was wisest to keep quiet about that.

It had become apparent during the Paris Peace Conference that the USSR suspected the Finns of trying to obtain support from the West. In fact, they strictly avoided seeking such support, which anyway was not available. Neither Great Britain nor the United States had interests to defend in Finland that would have demanded any active intercession

on their part. London continued to regard the peace treaty with Finland as being mainly the concern of the USSR. At the same time, it made a determined effort to defend its trade interests in Finland. The USA, for its part, made a valuable contribution to reconstruction in Finland by granting loans to it, thereby reinforcing its democratic system of government. However, Finland was forced to refuse the aid it had anticipated receiving under the Marshall Plan in July 1947 when the Soviet Union announced that it opposed Finnish participation.

Finland's attempts to remain outside the conflicts of the great powers were put to the test when on 22 February 1948 Stalin suggested in a letter to Paasikivi that Finland and the USSR should sign a mutual assistance agreement against a possible attack by Germany. This was nothing new for the Finns. In fact Mannerheim had proposed a military pact with the Soviet Union back in January 1945. Then his intention had been to consolidate the position of Finland and obtain some concessions in the armistice conditions. Although it did not reject the proposal in principle, Moscow had not then considered that the time was right as no final peace treaty had been signed between the USSR and Finland. By 1948, the situation had changed in many respects. Such a treaty now existed. The world was becoming more and more sharply divided between two camps, and fearing that Germany would rise again with the support of the Western powers, the Soviet Union was striving to strengthen its own system of security in eastern Europe. It had already concluded mutual assistance treaties with Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia, and in 1948 it signed similar agreements with Romania and Hungary. After that Finland was the only gap in its western defence zone. Moscow was increasingly suspicious of Paasikivi's policy. It feared that after the ratification of the peace treaty, Finland would begin to pursue a more independent Western-oriented foreign policy.[14]

The Finns were generally extremely unwilling to conclude any kind of agreement that might be construed as indicating that the country had shifted to the Soviet camp, and which would thus compromise relations with the West. When Stalin's letter arrived, all parliamentary parties apart from the People's Democrats declared that they opposed a defence pact with the Soviet Union. The unrest was intensified by a government crisis in Czechoslovakia at the end of February which brought the Communists to power there. Paasikivi realized that it was impossible to refuse Stalin's invitation to begin negotiations. His objective was to persuade the Soviet Union to accept an arrangement that would take its security interests into account, but which would not signify an alliance proper and would allow Finland to remain outside

any conflicts between the great powers. The President turned down an invitation to go to Moscow, citing age and ill-health. He remembered how Hitler had forced Emil Hácha, the President of Czechoslovakia, to agree to the occupation of his country during his visit to Berlin in March 1939.[15]

The Finnish delegation was led by Prime Minister Pekkala, whom Paasikivi did not trust, describing him as 'an obedient tool of the Soviet leaders'. His trusted man in the delegation was Urho Kekkonen, whom he had nominated, overriding the proposal of Kekkonen's own party, the Agrarian League. From Helsinki the President kept a tight rein on the delegation. He had Kekkonen deliver a personal message to the Soviet leaders in which he drew attention to Parliament's opposition to a mutual assistance treaty and to the fact that it was imperative to get the backing of public opinion in Finland behind any agreement. When the Communists leaked the contents of the Finns' preparatory documents to Moscow, the Soviet leaders had a clear idea of how far Paasikivi was prepared to go. While he had been dubbed the leader of 'reactionary forces' in the nomenclature of Soviet diplomacy, they realized that he was, neverless, the only one who was capable of getting Parliament to agree to a mutual assistance agreement. As Maxim Korobochkin has noted, Stalin was on the horns of a dilemma: either pressurize Paasikivi, in which case the negotiations might founder, or ensure that the core of the pact would be accepted in Finland by making concessions. Assessing the situation realistically, he chose the latter alternative.[16] Thus the Soviet delegation accepted the Finnish proposal as a basis for negotiations. The end result was the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance, an agreement which differed in essence from the treaties that the Soviet Union had concluded with Romania and Hungary. Finnish commitments were limited to a situation in which an armed attack was made on Finland or on the USSR through Finnish territory by Germany or a state allied to it. In such a case, Finland would defend its territorial integrity if necessary either with the assistance of the Soviet Union or jointly with it. At home, the President forced the agreement through a reluctant Parliament, although he was well aware that the majority of the Finnish people were opposed to it. Despite an upcoming general election, Parliament ratified the agreement by a large majority on 28 April 1948.

The 'democratization' process envisaged by the Communists had progressed much more slowly in Finland than in the countries of eastern Europe. In the end it stopped altogether. The Big Three coali-

tion ran into increasing difficulties as the Agrarian League and the Social Democrats tried to pull out of it. Pekkala, the Prime Minister, lacked initiative, oscillated between different power groups and generally avoided taking a definite stand on any issue. In reality, he acted as a kind of buffer against the Communists' efforts to take power. However, in public, he was regarded as a Communist fellow traveller, and his position was not helped by the fact that relations between him and the President were not good. On the other hand, the star of the Social Democrat K.A. Fagerholm was rising.

At the end of 1947, Leino, the Minister of the Interior, and his wife, Hertta Kuusinen, received an invitation to go to Moscow. There Zhdanov rounded on the Finnish Communists: they had failed in their major task, the dissolution of the Social Democrats. Leino bore the brunt of the attack for failing to purge the administration. He was ordered to resign from his leading posts in the Finnish Communist Party. Then Zhdanov explained to them how matters had been handled in Hungary. There the main opponents had been jailed for intrigue with foreign powers, which had turned the balance of power decisively in favour of the Communists. The Finnish Communists were ordered to win a majority in the general election of the following summer. This was a tall order considering that the People's Democrats had just lost support in the local elections. Hertta Kuusinen was forced to admit that without outside help it would be a hundred years before they obtained a majority in the Finnish Parliament.[17]

When the Soviet Union proposed a mutual assistance treaty with Finland, the Communists got new hope. They tried to exploit the situation by creating a mass movement. A small group of them planned the exposure of a 'right-wing conspiracy' and the imprisonment of some Brothers-in-Arms Socialists by the State Police on the Hungarian model.[18] After the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February, Helsinki was filled with wild rumours. The weak link in the Communists' schemes turned out to be Leino, who, abandoned by his own, now feared even for his personal safety. In early March, he intimated to the Commander of the armed forces, General Aarne Sihvo, that there might be civil unrest. The army initiated conspicuous preventive measures. Manoeuvres by a military detachment with tank support in the vicinity of Helsinki and the presence of gunboats anchored in the harbour outside the President's Palace further fed the flames of rumour. The Social Democrats also did their bit, and indeed more, to create the impression among the public that the Communists were preparing a coup.[19]

'Czechoslovakia's road is our road', Hertta Kuusinen was claimed to have said in a speech at a mass meeting. The belief of the time, that the Communists intended to implement a coup d'état in the early hours of 27 April 1948, persisted for a long time. Facts that have subsequently come to light, however, indicate that they were not planning any classical armed coup. Rather their object was to create a favourable climate of opinion for a big victory in the forthcoming election by resorting to concocted claims about a right-wing conspiracy, effecting surprise arrests and using intimidation, pressure and shows of mass strength in the streets. They would have had an opportunity to do all of these if Parliament had rejected the mutual assistance agreement with the Soviet Union.[20]

Finland did not take the road of either Czechoslovakia or Hungary. Barring the way was an irritable old President and the majority of Parliament. The mutual assistance treaty gave Paasikivi the prop he needed to oppose the Communists. He had behind him the civil service, the armed forces and most of the police. The President, who was notorious for his irascible temperament, his loud voice and his colourful language, thundered out to a deputation from the Finnish People's Democratic League that he had carefully acquainted himself with reports of what had happened in Czechoslovakia: 'That kind of thing must not happen in Finland, and it shall not happen before I am shot. Law and order must be observed in Finland.' The Communists waited in vain for support from Moscow. The opportunity was lost when Parliament approved the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance. The Finnish comrades were instructed to continue the struggle on their own. The treaty with Finland was enough to satisfy the Soviet Union's main objective, which was its own security. Rather than the inept Finnish Communist Party, Stalin turned to Paasikivi in building his relationship with Finland.[21]

Paasikivi now put his faith in the Social Democrats. 'For the sake of the country, I wish your party success in the next election. From the general point of view, that is now the main issue', he wrote to Fagerholm. In the general election of July 1948, the Finnish People's Democratic Party suffered a severe defeat, losing 13 of its 51 seats in Parliament. The winners were the Agrarian League, the Social Democrats and the conservative National Coalition Party. After the election, Fagerholm formed a Social Democrat minority government. The Finnish People's Democratic League went into opposition. It would take eighteen years before it was able to take office again, this time as a junior partner in a Cabinet led by the Social Democrats.

11
Conclusion

Independent Finland was born out of the political and social chaos created by the First World War. The defeat of Russia and the October Revolution made possible something that the Finns had only dared to dream of: a severance from the century-old union between Finland and its mighty neighbour in the east. The Bolsheviks were the only political group in Russia that was willing to recognize Finland's independence. Finland's declaration of independence on 6 December 1917 was encouraged by Germany, which was seeking to draw into its own sphere of influence the border states that were breaking away from Russia. In this sense, one might well claim that the godfathers of Finnish independence were Lenin and the German military leader, General Ludendorff. But Finland was to become neither the socialist state envisaged by Lenin nor a vassal state of Germany. After Germany's defeat in the First World War, Finland became a democratic republic, whose political traditions and common values united it with Scandinavia and the great democracies of the West.

Finland, like the other new states of eastern and central Europe, became an integral part of the post-war international order which was established and led by the Western powers and based on the principles of democracy, self-determination and the security guarantees promised by the Covenant of the League of Nations. When that order began to founder, Finland's position was determined by the fact that it was located in an area where the Soviet Union and Germany vied with each other for supremacy. The Western powers were far away and had very little say in what happened in the area. Finland was bound to Great Britain by economic ties, but strategic realities placed it in the field of tension created by the mutual hostility between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In an attempt to extricate itself from this situation,

Finland took refuge in a policy of Scandinavian neutrality. From the point of view of the USSR, however, Finland was not part of a neutral Scandinavia but of a buffer zone that was vitally important to its own security. Ideological conflict and a lack of mutual trust created a lasting atmosphere of hostility between the Soviet Union and Finland. At the same time, Finland also kept its distance from Germany, from whose National Socialist ideology it shrank. The concern of the Soviet government about the supposed relationship between Finland and Germany, however genuine, was thus unfounded.

As the threat of world war deteriorated into a crisis, Finland's strength lay in an ethnically and culturally homogenous nation and an economic boom that was unparalleled in Europe, and in which all classes of society shared. Finnish society was pervaded by a sense of nationhood, a pride in the country's achievements in the economic, cultural and indeed sporting fields, and it was this that created the spiritual foundation upon which the nation was able to stand firm in the face of the crisis. National unity was further strengthened by the course of domestic politics in the 1930s. In November 1939, the country was led into war by a government composed of centrist parties and the Social Democrats, to whom the electorate had given a strong mandate in a general election a few months earlier.

The non-aggression pact signed with Germany on 23 August 1939 and the war in Europe, which broke out a few days later, presented the USSR with a unique opportunity to push its western defence line a few hundred kilometres to the west in preparation for a later phase in the world war. It occupied eastern Poland and coerced Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into allowing it to establish bases on their territory. Seen against this background, the demands it presented to Finland were fairly reasonable. Here, too, the aims of the Soviet Union were strategic; Stalin saw no reason to suppose that the Finns would be able, or even willing, to defend their territory against a great power that might wish to use it as a springboard for attacking the USSR. The gate to Leningrad had to be closed in time. The Soviet Union demanded that the border in the Karelian Isthmus be moved and that it be given some islands in the Gulf of Finland and part of the Hanko peninsula for a base. But the Finns were stubborn and self-assured. They expected nothing good from Russia, and they refused to be intimidated. Mannerheim and Paasikivi, who were both able to see the situation from the Soviet point of view, were in favour of concessions, but they were unable to make themselves heard. Whether the concessions would have saved Finland in the end, or whether they would have taken it along the same road

as Czechoslovakia and the Baltic countries is debatable. Stalin certainly realized that the Finns could not be forced into the same kind of agreement that he had made with the Baltic republics. What he did not realize was that he would unite the whole Finnish nation by his attack on Finland and, even more so, by trying to impose Kuusinen's puppet government on it. The Finns' united obduracy can be to a great extent explained by the fact that at that moment they did not really think that the Soviet Union would attack them. When it finally happened on 30 November 1939, there were no options left, and they were forced to engage in an unequal struggle.

Following the outbreak of war the Soviet Union aimed to occupy the whole of Finland. It refused to recognize the government in Helsinki, and concluded a treaty with Kuusinen's government. The plans drawn up for the occupation administration resembled the measures that the Soviet Union put into effect in the Baltic republics, and which led to the loss of their independence. The Soviet Union's offensive strategy was founded on the basic assumption that the campaign would be successfully concluded in a short time, but this did not happen. The USSR found itself in an unwished for situation. It became involved in a peripheral theatre of war at a time when a great war was being waged in Europe. Its relations with its Western allies were strained to breaking point. To get out of this impasse, it deemed it best to initiate negotiations with the Finnish government, which meant that it had to renounce its attempt to bring the whole of Finland under its control and settle for territorial gains.

It was in the interests above all of Sweden, but also of Germany, that Finland should continue to remain independent. Sweden was the most important provider of aid to Finland during the war, and it offered a channel for contacts between Moscow and Helsinki. As for Germany, its position in the Baltic would be threatened and its war economy would suffer if Finland were to come under the control of the Soviet Union. However, the German leaders at that moment gave precedence to relations with the Soviet Union, and therefore Germany did not involve itself officially in the dispute. To start with, London and Paris had little confidence in Finland's ability to survive. But survive it did, and the Western states began to consider how they might use Finland's struggle to advance their own interests. Under the guise of aid to Finland, they prepared an expeditionary force whose real purpose was to cut off the supply of Swedish iron ore to Germany and open up a new front in Scandinavia. Although the Finnish leaders were not completely able to discern the motives behind this offer of aid, which from

the point of view of a small nation were nothing if not cynical, they nevertheless had a sufficient grasp of reality to reject the Western alternative when a chance of peace with the Soviet Union presented itself.

Finland was saved by the fighting spirit of an army of farmers and lumberjacks. The Soviet Union had the resources to overrun the country, but the Finns' stalwart defence caused it to run out of time. Its military credibility as a great power at stake, the Soviet Union launched a massive offensive in February 1940 with such a superiority of forces that it could not fail to achieve a result. After four weeks, Finnish defences were crumbling, and the Finns were forced to submit to Moscow's conditions. The Soviet Union achieved its strategic aims in the ensuing peace treaty: the border shifted further away from Leningrad, and it obtained a base on the mouth of the Gulf of Finland. But behind the new border it also acquired a neighbour that was concerned about its own security and thirsting for revenge.

The Winter War and the Peace of Moscow threw Finland into the arms of Germany. In the Winter War Finland had found itself fighting completely alone against a great power, and the Finnish leaders felt that must never be allowed to happen again. It was generally believed in Finland that the Soviet Union would renew its attack at the earliest opportunity. Initially, Finland was willing to commit itself to the Western powers in order to obtain aid and to keep its foreign trade channels open, but this option was lost when the Germans occupied Norway, and France fell. The destruction of the last remnants of independence in the Baltic countries caused profound shock and fear that it would be Finland's turn next. In this situation, Germany offered the only counterbalance to the USSR in the north.

The Soviet Union found itself in a frightening position after the fall of France. It prepared for a clash with a Germany that would be able to concentrate all its forces against it. The Soviet leaders considered – just as they had done before war broke out – that Finland would probably become an ally of Germany. The new demands it made on Finland in the summer of 1940 concerning the surrender of the Pechenga nickel mines, the dismantling of the fortifications on the Åland Islands and the right of transit to the base in Hanko were strategically justified. In Finland, however, together with the political pressure that was being applied, they reinforced the view that the Soviet Union intended to destroy the country's independence. In fact, Soviet plans regarding Finland were still defensive at that stage. In autumn 1940 it was ready to settle accounts with Finland, but by that time the latter had already come under the protection of Germany.

Hitler had become interested in supporting Finland in the summer of 1940 when he began to plan a campaign against the Soviet Union. 'It's good to have allies that want revenge', he said. Finland gradually shifted into the German sphere of influence in the course of the following autumn. To begin with, Finland's aims were to get security guarantees from Germany. However, as the likelihood of a rift between Germany and the USSR increased in the spring of 1941, the Finnish leaders began to augment their objectives: the restitution of the territories lost in the Peace of Moscow and even the annexation of areas east of the 1939 border were mooted. Without making any formal commitments, Finland participated in the planning of joint measures with Germany under the ever more transparent curtain of neutrality. Three days after Operation Barbarossa was launched, Finland joined the enemies of the USSR.

In fact, there was no way that Finland could have avoided becoming involved in a new war. Germany was soon to have complete control of the Baltic area. In its attack on the Soviet Union, it needed Finnish territory and territorial waters as well as the cooperation of the Finnish Army to ensure the success of the operations of its left flank. Without realizing the real nature of National Socialism and Hitler's war aims, the Finns fought to preserve their way of life and to ensure security from what they considered an eternal threat from the east. Finland enjoyed a special status among the states that waged war alongside Germany. It was the only democratic country on the German side, its army fought under its own Commander-in-Chief and was in no way subordinate to the Germans, and it continued to maintain diplomatic relations with the USA. If Germany had emerged victorious from the war, the independence and democratic system of Finland would never have survived. But when the German offensive in the east unexpectedly failed to achieve a rapid result and turned into a titanic struggle between two continental powers, Finland's significance for Germany's military effort and for its war economy increased. Consequently, Germany was willing to support its struggle and to accept its special position within the German sphere of influence. As the war dragged on, Finland's weakness became its inability to produce enough food of its own to feed its population. This, combined with the German military presence, increased its dependence on Germany.

Apart from the Soviet Union and Germany, practically the only country with a strong interest in Finland was Sweden. From the point of view of the Western Allies, it lay on the periphery. There was sympathy for it, particularly in the United States, but the Finnish question

was not allowed to cause any problems with the USSR. Indeed, Great Britain declared war on Finland in December 1941 at the behest of the Soviet Union. The USA, on the other hand, agreed to maintain diplomatic relations with Finland in order to be able to oppose German influence there and to persuade Finland into making peace before it was too late. As a matter of fact, there was very little that the Americans or the British could do for Finland. For its part, the Soviet Union tried to make sure that Finland would not be able to turn to the Western powers for support. At the Teheran Conference in December 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill accepted the peace conditions drawn up by the Soviet Union for Finland after Stalin had pledged himself to respect Finnish independence.

Although the defeat of Germany was clearly evident, the Finnish government and Parliament rejected the proposed conditions in April 1944 because they believed that they could easily lead to the complete subjection of the country by the Soviet Union. As a result, in June the Soviet Union launched a massive offensive against Finland in order to compel it to accept the terms. When, after the collapse of the front, Finland indicated that it was willing to engage in new talks, it received a demand for surrender from Moscow. This had the effect of getting the Finns once more to summon up all their strength in opposition. The defensive victories achieved by the Finnish Army that summer with the aid of arms supplied by Germany are comparable in importance with the battles of the Winter War. As then, the army bought time until the adversary was willing to sit down at the negotiating table. The USSR was turning the focus of its attention to central Europe, and it began to move its forces away from the Finnish front. Germany, for its part, had become too weak even to attempt an invasion of Finland. In hindsight, Finland pulled out of the war at the most opportune, albeit the last possible, moment. This timing was probably as much a matter of luck as of judgement.

After the armistice had been signed in September 1944, Finland was politically and militarily at the mercy of the USSR, which certainly would not have needed much time to bring sufficient forces to bear against Finland to crush its resistance. And there would have been no lack of pretexts for it to do so; it would not even have been necessary to fabricate an incident as in 1939. However, after Germany lost its grip on the Baltic region, the Soviet Union no longer had any compelling military reasons to concentrate its forces in this peripheral northern theatre of war. Finland no longer presented any threat to the Soviet Union; it was debilitated by the war, it had no support from

abroad, and its capital was within the range of the guns of the Soviet base in Porkkala. The mere threat of occupation was enough to bend Finland to the victor's will. It could be kept within the Soviet sphere of influence by political means. Possibly, Stalin also took into account the unfavourable reaction that an invasion of Finland after the armistice would arouse in the West.

After the war, the Communists did not come to power in Finland as they did in all the states of eastern and south-eastern Europe that fell under the Soviet sphere of influence. The war had rolled over these states, and they had been occupied by either Germany or the Soviet Union, or in most cases both. In consequence, they had suffered considerable material devastation, and their social institutions and structures had been destroyed. In Finland the front held out to the end, and the Finnish situation was characterized by continuity. It was able to move onto a peace footing with its most important institutions – political parties, civil service, judiciary and army – preserved intact. Unlike most of the eastern and south-eastern states, Finland had a long unbroken tradition of democracy and the rule of law, which limited the activities of the Communists when they began to take part in public life. Nor did the war constitute an economic catastrophe for Finland. The material damage it suffered was small, apart from the devastation wreaked by the Germans in Lapland. There was full employment, thanks in part to the war reparations, and the swiftly implemented settlement of the Karelian evacuees and the veterans helped to relieve social pressures. Despite the post-war economic privations, there was no basis for large-scale social discontent in the long run. And finally, in the countries of eastern and south-eastern Europe, where the Social Democratic parties were weak, the Communists had succeeded in uniting the workers' movement under their leadership. This represented an important step on the road to the establishment of their totalitarian regimes. In Finland they did not succeed in this. There the Social Democratic movement, which was traditionally strong and had successfully maintained its independence after the war, secured its leadership of the workers' movement in a fierce struggle. The fact that Finland did not become a 'People's Democracy' after the war can to a great extent be explained by two defensive victories: the first was achieved by the army in the summer of 1944, and the second by the Social Democrats in the years following the war.

However, this explanation would be deficient if it did not also take into account Paasikivi's skilful policy of appeasement after the war. The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 and the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation

and Mutual Assistance concluded with the Soviet Union the following year were to determine the international position of Finland for decades ahead. In the peace treaty, Finland lost Karelia for good. This was something that the Finns considered, and still consider, an injustice that is difficult for them to forget. However, the fact that none of the Finnish population of the ceded areas remained behind made it easier for them to accept the situation. The Soviet Union subsequently resettled the region with people from various parts of its vast territory. The mutual assistance treaty tied Finland to the Soviet security system. However, Finland managed to preserve a separate position within the system, and it was not compelled to become involved in military cooperation with the Warsaw Pact. Finland's room for manoeuvre increased in 1956 when the Soviet Union gave up the base in Porkkala, which had become technically obsolete and unnecessary. Its position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union was also strengthened by its rapid economic and technological progress, which made it one of the world's developed industrial nations. In the Cold War, the international position of Finland was such that both great power blocs were able to accept it. For the Soviet Union, the modus vivendi it had achieved with Finland was in the end advantageous in that a democratic Finland caused it fewer problems than any one of its communist neighbours. Recalling the past in his old age to an interviewer, V.M. Molotov said: 'How mercifully we treated Finland. We were wise not to occupy it. It would have been a permanent wound … the people there are stubborn, very stubborn.'[1]

Notes

1 From Northern Outback to Modern Nation

1. Luntinen 1992 p. 31
2. Luntinen 1992 p. 77
3. Polvinen 1967 pp. 174–95
4. Paasivirta 1988 pp. 147–53; Pietiäinen 1992 pp. 307–17; Polvinen 1989 pp. 396–8
5. Böhme 1973 pp. 377–96; Pietiäinen 1992 pp. 307–44
6. Polvinen 1971 pp. 133–9, 299–300
7. Hietanen 1989 pp. 50–2; Paasivirta 1988 pp. 234–57

2 The Clouds Gather

1. Vehviläinen 1966 pp. 218–19
2. Korhonen 1971 pp. 43–6; Vehviläinen 1971 pp. 38–40, 67–72
3. Turtola 1984 and 1987 *passim*
4. Baryshnikov 1997 pp. 74–6; Leskinen 1997 pp. 380–400
5. Baryshnikov 1997 p. 76; Leskinen 1997 pp. 401–4
6. Korhonen 1971 pp. 135–6
7. Backlund 1983 *passim*, esp. pp. 586–8; Hiedanniemi 1980 pp. 177–9
8. Menger 1988 pp. 16–20
9. Backlund 1983 pp. 291–300; Selén 1980 pp. 220–4
10. Holsti's account of his visit to Moscow, FMA 5 D Holsti II; Suomi 1973 pp. 48–61; Vihavainen 1997 pp. 55–6
11. H. Soikkanen 1987 pp. 25–33, 48–54
12. Tsubarjan 1997 pp. 38–9. See also Baryshnikov 1997 pp. 82–3
13. Note by Holsti 14 April 1938, Tanner's papers 25, NA; Suomi 1973 pp. 186–7
14. Note by Tanner 18 August, notes by Holsti 14 and 15 October 1938, Tanner's papers 25, NA
15. T. Soikkanen 1984 pp. 231–42
16. SDF III pp. 325–6
17. Leskinen 1997 pp. 413–14; Mylly 1983 pp. 181–2; Polvinen 1992 pp. 497–8
18. Seeds to Halifax 15.5.1939, DBFP III: V pp. 558–9
19. Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of Anglo-Franco-Soviet Military Delegations 14 August 1939, DBFP III: VII pp. 576–7. The Soviet minutes in God krizica 2 No. 554
20. Tanner to Paasikivi 26 July 1939, Paasikivi to Tanner 5 August 1939, Tanner 1966 pp. 241–8

3 In the Shadow of the Nazi–Soviet Pact

1. Fleischhauer 1990 pp. 353–4, 360–1
2. Schulenburg to the Foreign Ministry 25 September 1939, DGFP D:VIII 131
3. The German–Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty 28 September 1939, DGFP D:VIII 157, 158 and 159; Myllyniemi 1979 pp. 52–3
4. Hyytiä 1992 pp. 126–34; Myllyniemi 1979 pp. 57–9; Warma 1973 pp. 29–41
5. Hyytiä 1992 pp. 135–45; Ilmjärv 1993 pp. 75–83; Warma 1973 pp. 42–7
6. Myllyniemi 1979 pp. 64–9. The text of the Soviet–Lithuanian Treaty of Mutual Assistance in Kaslas 1973 pp. 149–51
7. Myllyniemi 1979 pp. 65–6
8. Gripenberg, the Finnish envoy in London, to the Foreign Ministry about a conversation with the head of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, Collier, 8 September 1939, FMA 109 A 2
9. Telegrams from the Finnish Legation in Moscow 5 and 7 October 1939, FMA 109 A 2
10. Minutes of the government meeting of 9 October 1939, FMA; Pakaslahti 1970 pp. 129–33; Polvinen 1995 pp. 16–24
11. AVPRF f. 0135 op. 24 d. 7 pp. 76–8; AVPRF f. 06 op. 1 d. 194 pp. 8–13; AVPRF f. 06 op. 2 d. 318 pp. 3–4; Manninen and Baryshnikov 1997 pp. 114–16; Polvinen 1995 pp. 25–6; Van Dyke 1997 pp. 14–17
12. Memoranda of the negotiations in Moscow 14 October 1939, FMA 109 A; Paasikivi 1958 pp. 37–50; Polvinen 1995 pp. 24–31
13. Memorandum of the discussion in the government 16 October 1939, minutes of the government meeting 21 October 1939, FMA 109 A 3; Manninen and Baryshnikov 1997 p. 119; Paasikivi 1958 pp. 56–63; Polvinen 1995 pp. 31–9; Tanner 1957 pp. 31–5
14. Polvinen 1995 p. 32
15. Paasikivi 1958 pp. 64–9; Tanner 1957 pp. 36–45
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11 Conclusion

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Abreviations

FHS Finnish Historical Society
HAik Historiallinen Aikakauskirja.
KKS *Kansakunta sodassa*, ed Silvo Hietanen (Helsinki: Valtion Painatuskeskus, Vol. I 1989, vol. II 1990, vol. III 1992).
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TPH *Yksin suurvaltaa vastassa. Talvisodan poliittinen historia*, eds O. Vehviläinen and O. Rzheshevsky (Jyväskylä: Finnish Historical Society 1997). (Russian edition: *Zimniaia voina 1939–1940. Politicheskaia istoriia*, eds O.A. Rzheshevsky and O. Vehviläinen, Moskva: Nauka 1998.)

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