**Dunkirk to Pearl Harbor: May 1940 to December 1941**

**War ministry created**

*Main article:*[*Churchill war ministry*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Churchill_war_ministry)

In May, Churchill was still generally unpopular with many Conservatives and probably most of the Labour Party.[[293]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJenkins2001590-294) Chamberlain remained Conservative Party leader until October when ill health forced his resignation. By that time, Churchill had won the doubters over and his succession as party leader was a formality.[[294]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBlakeLouis1993249,_252%E2%80%93255-295)

He began his premiership by forming a [five-man war cabinet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Churchill_war_ministry) which included Chamberlain as [Lord President of the Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_President_of_the_Council), Labour leader [Clement Attlee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clement_Attlee) as [Lord Privy Seal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Privy_Seal) (later as [Deputy Prime Minister](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deputy_Prime_Minister_of_the_United_Kingdom)), Halifax as [Foreign Secretary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_of_State_for_Foreign_Affairs) and Labour's [Arthur Greenwood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Greenwood) as a [minister without portfolio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_without_portfolio_(United_Kingdom)). In practice, these five were augmented by the service chiefs and ministers who attended the majority of meetings.[[295]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJenkins2001587%E2%80%93588-296)[[296]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHermiston201626%E2%80%9329-297) The cabinet changed in size and membership as the war progressed, one of the key appointments being the leading [trades unionist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_unions_in_the_United_Kingdom) [Ernest Bevin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Bevin) as [Minister of Labour and National Service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_of_State_for_Employment).[[297]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJenkins2001714%E2%80%93715-298) In response to previous criticisms that there had been no clear single minister in charge of the prosecution of the war, Churchill created and took the additional position of [Minister of Defence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_of_Defence_(UK)), making him the most powerful wartime Prime Minister in British history.[[298]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBlakeLouis1993264,_270%E2%80%93271-299) He drafted outside experts into government to fulfil vital functions, especially on the Home Front. These included personal friends like [Lord Beaverbrook](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Aitken,_1st_Baron_Beaverbrook) and [Frederick Lindemann](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Lindemann,_1st_Viscount_Cherwell), who became the government's scientific advisor.[[299]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHermiston201641-300)

**Resolve to fight on**

*Main article:*[*War cabinet crisis, May 1940*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_cabinet_crisis,_May_1940)

At the end of May, with the [British Expeditionary Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Expeditionary_Force_(World_War_II)) in retreat to [Dunkirk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunkirk) and the [Fall of France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_France) seemingly imminent, Halifax proposed that the government should explore the possibility of a negotiated peace settlement using the still-neutral Mussolini as an intermediary. There were [several high-level meetings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_cabinet_crisis,_May_1940) from 26 to 28 May, including two with the French premier [Paul Reynaud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Reynaud).[[300]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJenkins2001599-301) Churchill's resolve was to fight on, even if France capitulated, but his position remained precarious until Chamberlain resolved to support him. Churchill had the full support of the two Labour members but knew he could not survive as Prime Minister if both Chamberlain and Halifax were against him. In the end, by gaining the support of his outer cabinet, Churchill outmanoeuvred Halifax and won Chamberlain over.[[301]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJenkins2001602%E2%80%93603-302) Churchill believed that the only option was to fight on and his use of rhetoric hardened public opinion against a peaceful resolution and prepared the British people for a long war – Jenkins says Churchill's speeches were "an inspiration for the nation, and a [catharsis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catharsis) for Churchill himself".[[302]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJenkins2001611%E2%80%93612-303)

Churchill succeeded as an orator despite being handicapped from childhood with a speech impediment. He had a [lateral lisp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lateral_lisp) and was unable to pronounce the letter *s*, verbalising it with a slur.[[303]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGilbert199165-304) He worked hard on his pronunciation by repeating phrases designed to cure his problem with the sibilant "s". He was ultimately successful and was eventually able to say: "My impediment is no hindrance". In time, he turned the impediment into an asset and could use it to great effect, as when he called Hitler a "Nar-zee" (rhymes with "[khazi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khazi)"; emphasis on the "z"), rather than a Nazi ("ts").[[304]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-305)

His first speech as Prime Minister, delivered to the Commons on 13 May was the "[blood, toil, tears and sweat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood,_toil,_tears_and_sweat)" speech. It was little more than a short statement but, Jenkins says, "it included phrases which have reverberated down the decades".[[305]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJenkins2001591-306) Churchill made it plain to the nation that a long, hard road lay ahead and that victory was the final goal:[[306]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-BTTS-307)[[307]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-H360:1501-308)

I would say to the House... that I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. You ask, what is our policy? I will say: it is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: it is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.

**Operation Dynamo and the Battle of France**

[Operation Dynamo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Dynamo), the evacuation of 338,226 Allied servicemen from Dunkirk, ended on Tuesday, 4 June when the French rearguard surrendered. The total was far in excess of expectations and it gave rise to a popular view that Dunkirk had been a miracle, and even a victory.[[308]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJenkins2001597-309) Churchill himself referred to "a miracle of deliverance" in his "[we shall fight on the beaches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_shall_fight_on_the_beaches)" speech to the Commons that afternoon, though he shortly reminded everyone that: "We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations". The speech ended on a note of defiance coupled with a clear appeal to the United States:[[309]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-WSFB-310)[[310]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-H361:791-311)

We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

Germany initiated [*Fall Rot*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_Rot) the following day and Italy entered the war on the 10th.[[311]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHastings200944%E2%80%9345-312) The Wehrmacht occupied Paris on the 14th and completed their conquest of France on 25 June.[[312]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHastings200951%E2%80%9353-313) It was now inevitable that Hitler would attack and probably try to invade Great Britain. Faced with this, Churchill addressed the Commons on 18 June and delivered one of his [most famous speeches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/This_was_their_finest_hour), ending with this peroration:[[313]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJenkins2001621-314)[[314]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-H362:61-315)[[315]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-TFH-316)

What General Weygand called the "[Battle of France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_France)" is over. I expect that the [Battle of Britain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Britain) is about to begin. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth and Empire lasts for a thousand years, men will still say: "This was their finest hour".

Churchill was determined to fight back and ordered the commencement of the [Western Desert campaign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Desert_campaign) on 11 June, an immediate response to the Italian declaration of war. This went well at first while the Italian army was the sole opposition and [Operation Compass](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass) was a noted success. In early 1941, however, Mussolini requested German support and Hitler sent the [Afrika Korps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrika_Korps) to [Tripoli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripoli) under the command of [*Generalleutnant*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generalleutnant) [Erwin Rommel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin_Rommel), who arrived not long after Churchill had halted *Compass* so that he could reassign forces to Greece where the [Balkans campaign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balkans_campaign_(World_War_II)) was entering a critical phase.[[316]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-317)

In other initiatives through June and July 1940, Churchill ordered the formation of both the [Special Operations Executive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Operations_Executive) (SOE) and the [Commandos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Commandos). The SOE was ordered to promote and execute subversive activity in Nazi-occupied Europe while the Commandos were charged with raids on specific military targets there. [Hugh Dalton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_Dalton), the [Minister of Economic Warfare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_of_Economic_Warfare), took political responsibility for the SOE and recorded in his diary that Churchill told him: "And now go and set Europe ablaze".[[317]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill#cite_note-318)

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