

## Great Britain to Finland, 28-11-1941

In the late autumn of 1941, Finland attempted to capture Soviet occupied territory in what the Finnish government called the Continuation War. It coordinated its actions with Germany. Great Britain and the United States accused the Finnish government of aiding Germany in trying to shut down the Murmansk railway. The railway was an essential supply line used by Great Britain to transport materials to the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> The Soviet Union had been coaxing the government of Great Britain to pressure Finland to cease its military operations.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, after ample deliberation, Great Britain issued a written ultimatum delivered by the US diplomatic representative to the Finnish government in Helsinki on 28 November 1941.<sup>3</sup> The terms of the ultimatum, which were nearly identical to the terms of ultimata presented almost simultaneously to Hungary and Romania (see ultimata Great Britain to Hungary, 29-11-1941 and Great Britain to Romania, 29-11-1941) read:

On Sept. 22 the Norwegian Government delivered to the Finnish Government on behalf of H.M. Government in the U.K. a message to the effect that if the Finnish Government persisted in invading purely Russian territory a situation would arise in which Great Britain would be forced to treat Finland as an open enemy not only while the war lasts, but also when peace comes to be made ; but that if Finland should terminate her war against Russia and evacuate all territories beyond her frontiers of 1939, H.M. Government would be ready to study proposals for the improvement of relations between Great Britain and Finland. The Finnish Government's reply showed no disposition to respond to this overture nor have they ceased to pursue aggressive military operations on territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the ally of Great Britain, in the closest collaboration with Germany. The Finnish Government have sought to contend that their war against Soviet Russia does not involve participation in the general European war. This contention H.M. Government find it impossible to accept. H.M. Government in the U.K. in these circumstances find it necessary to inform the Finnish Government that unless by Dec. 5 the Finnish cease military operations and in practice withdraw from all active participation in hostilities, H.M. Government will have no choice but to declare the existence of a state of war between the two countries.<sup>4</sup>

The Finnish premier Rangel asserted in a secret session of the Finnish parliament on 29 November that 'the territories we have occupied beyond the frontier and from which enemy [sic] threatened us must remain in Finnish occupation'. He maintained that the German-Finnish relationship was based 'on common military interests, fraternity, loyal friendship and reciprocal respect', and accused Great Britain of aiding the Soviet Union and threatening Finland with war.<sup>5</sup> With nearly unanimous support of the Finnish parliament he dispatched a negative reply on 5 December. Unofficially, it was communicated that Finland would halt its military operations soon and would stay clear of the railway.<sup>6</sup> The government of Great Britain deemed the reply inadequate and declared war on 6

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<sup>1</sup> Tiina Kinnunen and Ville Kivimäki, *Finland in World War II: History, Memory, Interpretations* (BRILL, 2011), 73. Keesing's, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1941*, vol. IV, Part I (Keesing's Limited, 1941), 4935.

<sup>2</sup> 'Correspondence between the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the Presidents of the USA and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain during the Great Patriotic War of 1941 - 1945', n. 20 esp., accessed 14 July 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/correspondence/01/41.htm#15b>.

<sup>3</sup> Olli Vehvilainen, *Finland In The Second World War: Between Germany and Russia*, trans. Gerard McAlester (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 99–100.

<sup>4</sup> Keesing's, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1941*, IV:4935.

<sup>5</sup> Keesing's, IV:4935.

<sup>6</sup> Vehvilainen, *Finland In The Second World War*, 100.

December.<sup>7</sup> While Finland completed its eastern advance at 7 December, it continued to hold on to its alliance with Germany. The war declaration did not have any immediate ramifications. The British government did not deploy its military forces against Finland after the ultimatum. It did maintain its previously established economic blockade and interned hundreds of Finnish citizens residing in Great Britain.<sup>8</sup> Great Britain, fighting on the Allied side, would eventually be victorious over the Axis side, in the Second World War.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Britain At War With Axis Allies: Ultimatum Sequel', *The Times of India (1861-Current)*, 8 December 1941, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/346350481/abstract/13D20707CF21F195628/2?accountid=11862>.

<sup>8</sup> Tiina Kinnunen and Ville Kivimäki, *Finland in World War II: History, Memory, Interpretations* (BRILL, 2011), 74.