



Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions That Changed the World, 1940-1941

By Ian Kershaw

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The newest immensely original undertaking from the historian who gave us the defining two-volume portrait of Hitler, *Fateful Choices* puts Ian Kershaw's analytical and storytelling gifts on dazzling display. From May 1940 to December 1941, the leaders of the world's six major powers made a series of related decisions that determined the final outcome of World War II and shaped the course of human destiny. As the author examines the connected stories of these profound choices, he restores a sense of drama and contingency to this pivotal moment, producing one of the freshest, most important books on World War II in years—one with powerful contemporary relevance.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Tracing the thought processes behind crucial turning points in WWII's most crucial 19 months, Kershaw, the author of a major biography of Hitler and professor of modern history at the University of Sheffield, reminds us that nothing in that titanic struggle was predetermined. Events might have run a very different course had Great Britain decided to negotiate peace with Hitler in June 1940, or if Japan had attacked the Soviet Union from the east as Germany invaded from the west in June 1941. Kershaw shows that Germany's war on two fronts and Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor, though ultimately disastrous for those countries, were the results of chains of reasoning based on political and military goals, however despicable. Though the author makes deep, intelligent use of archival materials, he provides little new information. Rather, his analysis focuses on the structure of decision making and its consequences. Kershaw depicts Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union as severely hampered by one man giving the orders, getting input only from subordinates too fearful to say anything he didn't want to hear. The slower democratic process enabled many voices to be heard and better informed judgments to be made by Churchill and Roosevelt. This subtext adds a note of hope to a text depicting one of humanity's darkest periods. (*June*)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

In *Fateful Choices*, Ian Kershaw, professor of history at England's University of Sheffield and author of multiple volumes on Hitler, including the acclaimed two-volume biography *Hubris* (1999) and *Nemesis* (2000), has done his research, and his arguments here possess the same reasoned analysis that he brought to the Hitler books. Not all key decisions were made in the opening months of the war, of course, and critics wonder whether the author might have chosen other events to examine, including the offensive attacks by Japan and Germany that were catalysts for the war in the first place. Nonetheless, Kershaw offers a solid primer on the war's early history and a fresh perspective on the events that avoids the "terrible bog of counterfactual history" (*Guardian*) so popular these days in history books. *Fateful Choices* is engaging, and its insights into the decision-making process valuable.

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From [Booklist](#)

Kershaw is an esteemed British historian, best known for his definitive two-volume biography of Hitler. Here he examines a series of decisions that was instrumental in determining the course of World War II, including the one made by the British cabinet to refuse to make a deal with Hitler after the fall of France, Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union, and Stalin's choice to ignore strong evidence that a German attack was imminent. Kershaw has loaded his account with fascinating details. As he illustrates, British popular opinion generally supported compromise (or appeasement) with Hitler before Munich; even within the cabinet, there was support for an understanding with Hitler after the defeat of France. And on the eve of the German invasion, a Russian agent, code-named "the Corsican," provided clear and specific proof of the coming attack, which Stalin discounted. This is a well-done, riveting, and often surprising examination of these critical choices. *Jay Freeman*

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Users Review

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