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Collective security or world domination: the Soviet Union and Germany, 1917-1939

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COLLECTIVE SECURITY OR WORLD DOMINATION:
THE SOVIET UNION AND GERMANY, 1917-1939

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

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May, 2012

DEDICATION

To my wonderful family, Wendy, Mallory, Meredith, Myles and Mya, who put up with an absent Dad for too long a time driving to and from Baton Rouge and for believing that this dream could indeed come true. This degree truly belongs to them.

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of World War II, a rather consistent narrative has appeared regarding the origins of this terrible conflict: Hitler started it. The victorious western powers emerged as innocent victims in the titanic struggle while the USSR, once allied to both Hitler and the west, took on the role of principal villain during the Cold War.

With the collapse of communism and the partial opening of Soviet archives, a re-assessment appeared, principally under the heading of the “Collective Security School.” As politically incorrect as it may seem, sober reflection indicates that the Soviet Union was actually the peacemaker in the inter-war period, while Britain and France engaged in a dangerous game of deception and underhandedness regarding the USSR. With all options exhausted, the Soviets turned to Hitler, making the attack on Poland easier.

In this dissertation, I present documentary evidence of Soviet intentions and western duplicity. The Soviets did not seek to divert a conflict; they did not want war in any manner. The USSR was undergoing massive internal upheaval in economic, social, political, and military spheres. Soviet leaders could not risk an open contest for fear of losing the bigger prize: the Soviet Revolution. Soviet diplomacy pursued a consistent path of collective security until western intransigence became too great. The Nazi-Soviet Non –Aggression Pact of August 23, 1939, far from being a goal of Soviet policy, was simply a last resort.

INTRODUCTION

Historians, like contemporary observers, have never fully understood why, in August, 1939, the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact with its avowed enemy, Nazi Germany. Some have asserted that the pact represented the outlines of a Moscow-Berlin axis bent on world domination between Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler; others concluded that the Soviet dictator finally gave up on the policy of collective security and turned to the only nation willing to align with the Soviet Union. This work will argue that the Nazi-Soviet pact, with its secret protocols, was Stalin's last resort to slow down the advance of German aggression in Eastern Europe and buy time for the Soviet Union substantively to oppose the coming conflict with Hitler. By late August 1939 Western policy became clear regarding alignment with the USSR. With the horrors of collectivization, man-made famine, and widespread purges revolutionizing the USSR, Stalin could ill-afford the outbreak of a general war involving the Soviet Union. Stalin and the foreign policy leadership of the Soviet Union favored collective security, that is, pacts of non-aggression and mutual assistance with any and all nations opposed to Nazi Germany. When this policy failed to produce results, the pact of 1939 became a reality.

In this work, I concentrate on the substance and shifts in diplomatic relations between Germany and Russia between 1917 and most of 1939 until the conclusion of the Non-Aggression Pact in August, 1939. The purpose of this presentation is to analyze the tension between Marxist world revolutionary theory and *Realpolitik* in the USSR as well as to contribute to the "collective security" debate begun by A.J.P. Taylor and refined by Geoffrey Roberts and Robert Tucker. This work will argue that collective security was a substantive component of Soviet foreign policy until late August 1939. "The case for collective security rests on the claim that regulated,

institutionalized balancing predicated on the notion of all against one provides more stability than unregulated, self-help balancing predicated on the notion of each for his own. Under collective security, states agree to abide by certain norms and rules to maintain stability and, when necessary, band together to stop aggression. Stability—the absence of major war—is the product of cooperation.”¹ This controversy centers on the motives of Stalin and the Soviet Foreign Office as to whether Stalin genuinely sought peace and stability in Europe or whether his entire foreign policy program was a ruse to attract Nazi Germany into a substantive alliance for the division of Europe. Central to this argument is an analysis of how this shift in political authority in central and Eastern Europe toward a powerful Soviet Union altered the diplomatic history of what could have become a formidable Nazi-Soviet alliance. Stalin, Maxim Litvinov and Viacheslav Molotov supported the idea of collective security separate from the limitations of Marxist theory. Stalin particularly understood that the USSR could not be involved in a general war in the 1930s because it could not prevail in such a conflict. He sought to avoid war while carrying out his terror inside the Soviet Union. His “peaceful” intentions were to avoid foreign military conflict. The role of the dictators in the formation of foreign policy will be analyzed against the backdrop of increasing domestic tensions in order to illustrate their ultimate goals; for Hitler the goal was war, for Stalin international stability and internal terror.

A more general aim of this dissertation is to illustrate the importance of intention, perception, and patience in foreign policy. By intention, I mean the interests of the states involved and how they sought to fulfill those interests, that is, what did they want to accomplish?: by perception, the political and intellectual overlay of foreign policy often leading to distorted policies, how things appeared. I define patience as the painstaking give and take of

modern diplomatic interchange and the willingness to wait for results. By examining the diplomatic relations between Germany and Russia between 1917 and 1939, I hope to illustrate that it was indeed the USSR which sought collective security in order to prevent a conflict anywhere, while the domestic terror proceeded.

Central to this discussion is a detailed analysis of the diplomacy of Britain and France; a policy which drove the USSR into the arms of Germany in 1939. Western policy regarding the USSR alternated between reality and consternation in the 1930s. While the specter of war cast a giant shadow over Britain and France, it cast the same shadow over the USSR. Russia too suffered horribly in the Great War and sought to avoid a repeat of the carnage. British and French diplomats and politicians feared the possible spread of communism more than the direct threat of Nazism. They felt that any war could be localized, while the USSR wanted to avoid armed conflict altogether. Domestic considerations and public opinion obscured the need for a collective front against Germany. Paris and London did have some legitimate grounds for limiting contact with the USSR. Perhaps such a discussion will deepen the debate concerning contemporary problems in international relations, such as the recently revealed initiative for talks between the United States, Pakistan, and the Taliban.

Britain and France faced a confusing, often contradictory Russia. While the foreign commissariat advocated collective security, the Comintern continued to preach worldwide revolution. The role of this controversial body shifted with the international fortunes of the Soviet state. Founded in March, 1919, it spoke for the Marxist ideal of worldwide proletarian upheaval, its venom especially directed against Russia's direct enemy, Great Britain. The United Kingdom was the model of western excesses: brutal capitalism and empire. Britain was also one

of the nations leading the allied intervention against the Bolshevik revolution. One of the declarations from the first Congress of the Comintern attacked Great Britain directly: “Matured by the entire course of events over decades, the war was unleashed through the direst and deliberate provocation of Great Britain.”² Later, as the USSR gained more international stability, its voice was somewhat curtailed.³ Even after Rapallo the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1923 reminded the oppressed classes that, “The proletarian revolution can never triumph within the limits of a single state, that it can triumph only on an international scale by merging itself in a world revolution...in all countries the impoverished and enslaved workers must proclaim their moral, economic, and political solidarity with Soviet Russia.”⁴ The Soviet Union aided Germany in avoiding the military provisions of the treaty of Versailles by opening three joint German-Soviet bases on Soviet territory. Additionally, the USSR violated the arms provisions of the League of Nations and the non- intervention agreement with its actions in the Spanish Civil War. The terror and purges were beginning to make headlines in the west, contributing to the anti-communist atmosphere. The west simply hated communism and wanted the new state in the east to collapse. Stalin took the opportunity of the conflict in Spain to brutally subjugate the Spanish Communist Party under the iron fist of Moscow. To western diplomats, these actions did not comport with “collective security.” For Paris and London, the real threat of war was in the east and this was not their problem. It was not “politically correct” to support the USSR. Politicians were re-elected on an anti-Soviet platform. If Hitler attacked the Soviet Union and was exhausted in the process, the twin devils may fall together.

Since the end of World War II, diplomatic historians, such as those mentioned below, have examined the crucial decade of the 1930s in Soviet-German relations. The early work of

diplomatic scholars suffered because of the lack of access to Soviet archives, leading to an over-reliance on the captured German documents. According to the Nazi sources, the Soviet Union courted Germany into the pact of 1939 in an effort to occupy central Europe and the Russians created the bellicose climate resulting in the outbreak of war. In addition, the limitations of the Cold War furthered this view that the Soviet Union sought only world domination in conjunction with Hitler. Historians paid scant attention to the collective security policy of the USSR, at least until recently, with the partial opening of Soviet archives. This initial analysis has produced diverse and important schools of interpretation which seek to explain the intentions and motivations of Russia and Germany leading to the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939.

Two contrasting points of view define the parameters of the debate: the “German school” and the “collective security school.” Those scholars who espouse the “German school,” such as Robert Tucker, Gerhard Weinberg (actually straddling both schools), Jiri Hochman and Aleksandr M. Nekrich, argue that Stalin and the Soviet leadership concocted collective security as a cover for their real intentions: a pact with Hitler and an extension of the Rapallo and Berlin policies. (The treaties of Rapallo and Berlin appear in chapter 2). By supporting Hitler and the Nazi repression of the working class, Stalin lured his avowed enemy into the trap of enhancing the complete victory of communism.⁵ Those of the “collective security” school picture Stalin and the Soviets as realistic politicians in a hostile world seeking to protect the gains of the revolution.⁶ I now turn to a detailed examination of the particulars of this important debate.

THE GERMAN SCHOOL (AND WEINBERG)

While Geoffrey Roberts, Teddy Uldricks and others classify Gerhard Weinberg a member of the German School, a close analysis of Professor Weinberg’s works illustrates a

scholar with a foot in both camps. In 1954, Weinberg asserted in *Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941* that, “For Soviet Russia, Munich marked the final collapse of the policy pursued by Foreign Commissar Litvinov of securing a common front of Russia with the western powers against Germany. Whatever the motives and sincerity of that policy, after Munich it could hardly continue to play any substantial role in Soviet eyes.”⁷ He continued,

Whatever the real intentions of the Soviet Union might have been in the period before Munich, the explicit classification of the new war, which the Soviets believed would soon break out, as the Second Imperialist War—and as such one in which Russia might take no active part—signified a change from the earlier policy of stressing the willingness of the Soviet Union to aid those prepared to unite against Germany.⁸

He did not mention the April 17, 1939 (post-Munich) Soviet proposal of a tri-partite pact against Germany. He did not mention the furious Soviet anti-German diplomacy until August 23, 1939. As such, Munich did not represent the final collapse of collective security.

Writing in 1970, Weinberg moderated his earlier position a bit when he concluded that Soviet Russia did not fear the new Nazi regime and sought to continue the connections of the Weimar period. Weinberg is here referring to the first year of the Nazi regime and Soviet hopes for the proletarian revolution in Germany. Since the 17th century Poland remained an important component of Russian policy toward the German states, especially Prussia. Weinberg argued that:

It was also believed (by the Soviets) that the National Socialist regime would not last long and would hasten the collapse of capitalism in Germany. The practical reasons for Soviet reluctance to turn to new policies were of a different sort. In the first place, the Soviet, like many German soldiers and diplomats, hoped for a continuation of that cooperation between the two countries which had proved so advantageous for both and to which individuals on both sides would hark back nostalgically for years to come. Neither the German nor the Soviet ‘Rapallo generation’ of soldiers and diplomats had any illusions about the domestic policies of the other country, but separated as they were by what they considered to be the common enemy of Poland, each felt able to deal with any domestic advocates of the other’s social and

political system. In this regard, the National Socialist regime looked to the Soviets as simply more vehement and ruthless than its predecessors.⁹

Even after Germany left the League of Nations and the Geneva Disarmament Conference in October, 1933, Weinberg claimed that:

...many Soviet leaders were reluctant to leave the traditional policy of cooperation with Germany and to align themselves instead with France and the League. Certainly the military leaders of the Soviet Union were dubious of such a shift; and some of the political leaders were not yet convinced that the turn toward collective security that came to be advocated by Maxim Litvinov, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, was either wise or safe. Perhaps the hope of securing a better bargain from the prospective ally played a part in the proceedings; the similarity to the situation in 1939 is most striking. In each instance, the Soviet government appeared to look back to past associates while preparing to sign with new friends—unless confronted with a really attractive offer.¹⁰

This analysis puts Professor Weinberg into the “collective security” school concerning the Soviet intention of “preparing to sign with new friends—unless confronted with a really attractive offer.” In the same work, however, he interpreted the Nazi-Soviet economic talks of 1935 “as a last attempt [by the USSR] to come to agreement with Germany.”¹¹ Soviet documents indicate that Germany was seeking an understanding with the USSR.¹²

In volume two of his seminal work, Weinberg argues that the replacement of Litvinov with Molotov on May 3, 1939 was Stalin's signal to Hitler that collective security was dead and that the door was open for negotiations leading to the pact of August 23, 1939. He concluded that, “Stalin could well believe that Hitler would find it easier to explore the possibilities of agreement with the Soviet Union if he did not have to conduct negotiations through a minister of Jewish background that had long been the object of ridiculing cartoons in the National Socialist press.”¹³ Further, “In the German capital, the change in the Soviet government was taken precisely the way Stalin appears to have meant it, namely, as a sign of Soviet willingness to

works out some sort of rapprochement.”¹⁴ He does not adequately explain the numerous attempts Molotov undertook to establish an anti-German front in 1939.

Starting in 1977, Robert Tucker took up the mantle and became the main voice of the “German School.” He asserted that Stalin indeed had great respect for the Nazi state and Hitler. Hitler supported German nationalism and an anti-western policy. Like the Soviet Union before 1934, the Nazis opposed the Versailles Treaty and sought its revision. To Tucker, Soviet foreign policy under Stalin was nothing more than a charade to mask a pro-German orientation. Tucker started from the premise that:

On no subject was foreign opinion more inclined to err in the 1930s than on Stalin’s foreign policy. The apostle of socialism in one country was widely viewed as a nationalist leader who, in fact if not in theory, had jettisoned international Communist revolution as an aim of Soviet policy. This simplistic thinking, based on the antithesis of ‘Russian nationalism’ versus ‘international revolution,’ blocked an understanding of Stalin’s foreign policy as a subtle amalgam of both. In charity to those who erred, it must be said that for reasons of *Realpolitik* Stalin encouraged the misconception.¹⁵

Although Tucker admitted that Stalin needed to avoid the inevitable capitalist war:

At the end of the 1920s and in the early 1930s, Stalin and his associates were preoccupied with the internal revolution from above, knew that Soviet society was in no condition to fight a war, and feared external complications that could lead to war. But preparation of the country for a future war was the primary purpose of the policies being pursued; and the war prospect was a revolutionary one as well.¹⁶

In Tucker’s view, Stalin wanted both to prepare for international conflict, that is create a war-like climate and to prevent war in order to promote the “internal revolution.” Hence he sought out the one power bent on conquest: Nazi Germany. Tucker noted that:

Stalin’s German orientation was not rooted in anything personal. His German experience was confined to the two or three months that he had spent in Berlin in 1907 while returning from a Bolshevik party congress in London, and he knew only a few words of German. The orientation derived from the legacy of Lenin.

For Lenin, asserted Tucker, Germany was the key to a divisive diplomacy to separate and conquer the West.¹⁷ So powerful was this pro-Nazi orientation, that Stalin repressed the anti-Nazi German Communist Party and the German Social Democratic Party, both of which correctly assessed the danger of the National Socialist movement. With these measures, argued Tucker, Stalin illustrated his good faith toward Germany and even “abetted” the Nazi takeover.¹⁸

Finally, Tucker addressed this question of collective security:

By his collective- security diplomacy, in combination with his popular- front tactics in the Comintern, Stalin was assisting events to take their course toward a European war. An accord remained a basic aim because it would offer an opportunity to effect a westward advance of Soviet rule while turning Germany against the democracies in what Stalin envisaged as a replay of World War I, a protracted inconclusive struggle that would weaken both sides while neutral Russia increased her power and awaited an advantageous time for decisive intervention. But to make sure that the European war *would* be protracted, he wanted Britain and France to be militarily strong enough to withstand the onslaught that Germany under Hitler was becoming strong enough to launch against them. That explains his moves to encourage ruling elements in both these major states to rearm with dispatch, and his orders to the French Communists to support the French military buildup.¹⁹

In essence, Tucker believed that Stalin sought to manage and control the bellicose intentions of Hitler and jeopardize the Soviet Revolution with his belief that this avowed Communist hater would not be true to his spoken and written words. The actions of the Soviet diplomats simply camouflaged the real intentions of the master.

Jiri Hochman furthered the Tucker thesis in 1984. Hochman also explained the pro-German policy of the Soviet Union leading to the Non-Aggression Pact of 1939. He saw a continuum of relations both pre and post 1933:

During the years preceding the Nazi accession to power, however, it can safely be concluded that the Soviet Union followed neither a course of gradual withdrawal from the policy of preferential friendship with Germany nor a course of gradual or even purposeful rapprochement with the West. No intention to change clubs can legitimately

be detected in the documented actions of the Soviet government...until the last moment, commitment to the German connection appears to have been complete.²⁰

Hochman did not define what “moment” he had identified. He seemed to forget the trade and commercial relations between Russia and England from the 1920s, not to mention the diplomatic ties. Later in the same work he detailed the substantive commercial relations between Britain and the USSR and pointed out that, “International trade statistics show that in the 1934-1938 period, Germany was not in fact Soviet Russia’s leading foreign trade partner. England’s consistent participation in Russian trade and relatively extensive imports from the USSR made her the most important Soviet business partner in this period...”²¹ Did these contacts constitute a pro-Nazi orientation?

Hochman concluded that the purges of the “Old Bolsheviks” between 1936 and 1939 occurred because they “could not stomach” an alliance with Nazi Germany, something Stalin presumably sought.²² He went so far as to discount the quite public denunciations of both Russia and Germany in the presses of each country:

Even the loud public campaigns waged in Germany against the Soviet Union, however, and in the Soviet Union against Germany, failed to provide sufficient assurance that a German-Soviet rapprochement or entente was not in the making. Not even assistance to the Spanish Republic, the most impressive single act of the USSR as an advocate of collective security, diffused the suspicions of a potential collusion with Germany. This may, of course have followed from the parallel fact of the purges in Russia, the least assuring background for an exercise of the defense of democracy. And yet the fact that these purges, in addition to providing Stalin with unrestricted personal power, performed a specific role in asserting the pro-Nazi orientation in the Soviet foreign policy was not understood at the time, and even nowadays does not seem to be sufficiently acknowledged.²³

Quoting Tucker, Hochman agreed that Stalin “visualized the coming pact with Hitler as more than merely a way of securing temporary safety from invasion...what he contemplated...was a

kind of Moscow-Berlin axis, an active collaboration of the two dictatorships of influence in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and even the Middle East.’’²⁴ According to this thesis, Stalin was looking for a long-lasting partnership with the sworn enemy of Bolshevism and everything that he represented.

Prior to his untimely death in 1993, Professor Aleksandr M. Nekrich completed his *magnum opus*, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations, 1922-1941*.²⁵ Nekrich represents a moderate line of the “German School” of historians who asserted that Stalin and the Soviets actively courted the Nazis in an attempt at European and world domination. Stalin and the Communist leadership overlooked the doctrinal differences between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia and concentrated instead on the similarities of the two authoritarian nations. These historians pointed to Russian support for closer ties with Germany despite the anti-communist rhetoric and actions of the Nazi government. For these scholars, the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939 and the subsequent dismemberment of Poland is proof of the culmination of Nazi-soviet ties.

Nekrich actually adopted a middle position. He described a dual foreign policy in Russia in the 1930s. Stalin sought accommodation with England and France while simultaneously keeping a close relationship with Germany.²⁶ He would move Russia into the most advantageous position. As Nekrich argued, “Soviet policy underwent significant change in the spring and summer of 1939. Moscow developed a broad program; its primary purpose was to expand borders along the western frontier, beginning with Finland.”²⁷ By 1939, Stalin came to believe, based on the intransigence of the western powers, that England and France wanted a war between Stalin and Hitler. Therefore, Stalin moved quickly to conclude the pact of August 1939.

Soviet leaders identified the “genetic bonds” between the two nations.²⁸ Nekrich described what he called the “Stalin Doctrine.” He described a speech of the Soviet dictator, delivered at a plenary session of the central committee on January 19, 1925, wherein Stalin declared that “Our banner remains, as before, the banner of peace. But if war begins, than we will not sit with our hands folded—we shall have to act, but act last. And we shall act in order to *throw the decisive weight on the scales, a weight which could tip the balance.*” Stalin sought to exploit any contradictions in the imperialist camp should the west thrust Europe into war.²⁹

Robert Tucker saw this same speech as a call for a European conflict resulting in Communist domination.³⁰ A close examination of the language indicates no such call, but a reiteration of a demand for peace.³¹ Of course, as Nekrich noted, if the West collapsed into warfare, a war without the Soviet Union, Stalin would have been content to pick up the pieces. But he was in no position to instigate or manage someone else’s conflict.

Nekrich presents an interesting perspective on Soviet motivation. He describes Stalin and Litvinov neither as peace-loving doves in a hostile world, nor as power-hungry madmen, but as rational practioners of *Realpolitik*. In his book, the culmination of his life’s work, he proposes a needed balance in the historical analysis of this important period.

THE COLLECTIVE SECURITY SCHOOL

With the publication of his now classic work in 1961, *The Origins of the Second World War (1961)*, British historian A.J.P. Taylor ignited the debate on Soviet intentions in the 1930s. Taylor asserted that the invasion of Poland:

Was not the intention of Soviet policy; the events of 1 September and 3 September could not be foreseen on 23 August. Both Hitler and Stalin imagined that they had prevented war, not brought it on. Hitler thought that he would score another Munich over Poland; Stalin that he had at any rate escaped an unequal war in the present, and perhaps even

avoided it altogether. However one spins the crystal and tries to look into the future from the point of view of 23 August 1939, it is difficult to see what other course Soviet Russia could have followed.³²

With this provocative conclusion, Taylor founded the “collective security” school, although he did not employ this particular phrase to describe his thesis. Taylor asserted that the Soviet Union was simply reacting to the changing diplomatic conditions in Europe and it sought peace through multilateral agreements among all European nations, including Germany, in order to prevent the outbreak of conflict enveloping Russia as it sought to consolidate the gains of the revolution. When the western powers, particularly Britain, rejected Soviet overtures for an agreement, the Soviet Union had to align with the only willing partner. Even then, he continues, the USSR sought a peaceful solution to the diplomatic crisis over Poland, a crisis that Hitler, not Stalin, created.³³ After the conclusion of the agreement, the USSR took no action against Poland until September 17.

In more recent works, Jonathan Haslam and Geoffrey Roberts have refined Taylor’s thesis. They conclude that Stalin and Maxim Litvinov wanted to maintain the *status quo* in Europe in the hope that the western powers and Nazi Germany would align with the Soviet Union and maintain a balance of power status. Stalin was pre-occupied with domestic matters and wanted to avoid a conflict that could only delay, or worse, destroy the proletarian revolution. Alexandr M. Nekrich promoted a modified version of the other pole, the “German school,” whereby Stalin and his foreign office courted Hitler and the Nazis in order to partition Europe and later the world. In this view, the Nazi-Soviet Pact represented an instrument of authoritarian domination.

In 1984, Jonathan Haslam continued and expanded Taylor’s work on collective security. Haslam concentrated on the personality of Maxim Litvinov, the pro-western Commissar for

Foreign Affairs. Litvinov wanted a substantive alliance with Britain and France in order to intimidate Hitler in east central Europe. When the western powers proved unwilling, the Soviet Union had no other choice but to align with Germany. Haslam argued that:

Certainly the ever-suspicious Stalin found an isolationist policy more congenial than either the revolutionary internationalism of Lenin or Trotsky, or the more conservative and statist cosmopolitanism of Litvinov. Stalin's whole philosophy was one of fortress Russia, an outlook nurtured by the very isolation of the October revolution in an alien world.³⁴

Haslam concluded that, "Nevertheless, the Nazi-Soviet pact was unquestionably a second-best solution."³⁵ Stalin was simply playing the hand that he was dealt.

Writing in 1995, Geoffrey Roberts emerged as the leading voice of the "collective security" school. Roberts asserted that:

Having tried and failed to negotiate a suitable treaty of alliance with the British and French, and fearing an Anglo-French design of involving them in a war with Germany which they would have to fight alone, the Soviets turned to a deal with Hitler. The Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of 23 August 1939—notwithstanding its secret clauses establishing Soviet—German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe—was for Moscow a matter of security not expansion.³⁶

Roberts argues that Stalin and the Soviet leadership feared war and the possibility of a western alliance with Hitler aimed at the Soviet Union. Therefore, Roberts supports Taylor in asserting that, in concluding the pact in 1939, Stalin sought only to protect the gains of the revolution, promote peace in Europe, and appease a dangerous Nazi dictator. Soviet foreign policy was haphazard, not intentional. "There was no grand plan, or even inclination, for Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe in 1939."³⁷ In Roberts' assessment, Stalin hoped to defend the territorial balance in Eastern Europe while protecting the Soviet Union from a destructive conflict with the West or Nazi Germany.

Roberts bases his conclusions on the recently opened Soviet archives, German foreign policy documents, and leading secondary works. With the Russian documents, we are able to clarify the uncertainty of the diplomatic exchanges. From the German documents on foreign policy, we learn that the German diplomats were frustrated with the Nazi government's position toward the Soviet Union. Compared with Nazi Germany, the USSR seemed the more flexible and accommodating party until limiting diplomatic relations in the mid 1930s. War was not an instrument of Soviet foreign policy during this period. Before the pact with Hitler, Stalin was simply reacting to changing conditions in east central Europe in order to secure the territory of the Soviet Union.

Proponents of the "collective security" school portray Stalin and the Soviet leadership as defenders of peace in Europe in order to protect and extend the advances of the Soviet revolution while awaiting the anticipated destruction of the western powers. This line of reasoning is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the Soviet Union partitioned Poland in mid-September 1939 and started a war with Finland in November. Could the tyrant Stalin really be so focused and patient when land and power awaited? Critics of the "collective security" school attack from the perspective of the pact of 1939 and the division of Poland. They point, furthermore, to the close relationship of Weimar Germany and Russia in the 1920s and early 1930s as well as the commercial contacts with the Nazi regime. They paint Stalin as a cunning dictator always ready to leap and devour weaker foes. They argue that Stalin indeed had a plan: world domination. Who better to share this plan with than Adolf Hitler? Although Hitler disdained the Soviet state, he knew that he needed Russian complicity with his plans to attack Poland. What better way to accomplish his goal than a non-aggression pact with an isolated Russia? Hitler had ulterior

motives from the start. Stalin did take advantage, however, of the geo-political situation with his annexation of the Baltic States as a defensive buffer.

Soviet involvement in the outbreak of war in 1939 continues to generate fierce debate. Roberts, Haslam, and Taylor, along with Tucker, Weinberg, Nekrich and others have outlined the core arguments of the issue. They each present their interpretation of the evidence and provide convincing arguments. With the anticipated permanent opening of Soviet archives, especially the Central Party and Foreign Ministry archives, historians hope that the contradictions and conflicts concerning Soviet foreign policy can be finally reconciled. These scholars have certainly given us a great deal to consider. Teddy Uldricks succinctly summed up the essence of the debate when he asserted that the position of the German School “makes 98 per cent of all Soviet diplomatic activity a brittle cover for the remaining 2 per cent.”³⁸ I argue that the ninety-eight percent was indeed the face of a realistic Soviet diplomacy of collective security.

As diplomatic historians, we often employ a textual analysis of the relevant documents. We trace their path from office to office and attempt to analyze the impact of the information. Recent research has revealed that not all information traveled the route that the time/date stamps indicated. Further, the timing of the delivery of information became crucial. It is important to study just who knew what and when they knew it.

INNERWORKINGS OF THE WEIMAR/NAZI FOREIGN OFFICE

In *What Hitler Knew: The Battle for Information in Nazi Foreign Policy* (2005), Zachary Shore argues that indeed knowledge was power in Hitler’s Reich. Diplomatic information determined the course of careers and Nazi foreign relations.³⁹ Information became a commodity which diplomats and advisors brokered for their own self-interest and protection. Further, he

illustrates the fact that Hitler's system was so chaotic that the dictator himself often had no idea about the state of affairs within his own inner circle, much less the workings of the entire Foreign Office. Because various persons had separate agendas in the Nazi bureaucracy, the regime suffered from *Ämterstreit*.

Shore pulls the reader into the Nazi foreign office with a provocative introduction which he entitles "The Darker World." Shore asks us to

Imagine yourself as one of Hitler's diplomats. From the very beginning of Hitler's rule in 1933, you find yourself serving a violent regime. Each day you read or hear about mass arrests, beatings, and murders... You can no longer speak freely on the telephone without fear that your line is tapped and your voice recorded... If this were not enough, your position and purview are threatened by Party interlopers.⁴⁰

Shore's approach creates a sense of personal connection with the events of the book. This summary contains the central argument of the work concerning the changing nature of the regime, the increase in violence as a matter of policy, and the value of information for personal well-being.

Shore initially describes the role of the diplomats in the creation of a Nazi-Polish pact. Poland was Germany's sworn enemy, the creation of Versailles diplomacy, and a French ally. However, because of the Soviet-Polish alliance, the Foreign Office in early 1934 convinced Hitler to change his position. Germany feared that it would be surrounded by enemies if the Soviet-Polish pact became more substantive.

Firmly in power by the summer of 1934, Hitler set out to consolidate his authority by appealing to the regular army for support. Hitler then had to eliminate the more radical elements in his party. Shore describes the events of "The Night of the Long Knives" and its effects on the diplomatic corps. After the bloodbath in which one former Chancellor was murdered, one arrested, and one sent into exile, Shore points out that, "One lesson these men, and surely other

decision makers as well, drew from this episode of state-led terror was that their ability to control information represented one of the few ways in which they could enhance their often tenuous positions, and that lack of information could prove disastrous.”⁴¹

Constantin Freiherr von Neurath was the Foreign Minister at the time of Hitler’s accession to the chancellorship in January, 1933. He soon found himself in a power struggle with the Nazi, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Neurath had to distinguish himself in Hitler’s eyes in order to maintain his position. Shore describes how in 1936 Neurath, who was in possession of information indicating French military weakness, urged Hitler to occupy the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles Treaty. Other advisors urged caution. When German troops marched into the Rhineland in early 1936 without incident, Neurath appeared to be a prophet.⁴² In the chaos of the Nazi foreign office, knowledge could protect careers.

Shore then examines in detail the diplomatic situation on the eve of war in 1939. He asserts that the outcome of the conflict could have indeed been different had Hitler been aware of all the information in the hands of his advisors. For example, Shore concludes that Ernst von Weizsäcker, the chief political official in the Foreign Ministry, had details of a speech by the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, wherein Stalin indicated that he would like closer relations with Germany. Weizsäcker, in order to prevent a substantive alliance, did not inform Hitler or the Foreign Office until much later in 1939.⁴³ Later that same year, Ribbentrop, now Foreign Minister, withheld information of a possible alliance with England: a policy favored by Herbert von Dirksen. Ribbentrop was in favor of a Soviet alliance, and talks with England could have jeopardized his goal.⁴⁴ Had these alliances materialized as intended (notwithstanding the weak Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939), the result of the war may have been different. Shore clearly

shows that information became very much a personal possession. In Hitler's Reich, the irrational reigned supreme.⁴⁵

Shore utilizes the archived papers of the diplomats and the published records to support his argument. His conclusions, however, remain speculative. Shore admits that "We can never know whether Hitler, if he had been in possession of all the information he desired and had not been surrounded by advisors who advocated dangerous policies, would have acted differently. What we do know, however, is that information-control affected the timing and nature of his decisions, and it may even at times have altered outcomes."⁴⁶ Shore gives the example of the delay in circulating Stalin's March 1939 foreign policy speech.

Finally it is important to analyze the structure of the Weimar foreign policy before Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. The Weimar foreign office maintained a distinct existence in the realm of foreign affairs separate from the military establishment. In *The Civil-Military Fabric of Weimar Foreign Policy* (1973), Gaines Post, Jr., argues that during the Weimar period the Foreign Office and the Defense Ministry were actually quite close in their goals and aspirations for Germany. The Weimar constitution was clear and explicit concerning lines of responsibility of the two offices, "The Weimar Constitution supported the diplomats by designating the Foreign Office as 'the sole agency for the administration of German foreign interests.'"⁴⁷

Gaines Post asserts that the dismissal of General Hans von Seeckt, Chief of the Army Command, illustrated the primacy of the Foreign Ministry over the military interests. Later, by 1933, "the center of gravity in German foreign policy and military planning had shifted from interdepartmental to executive-departmental relations."⁴⁸ Hitler was then able to exploit these shifts to his advantage and he quickly dominated the foreign office from his executive position.

Because German expansion dominated his ideology, Hitler took a personal interest in the day-to day operations of the increasingly Nazi dominated foreign office. *Lebensraum* demanded the extension of Germany and the colonization of the East. The Greater German Reich would encompass both central, eastern, and Russian Europe. Although the debate continues to rage between the “intentionalists” and “functionalists” regarding Hitler’s role in the German state, it is clear that the Führer dominated the planning and implementation of his aggressive foreign policy. He left domestic issues largely to his subordinates.⁴⁹ We continue to assess the role of Hitler in the daily functioning of the Third Reich.

CONSTRUCTING A SOVIET FOREIGN OFFICE

While Hitler inherited a professional foreign office staffed with diplomats trained in the fine art of international interchange, Lenin was not so lucky. As we have seen, initially Lenin did not see the need for foreign relations at all. He quickly reversed course and established the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) the day after the seizure of power.

Unfortunately, the staff of this hastily constructed bureaucracy, although energetic, lacked any substantive foreign policy experience.⁵⁰ In fact, in the chaotic early months of the new regime, diplomats from the overthrown Provisional Government remained at their posts and coordinated anti-Bolshevik activities.⁵¹ Additionally, Lenin had not yet set the parameters of Soviet diplomacy beyond the Decree on Peace. As mentioned above, Trotsky took his position as Foreign Commissar rather lightly. Finally, in keeping with the new, revolutionary atmosphere, the Bolshevik government proclaimed on June 4, 1918 that the old ranks of “envoys, ministers and other diplomatic representatives [are] to be abolished and all representatives of the Russian

government, accredited to foreign governments are to be called plenipotentiary representatives of the RSFSR.”⁵²

As Bolshevik policy became more complex, the role of the NKID increased in importance. The first pressing problem was peace with Germany, finally settled at Brest-Litovsk. With the advent of the New Economic Policy, Soviet diplomacy became intricately intertwined with the search for peace.⁵³ Various statutes and constitutional provisions enlarged the scope of the NKID. As the new Soviet state concluded formal agreements with foreign nations, the NKID staff exploded. From around 250 workers in 1918, the NKID’s central office expanded to 1300 by 1921.⁵⁴ Georgii Chicherin was one of the few trained diplomats in the NKID when he replaced Trotsky. Chicherin was a committed revolutionary, but he quickly realized that the worldwide upheaval was not on the horizon. He transformed the NKID into a rigid center for substantive foreign relations. In the Soviet system, however, the Politburo formulated foreign policy; the NKID carried out its decisions.⁵⁵

Stalin altered the make-up of the foreign office as he touched every facet of Soviet life. As the office increased in professional status, Koba became more suspicious. The NKID did not escape the great purges.⁵⁶ Stalin wanted to dominate all areas of the state and to forge his own foreign policy, or at least control his own diplomats. Interestingly, he did not replace Litvinov with Molotov until May 3, 1939, illustrating his commitment to collective security even after the change.

COLD WAR SHADOWS

Unfortunately, the legacy of the Cold War continues to obscure the scholarship. Hard-line cold warriors asserted (often for political advantage) that “Uncle Joe” Stalin of the wartime

alliance suddenly after 1945 became the source of all evil. As a brutal dictator, he could not have orchestrated a substantive, peaceful foreign policy in the 1930s. While the USSR undertook aggressive actions after 1945 in the name of self-protection, many anti-Soviet extremists in the west argued that after 1945, the Soviet Union was the cause of all conflicts and controversies in the world. It proved a convenient enemy for the west. They reasoned that Soviet Russia, the communist monolith, seemed destined to devour the free world, while Germany simply sought recognition and stability after the devastation of the First World War. This misinterpretation of Soviet intentions contributed to the inaction of the western powers and the expansion of Nazi authority in Europe. Such rational motives, such as the prevention of war and collective security, were simply beyond Stalin's capabilities, claimed some western historians after World War II. He only sought to dominate and occupy any nation at odds with his communist ideology. Indeed, he was a major cause of the horrors of World War II with his cohort and ally, Adolf Hitler. However, as E.H. Carr reminds us, we should not be too quick to pass moral judgments on the private lives of historical figures, which judgments cloud objectivity.⁵⁷ We must pass moral judgments on the public acts of public figures in order to place them in a proper historical context.

While Stalin remains one of the monsters of modern history, we must examine Soviet diplomacy in the interwar period as seeking international peace while Stalin carried out domestic terror. Stalin understood that the still fragile USSR could not defeat both foreign and domestic opponents. For Stalin, foreign policy served the domestic agenda.

For some historians, Russian foreign policy in the inter-war period was simply a reflection of the western Cold War mentality. To be sure, Soviet policy sought to exploit

“contradictions” in the west, such as the pressure applied to Poland and the work of the Communist International (Comintern), but historians tend to ignore Soviet attempts to make peace. The clash of ideologies in the post World War II period affected basic historical research. For example, in discussing Soviet foreign policy motives in the 1930s, Robert M. Slusser asserts, “to put it briefly, was the policy of collective security an expression of Soviet hypocrisy or indecision, or did it point to the existence of functional schizophrenia in the Soviet state?”⁵⁸

Many historians never considered the possibility that Soviet policy could indeed have been peaceful. This dissertation argues that for a time Stalin did pursue peace, though the purposes of that peace were in the end revolutionary ones, that is, to remake the USSR in his own image. Internal terror, collectivization, and industrialization did not mix with international warfare. Britain and France feared Bolshevism more than Nazism under the rubric “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” In the 1930s, the Soviet Union needed peace in Europe in order to solve massive internal problems and then turn to the coming revolution and the inevitable collapse of the west. The Soviets were in no hurry to force the proletarian upheaval, especially when the Revolution was still quite young. In Russian eyes, Britain and France forced their alliance with Hitler, and that alliance was made only as a last resort.⁵⁹

Did the Soviet Union have a viable choice of foreign policy options prior to August 1939? Did Litvinov attempt to cement a western alliance with the Soviet Union? Did Britain and France ignore or refuse Soviet overtures? Did Stalin use the possibility of a western alliance to move closer to Hitler and seize territory in Eastern Europe to fulfill a long standing Russian plan? Why did Hitler ignore the advice of professional, career diplomats in the field? How did the structure of the German foreign office change after 1933? What were the goals of the Soviet

Union? I believe that these questions are important in understanding the fluid nature of foreign relations between two powers in times of stress.

While access to the Soviet documents remains a problem for scholars, this difficulty should not become an excuse for ignoring this crucial period and delaying a re-assessment of the long held assumptions concerning the Soviet Union, Germany, the West, and the origins of World War II. A close and sober analysis of the available published documents illustrates a substantive desire for peace on the part of the Soviet Union. If an alliance with Nazi Germany was the ultimate goal, it seems curious that the Soviets spent so much of the 1930s engaged in furious diplomatic interchanges with Britain and France. While the Soviets pushed for peace throughout the 1930s, Britain and France ignored them and hoped for a Soviet-German war wherein both totalitarian states would destroy the other and the West would pick up the pieces. British and French documents, unknown to the Soviets at the time, indicate a specific intent to sabotage and unduly delay the diplomatic contacts which the Soviets initiated so as to create an anti-Nazi front. The West wanted an “eastern front” with the Nazis moving toward the Soviet Union and away from Britain and France. The politically popular stance was anti-communism, no matter the facts. The Soviet Union “appeared” dangerous in all respects; it could not be trusted in anything. This anti-Soviet attitude drove the Soviet Union into the arms of the Nazi dictator and allowed him a quick victory in the East which then facilitated his westward momentum. When a Nazi-Soviet alliance threatened, Britain and France sent representatives by slow boat and train with no power to conclude a binding pact. Hitler was not so insulting; Ribbentrop flew to Moscow.

As E. H. Carr so brilliantly asserted in his classic, *What is History* (1961), while the documents limit our perspective as historians, in that we only see what documents we find or those produced in collections, we must move forward with these limitations. We must hope that future researchers will re-interpret and criticize our work with new material. A.J.P. Taylor asserted that we only go where the documents lead.⁶⁰ The documents here lead to the conclusion that the west misinterpreted and ignored Soviet intentions regarding collective security. Although collective security was in the interest of the USSR, such a policy did not contradict the interests of the western powers. Britain and France were bogged down in anti-Soviet rhetoric. Indeed, the USSR still stood for world revolution, but, after Stalin's declaration of "Socialism in One Country," it made no direct attempts to carry it out. If presented with an opportunity, the USSR sought to exploit circumstances, such as the Spanish Civil War, but it did not act alone in the Spanish conflict, seeking only to oppose fascism in the Iberian Peninsula. The western powers could not get past the dogmatic divide. Why did the West not put the Soviets to the test and agree on a united front against the clearer aggressor? If the USSR was indeed secretly seeking alliance with Germany, call the bluff of collective security and expose the Soviet desire for union with Hitler for what it was. Instead of attempting to direct Hitler eastward and believing that he would somehow be content or that a war could be contained, why not stand up to the bully and attempt to preserve the peace?

In the following chapters I will provide an overview of German-Soviet relations and discuss the challenges of early Soviet foreign policy. Chapter One discusses the changing nature of Soviet foreign policy from the revolution until 1930. Chapter two analyses German foreign policy in the early Weimar Republic and relations with the new Soviet state. Chapter three

continues the narrative into the early Nazi period and the split in German-Soviet relations. Chapter four presents the crucial year 1938 and Soviet policy after Munich. Chapter five highlights the delicate negotiations between the USSR, France, Britain, and finally Germany, resulting in the Pact of 1939.

From the Decree on Peace of November 1917, to the formal announcement of “collective security” in December 1933, and through most of 1939, the USSR desired peaceful relations with the capitalist world in order to protect the Soviet revolution. The close relations of the Weimar period quickly gave way to the contentious conflicts with the Hitler regime and the substantive interactions with Britain and France. Finally the crucial years of 1938 and 1939 led to the pact of August 23, 1939. As we re-visit the complex origins of World War II, we understand that the Soviet Union was a nation opposed to the outbreak of a general conflagration, even if simply to avoid war in order to carry out domestic terror and protect a still fragile revolution. For the USSR, domestic policy drove foreign policy into the realm of collective security.

END NOTES

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² Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Co-Existence: A History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1967* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 113.

³ Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, vol. III., chapter 30.

⁴ *Kommunisticheski Internatsional v Dokumentak* (Moscow: State Office of Political Literature, 1933), as cited in *ibid.*, 441.

⁵ Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), chapters 10 and 14; Gerhard Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union 1939-1941* (Leiden, 1954); *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, 2 vols. *Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*:

Starting World War II, 1937-1939. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁶ Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933-1941* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), chapter 1. Hereinafter referred to as Roberts, *Origins*.

⁷ *Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954), 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, 76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 221

¹² See chapter 3.

¹³ Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 571.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 573.

¹⁵ Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 223.

¹⁶ Robert Tucker, "The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy," *Slavic Review*, vol. 36, No. 4 (December, 1977): 569. See also the spirited reactions to this article in the same volume of *Slavic Review*.

¹⁷ Tucker, *Stalin in Power*. 226.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 345(emphasis in original).

²⁰ Hochman., 36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

²² *Ibid.*, 141,142 Hochman used the example of Bukharin.

²³ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 141, 142, quoting Robert C. Tucker, "Stalin, Bukharin and History as Conspiracy," Introduction to *The Great Purge Trial*, R.C. Tucker and Stephen F. Cohen, eds. (New York, 1963), xxxvi.

²⁵ (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

²⁶ Nekrich, 70.

²⁷ Nekrich, 110.

²⁸ Nekrich, 66.

²⁹ Nekrich, 107(emphasis in original).

³⁰ Tucker, “*The Emergence of Stalin’s Foreign Policy*,” 575.

³¹ Stalin asserted that the Soviet Union could fight, if forced, but sought no conflict. He wanted potential enemies to know that the Red Army was ready, even if this claim was questionable.

³² Taylor, 263.

³³ Taylor, 262-263.

³⁴ Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-39* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 230.

³⁵ Haslam, 231-232

³⁶ Roberts, *Origins*, 1.

³⁷ Roberts, *Origins*, 93.

³⁸ T.J. Uldricks, “A.J.P. Taylor and the Russians,” in G. Martel, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 178.

³⁹ Zachary Shore, *What Hitler Knew: The Battle for Information in Nazi Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴⁰ Shore, 3.

⁴¹ Shore, 122.

⁴² Shore, 63-65.

⁴³ Shore, 111-112.

⁴⁴ Shore, 98.

⁴⁵ David F. Lindenfeld, “The Prevalence of Irrational Thinking in the Third Reich: Notes Toward the Reconstruction of Modern Value Rationality,” *Central European History*, Vol. 30, no. 3, (September, 1997): 365-385.

⁴⁶ Shore, 123.

⁴⁷ Gaines Post, Jr., *The Civil-Military Fabric of Weimar Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 16.

⁴⁸ Post, 352.

⁴⁹ Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship, Problems & Perspectives of Interpretation*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), chapters 4-6.

⁵⁰ Teddy J. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology: The Origins of Soviet Foreign Relations, 191-1930* (London: Sage Publishers, 1979), 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁷ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 97.

⁵⁸ Robert M. Slusser, "The Role of the Foreign Ministry." *Russian Foreign Policy: Essays in Historical Perspective*, Ivo J. Lederer (ed.), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 215.

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Roberts, "Stalin, the Pact with Nazi Germany, and the Origins of Postwar Soviet Diplomatic Historiography," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, (Fall 2002): 93-103.

⁶⁰ Taylor, "Second Thoughts" in *The Origins of the Second World War*.

CHAPTER ONE: DIPLOMACY IN THE MARXIST/LENINIST MIRROR

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels predicted the inevitable destruction of capitalism and the creation of a communist society. Western, bourgeois imperialism contained the seeds of its own destruction. Marx and Engels declared that his analysis was scientific and that capitalism had to collapse. For Marx and Engels, time was not an issue; the forces of history would destroy capitalism from within. The long term need for formal diplomacy did not exist in this model because it was not necessary. Relations between states would simply set the groundwork for the coming cataclysm. In his 1848 masterpiece, Marx noted that as the exploitation of peoples and nations wane, “The hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.”¹ Marx warned, however, that peasants and workers still had to be aware of the importance of foreign relations as they related to the class struggle. In his Inaugural Address to the International Working Men’s Association in 1864, Marx asserted that it was the duty of the working class:

To master themselves the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all means in their power; when unable to prevent, to combine in simultaneous denouncement, and to vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the rules paramount of the intercourse of nations.²

While the state would slowly wither away, it remained the task of the proletarians to carefully monitor the international situation.

By the time Marx’s vision became something of a reality in Russia, the German philosopher was long dead. His successors quickly found out that ruling was quite different than agitating for change. The first generation of Bolshevik leaders had to adapt Marxism to the realities of governing the former czarist empire, and to do so under the conditions of a civil war.

This transformation of peasant Russia into the industrial Soviet Union required international stability even at the price of betraying the master.

Although radical upheaval remained the theoretical foundation of Bolshevism, Lenin, Stalin, Georgi Chicherin and Maxim Litvinov realized that co-existence with the hostile West was the only way to maintain the gains of the Soviet revolution. Starting with the Decree on Peace in 1917, the Communist state sought substantive relations with the capitalist world.

From the revolution through 1930, the foreign commissariat became a critical component of the Soviet state. It would enhance that status in the 1930s. While undergoing both theoretical and practical reformation, it remained deeply rooted in the search for a broad European alliance in order to prevent any war while the Soviet Union underwent revolutionary domestic transformations. Soviet diplomacy became the foundation for the success of the Bolshevik experiment. The extreme pronouncements of the Comintern, the Third Communist International founded in 1919 in order to move Russia into Communism and promote Soviet propaganda to the world, hindered the efforts of Soviet diplomats and fueled an anti-soviet western press already shaken by the upheaval of 1917. Despite the seeming contradictions (*Ämterstreit*) in Soviet policy, the diplomats pushed forward in their quest for stability. In this chapter, I will illustrate the realistic and conciliatory nature of Soviet foreign policy in the early years of Communism. I will argue that a broad-based peace was indeed a component part of Lenin's construction of the Soviet Union. Based on world conditions after the revolution, combined with domestic crises, Lenin had little choice but to adopt a flexible international outlook.

LENIN'S DIPLOMACY

Vladimir Illich Ulyanov, known as Lenin, the founder of Bolshevism and the guiding force of the Russian revolution, agreed with Marx's worldview and underscored in his voluminous writings the importance of Russia's relationship with the wider world. According to Lev Davidovich Bronstein, known as Leon Trotsky, however, Lenin was surprised to think that he would need to trifle with foreign relations.³ According to communist theory, it was Lenin's task to light the fuse of universal upheaval. He merely had to prepare for the establishment of a workers' and soldiers' paradise in Russia and to observe the emulation of his utopia throughout the world.

With the advent of civil war, foreign intervention, and economic chaos, Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership went about the daunting task of establishing a government for the new, socialist Russia. The prophets of radical transformation soon learned that actually creating and managing a huge bureaucracy was a completely different matter from attacking the Tsarist regime. The Bolsheviks inherited "a whole empire walking" from the displacement of the First World War.⁴ The peoples of the vast, former Empire needed food, shelter, and protection. The civil war unleashed a widespread terror directed against internal enemies of the new regime. According to official Cheka reports, 12,733 prisoners perished. Other estimates put the figure as high as 300,000. Still others languished in concentration camps.⁵ In addition, the new government had to requisition and to distribute grain to the population. Because there was never enough food to go around, the black market flourished. Disease and malnutrition killed eight million people in 1918-1920.⁶ The population demanded leadership, support and stability. They wanted the society to function smoothly after the bloody revolution. Lenin and the Bolsheviks

had to deliver on their promises in order to remain in power. Lenin had no time for foreign policy theory in late 1917. Diplomacy took on a decidedly pragmatic tone.

Despite his Marxist orientation, Lenin quickly adapted to contemporary conditions. Russia was still involved in World War I and Lenin had promised the war-weary population peace. Indeed on November 8, 1917 (the day after the storming of the Winter Palace), Lenin had drafted his Decree on Peace in Wilsonian terms (before Wilson addressed Congress in January 1918) and placed it before the Second Congress of Soviets for approval. In it he proclaimed that “an overwhelming majority of the workers and the laboring classes of all the belligerent countries, exhausted, tormented, and racked by war, are longing for a just and democratic peace...” He went on to explain that “by such a peace the Government understands an immediate peace without annexations (i.e. without seizure of foreign territory, without the forcible incorporation of foreign nationalities), and without indemnities.” Lenin also asserted that “the Government abolishes secret diplomacy and on its part expresses the firm intention to conduct all negotiations absolutely openly before the entire people...” Like Wilson, Lenin demanded the abolition of secret treaties (for example, the Sykes-Picot agreement) such as those designed “as they were in the majority of cases, to secure profits and privileges for Russian landowners and capitalists, and to retain or increase the territories annexed by the Great Russians.” Furthermore, Lenin called for the publication in full “of the secret treaties concluded and confirmed by the Government of landowners and capitalists.”⁷ Lenin needed to avert the possibility of a German invasion of Russia, appeal to the workers and peasants, and turn his attention to the domestic crisis. He had to call for peace in the broadest and most acceptable language.

Now, after the seizure of power, diplomacy occupied a central position in his political agenda. With the fronts collapsing and the country in chaos, he had to reach an accommodation with Imperial Germany. Because in 1917-1918, Lenin believed that the universal revolution was imminent, he proposed acceptance of Germany's harsh terms. In Lenin's view, territorial shifts were temporary and the proletarian upheaval would bring permanent re-alignment. Furthermore, Lenin saw Germany as the home of the proletarian revolution and this harsh treaty would only accelerate the inevitable.

Until this revolution occurred, Lenin had to create a viable foreign office. The new government needed international contacts in a formal setting. In order to placate the extreme wing of his Bolshevik party, in November, 1917 he chose his comrade and often harshest critic, Leon Trotsky, to serve as the first People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs.⁸

Trotsky approached the new position with the zeal of a committed communist. For him, diplomacy was a bureaucratic chore with little importance. He proclaimed, upon taking office, that "I'll issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the people and then close up shop."⁹ He grossly misunderstood the complexity of international politics. Russia's position was one of weakness and vulnerability. The radical Trotsky had to become a seasoned negotiator, and quickly. He was used to forceful and incendiary rhetoric; he expected rapid results. In December, 1917, while he admitted that the new government in Russia had to negotiate with bourgeois systems, "The Council of People's Commissars does not for a moment deviate from the path of social revolution." He described a "dual path" for Soviet diplomacy; one path would lead to "the quickest possible cessation of the shameful and criminal slaughter which is destroying Europe," and the second would lead to the "overthrow of the domination of capital" and the working

classes' seizure of state powers.¹⁰ He was not comfortable with the formalities of diplomacy. He found this role quite difficult; he preferred confrontation over compromise as his actions concerning Brest-Litovsk would illustrate. Soon he and Lenin would split over Trotsky's extreme position.

Trotsky advocated a hard line toward Germany and the Central Powers during the peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk. He did not want to sign a simple act of surrender. He described the Soviet position as one of "neither war nor peace."¹¹ In declaring Russia's interest to terminate hostilities without formal capitulation, Trotsky demonstrated his conviction that the war-ravaged European working classes would rise up against the Imperial Governments. He asserted in an impassioned speech at Brest-Litovsk on January 28/February 10, 1918 that:

We do not wish to take part any longer in this purely imperialist war, in which the claims of the propertied classes are being paid in blood...While awaiting the time, which we hope is not far off, when the oppressed working classes of all countries will take power into their own hands, as the working people of Russia have done, we are withdrawing our army and our people from the war.¹²

Lenin, who threatened to resign over Trotsky's stance, demanded a pragmatic policy; peace must be the cornerstone of the Bolshevik regime.¹³ Lenin clearly understood the vicissitudes of the past. In Lenin's view, "Every zigzag turn in history is a compromise between the old, which is no longer strong enough to completely negate the new, and the new, which is not yet strong enough to completely overthrow the old."¹⁴ Diplomatic stability would allow for the establishment of communist institutions in Russia during a hectic period. The Soviet leadership endorsed Lenin's plan and agreed to the harsh peace of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. The new Soviet government now faced a dilemma: it was now a revolutionary state and a functioning system in the world community.¹⁵ Russian foreign policy suffered from an internal and

philosophical crisis of credibility.¹⁶ Somehow it had to define itself and protect Russia's interests.

Trotsky had neither the experience nor the interest to remain as foreign commissar. He was dedicated to the spread of revolution and the establishment of soviet states throughout the world. He could not be distracted or limited by the niceties of foreign policy. On March 13, 1918 Georgii Vasil'evich Chicherin replaced Trotsky as foreign commissar. Trotsky was ecstatic and commented that "with a sigh of relief I handed the diplomatic helm over to him."¹⁷ He would turn his energies toward the organization of the Red Army.

CHICHERIN

As Richard K. Debo explains, Chicherin was not like the other diplomats in the early Soviet foreign office. Most of these officials (like Trotsky) were grossly unprepared for the challenges of diplomacy. Chicherin, on the other hand, graduated from the University of St. Petersburg and then spent several years reading documents in the Foreign Ministry archives. He gained a deep respect for Alexander Gorchakov, Foreign Minister to Tsar Alexander II. Both Chicherin and Gorchakov had to cope with a declining Russia. They both realized that Russia was too weak to confront foreign powers and had to seek an alliance system to preserve peace. Chicherin was a former Menshevik, admitted into the party in January 1918. Having had experience with both wings of the Russian Social Democratic Labor movement, he was well versed in Marxist theory. With his classical education, he excelled at foreign languages. He mastered all the major European languages and some Asian languages as well. He often wrote memoranda to foreign governments in the local languages. For example, at both Genoa and Lausanne he addressed the delegates first in English and then French. He did not require a

translator. He was a rigid taskmaster. He had no family, so he literally lived at the Foreign Ministry. His long hours did not translate into efficiency, however; he often turned night into day with his demanding schedule. Chicherin's lack of order upset some foreign representatives except his friend Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, the German Ambassador, who possessed similar habits.¹⁸

Chicherin clearly understood Russia's precarious position in the world and he quickly realized that the Soviet regime had to keep its head above water in a capitalist ocean. Lenin echoed this assessment in a report to the party group at the Eighth Congress of Soviets on December 21, 1920. He commented on the value of flexibility, "There is no doubt that concessions are a new kind of war." He quickly turned to the importance of the survival of the Socialist experiment; reality must outstrip doctrine, "But we must also agree that it is our task to ensure the continued existence of an isolated socialist republic surrounded by capitalist enemies..."¹⁹ The Soviet state must craft new doctrines based on existing realities.

Under Chicherin, the Soviet Union sought normalization of relations with both hostile enemies and supporters alike. He developed a special affinity for Weimar Germany and German Ambassador, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau. Chicherin and Brockdorff-Rantzau realized that their respective nations needed the other. The two diplomats were striving for common goals. As career diplomats, personally they had a great deal in common: both were aristocrats with similar intellectual interests, they represented reforming nation states ostracized in the international community, both opposed the Versailles order. In fact, Rantzau chose to resign rather than accept the Versailles *Diktat*.²⁰

While Soviet diplomats urged restraint, revolutionary rhetoric from the recently formed Comintern (Third International) would prove a hindrance to Russia's credibility.²¹ Gregori Zinoviev, the president of the Comintern howled in 1919 that "we shall be glad if we can succeed in transforming the place of residence of the Third International and its executive committee as quickly as possible to another capital, for example, Paris."²² The USSR seemed to have no coherent policy: world revolution from the Comintern and peaceful negotiation from the foreign office. Chicherin, while a supporter of world upheaval, would not allow Comintern doctrine to hinder the important work of Russian foreign policy after 1919, especially regarding Germany.²³

In this task of peaceful co-existence the foreign commissar had the backing of Lenin, who proclaimed in 1920 that, "Peace will further our cause infinitely more than war...any peace, therefore, will open channels for our influence a hundred times wider."²⁴ While the Bolshevik state was fighting for its existence against Poland (Polish armies had moved into the Ukraine) and battling the remnants of the White armies, peace became the central tenet of Soviet foreign policy. These conflicts were draining the fragile resources of the USSR. As Lenin explained, commencing with the Decree on Peace, peace would provide the necessary breathing space for the building of socialism.²⁵ Karl Radek, an important communist theoretician and organizer of the German communist Party (KPD), called for "a *modus vivendi with the capitalist states...*" in an open letter to the Heidelberg Congress of the KPD in October 1919.²⁶ In March 1921, in an address to the ninth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Lenin repeated the need for cooperation in the international arena:

Is such a thing thinkable at all as that a socialist republic could exist in a capitalist environment? This seemed impossible either in a political or in a military sense. That it is possible in a political and in a military sense has been proved; it is already a fact.²⁷

Writing in *Pravda* in December 1921, Stalin echoed the same tune, “A period of sober calculation of forces has set in, a period of meticulous work in the preparation and accumulation of forces for the battles of the future.”²⁸ All three voices urged a common theme: patience.

Although Russia had entered the international community in 1921 with a trade agreement with Great Britain, Chicherin sought an alliance with Weimar Germany in the early 1920s. Lenin recognized the precarious position of Germany and its relationship to Russia in a speech to the eighth All Russian Congress of Soviets in November, 1920. Missing from the address was any mention of world revolution. Lenin referred to Germany as “the most advanced country with the exception of America.” He then commented that, “This country [Germany], bound by the Versailles treaty, finds itself in conditions which do not allow it to exist. And in this position Germany is naturally pushed into alliance with Russia.”²⁹ Lenin recognized that the western nations had little support for the Soviet Union while Germany showed an interest in relations with the USSR.

Brockdorff-Rantzu at first sought a lenient peace from the allies; when this agreement was not forthcoming he turned to an eastern policy and sought a rapprochement with Russia.³⁰ At the same time, Chicherin wanted to exploit the economic potential of Germany. Gustav Hilger, a German consular official, on his return to Moscow in June, 1920, reported that Chicherin assured him that Soviet policy was “dictated by the sole wish to establish closer economic, political, and cultural relations.”³¹ Imperial Germany and Tsarist Russia had a long and beneficial relationship, even after 1890, until the outbreak of war in 1914, and both nations

now represented attempts at reconstruction.³² The two states had something in common in the post-war world. The long conflict devastated Germany physically and the harsh provisions of the Versailles Treaty were an additional insult to the German nation. The Soviets also roundly criticized the treaties as western attempts to exploit the dislocation of the war. The Bolsheviks asserted that the peace was nothing more than imperialism disguised as progressive improvements. Lenin attacked the treaty in his work *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* wherein, in the preface to the French and German editions, he asserted that “the ‘democratic’ republics of America and France and a ‘free’ Britain, have rendered a most useful service to humanity by exposing both imperialism’s hired coolies of the pen and petty-bourgeois reactionaries who, although they call themselves pacifists and socialists, sang praises to ‘Wilsonism,’ and insisted that peace and reforms were possible under imperialism.”³³ Both the USSR and Germany sought to “revise” the harsh provisions of the Versailles arrangement. Despite doctrinal differences, each nation had to support the other. In German and Soviet eyes, the western powers simply wanted to extend their “imperialist” hold on Europe.

Grigori Zinoviev, the head of the Comintern, issued a proclamation in June 1919 which concluded with the Soviet perspective on Versailles, “Down with the Versailles peace, down with the new Brest! Down with the government of the social traitors! Long live the power of the Soviets in the whole world.”³⁴ Allied intervention in Russia in 1918-1919 seemed to prove his point in denouncing the west. Further, Germany and Russia sought acceptance as viable nation states in the world community. They represented grand political experiments. Chicherin exploited these connections and his own deep respect for Germany into the first substantive treaty of the new Bolshevik government: the Treaty of Rapallo in April, 1922. Chicherin and the

Soviet delegation took advantage of western intransigence over debts to attract an equally isolated Germany into an agreement. Germany and Russia illustrated to the western powers, paralyzed in their isolationism, that they could conclude important understandings in their own name.

Rapallo represented a major breakthrough for the Soviet diplomacy.³⁵ After the West's horrified reaction to the establishment of the first socialist state, the Soviet Union reached out to the wider world and found an ally. The communist experiment was now a long-term matter; it had withstood attempts at its eradication. Policymakers and statesmen now viewed the world as capitalist, communist, and colonial. After Rapallo, Soviet Russia became again a major actor on the world stage. Even with this success, Chicherin again sought to build an alliance package with the other nation states in eastern and Western Europe. Russia needed broad diplomatic stability. The foreign commissariat increased in importance within the Soviet bureaucracy.

By 1920, Lenin and the Soviet leadership, with the possible exception of Trotsky, admitted that the world-wide proletarian revolution was not as sure as they once expected. It would come; it had to occur, but maybe not at this stage of industrial development. The predicted German upheaval did not materialize. Lenin continued to counsel patience because capitalist "contradictions" would bring the conflict as the western imperialist states competed for economic domination in a shrinking market. "As long as we are alone and the capitalist world is strong," claimed Lenin in 1920, "our foreign policy must consist in part of the exploitation of contradictions."³⁶ While he waited for the expected upheaval, Lenin had to deal with more pressing domestic problems, particularly the non-functional economy. He had little choice as

factory output in 1920 was eighty-six percent lower than in 1913. The grain harvest of 1920 was only about three-fifths of the annual average for the half decade before World War I.³⁷

THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY

In 1921, in a complete break with Marxist economic doctrine, Lenin announced the New Economic Policy (NEP).³⁸ In essence, the NEP was small scale capitalism. Lenin explained his position as one of dire necessity. He even admitted “mistakes” in the past which led to the existing problems. He further asserted that this policy would be temporary until the economy stabilized. He was making economic changes, not political ones. Initially, the Tenth Party Congress opposed this heresy; however, after the revolt of the sailors at Kronstadt, Lenin’s new idea seemed plausible.³⁹

Realizing that war communism was a failure with the peasantry, in 1921 Lenin shifted course. In a report to the 10th Party Congress on March 15, 1921, the Bolshevik leader laid the foundations for his New Economic Policy. Russia, he argued, must have economic stability in order to build socialism. The peasantry would become the foundation of the new Bolshevik state. It must have an interest in the building of communism. Domestic order would bring foreign respect. He addressed the unique challenges of the former Tsarist Empire. He referred to “special transitional measures”:

There is no doubt that in a country where the overwhelming majority of the population consists of small agricultural producers, a socialist revolution can be carried out only through the implementation of a whole series of special transitional measures which would be superfluous in highly developed capitalist countries where wage-workers in industry and agriculture make up the vast majority.

Because the hoped-for international proletarian revolution was not materializing, Lenin concluded that “only agreement with the peasantry can save the socialist revolution in Russia.”

He then turned to practicalities and was confident of success. He asked and answered two important questions, “Can freedom of trade, freedom of capitalist enterprise for the small farmer, be restored to a certain extent without undermining the political power of the proletariat? Can it be done? Yes; it can, for everything hinges on the extent.”⁴⁰ Lenin was attempting to remain doctrinally consistent in the face of economic collapse. All reform remained a matter of “extent.” Lenin was not undermining Marx, just fine tuning him to the Soviet landscape.

At this point, domestic issues predominated. It was the task of the diplomats to buy time, that is, to maintain peace, in order to insulate the Soviet Union from hostile forces abroad. In an address to a Moscow party conference in November, 1920, before the announcement of NEP, Lenin explained the importance of stability, “We have not only a breathing space, and we have a new stage in which our fundamental position in the framework of the capitalist states has been won.”⁴¹ NEP would be a hard sell and even more difficult to administer.

With the conclusion of a trade agreement with England and the treaty of Rapallo with Germany, during the first half of the 1920s, Soviet diplomacy reached a high point in its development. The communist leadership recognized the importance of the foreign commissariat as a substantive instrument of domestic policy. The People’s Commissariat had to build on the momentum. Chicherin and his colleagues had to deliver on Soviet promises.

Although still subordinate to the powerful Central Committee and Politburo, Chicherin and his staff began to form and implement a non-ideological approach to the outside world. Soviet diplomats illustrated to the international community that the Marxist/Leninist diatribes were largely for doctrinal purity and that the Soviet Union could and would take a flexible stance on world issues. “Peaceful –Co-existence” became the guiding light of Soviet foreign policy.⁴²

This doctrine admitted the failure of the international proletarian revolution. World communism would have to wait. For now, European continental stability and real-world rationality, except for the occasional rail from the Comintern, would guide Soviet actions.

Lenin's NEP proved successful. At the Eleventh Party Congress in 1922, Lenin's last, he presented the delegates with a progress report on the New Economic Policy and its implications. He referred to the NEP as the "the major question" while he hoped that "we have learnt something from the launching of this New Economic Policy." Lenin understood that NEP would determine the success or failure of the revolution. This New Economic Policy also had important foreign policy ramifications:

To some extent we could and had to ignore this bond [with the peasantry] when we were confronted by the absolutely urgent and overshadowing task of warding off the danger of being immediately crushed by the gigantic forces of world imperialism.

It was the task of diplomacy to control the "gigantic forces of world imperialism" so that the Bolshevik state could re-connect with the peasants. Lenin concluded with a powerful dose of realism, reminding his comrades that "we Communists are but a drop in the ocean, a drop in the ocean of the people." The main focus remained the peasantry and peasants looked for concrete results. Because, according to Lenin, an important factor in stability was "whether we shall be able to supply the peasants with goods in exchange for their grain. The peasants will say: 'You are splendid fellows; you defended our country. That is why we obeyed you. But if you cannot run the show, get out!' Yes, that is what the peasants will say."⁴³ The Bolsheviks had to deliver specific, economic incentives to the vast Soviet peasantry. In Lenin's view, there was simply no place for international adventures in the face of such overwhelming internal crises.

Soviet peasants and workers began to trust the Bolshevik leadership and the economy slowly recovered. Lenin had the luxury to concentrate on domestic matters because the foreign

commissariat expanded Soviet diplomatic influence in the world and allayed fears of upheaval. The Soviet Union began discussions with France, and in 1924 the Third Republic gave official recognition to the Soviet Union. After a series of conflicts, Great Britain followed by 1929. Russia once again became a great power and a major force in world affairs by conducting not a rigid, dogmatic policy based on nineteenth-century predictions, but a flexible, accommodating strategy palatable to the international community.

DIPLOMACY AFTER LENIN'S DEATH

In late December 1922, after suffering a series of strokes, Lenin dictated several letters to be read at the next party congress. These letters collectively became known as his “testament.” Lenin detailed his vision for his new party as well as the problems facing the still fledgling revolution. He mentioned six “comrades” by name but found fault with all of them. Lenin feared that the conflict between Stalin and Trotsky would split the movement; Grigori Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev opposed the seizure of power in October 1917; Nikolai Bukharin and Georgy Pyatakov lacked sufficient grounding in Marxism. He did not name a specific successor. In a supplement of January 4, 1923, he pointedly warned the party about Stalin. Lenin asserted that “Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealings among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a general-secretary.”⁴⁴ He suggested that “...the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing another man in his stead...”⁴⁵ Lenin died on January 24, 1924. Despite Lenin’s wishes, Stalin brutally assumed power by 1928 and immediately began the transformation of the Soviet state from moderate Leninism to bloody Stalinism.

Stalin inaugurated the process of collectivization through five-year plans. He wanted to scrap the NEP as soon as possible. Like Lenin, Stalin required foreign stability while he carried out his domestic revolution. In a pamphlet entitled *Problems of Leninism* (in Russian, *Questions of Leninism*-an interesting translation), Stalin explained his doctrine of “socialism in one country.”⁴⁶ In this explanation and extension of Lenin’s thought, Stalin was confronting the left opposition who supported the doctrine of “permanent revolution.” The Fourteenth Party Conference adopted Stalin’s formulation in 1925 as policy and the open conflict with the left wing began. Stalin discussed his idea as a series of questions:

What does the *possibility* of the victory of socialism in a single country mean? It means the possibility of solving contradictions between the workers and the peasants with the aid of the internal forces of our country; it means the possibility of the proletariat’s seizing power and using that power for the construction of complete socialist society in our country, with the sympathy and the support of the workers of other countries, but without the preliminary victory of the proletarian revolution in other countries.⁴⁷

After a struggle for power, by 1928 Josef Stalin emerged as the next leader of the Soviet Union. Stalin understood that the Marxist/Leninist gospel of world revolution was frightening to many potential allies. Stalin had earlier announced the doctrine of “socialism in one country,” arguing that the Soviet government could initiate and complete communism in the Soviet Union alone without the international upheaval which Karl Marx predicted.⁴⁸ Stalin sought compromise in an anti-communist world. He realized that the Soviet Union had to exist in the international community, and if toning down the language was the first step, he would do it. Stalin would not allow dogma to limit economic and political necessity. His writings and later pamphlet, *Problems of Leninism*, [in Russian-*Questions of Leninism*] in 1924 provided the doctrinal foundation of the flexible and realistic Soviet position in international affairs and set

the stage for drastic and brutal reforms inside the Soviet Union. This explanation was intended for the party faithful and signaled a deep shift in Soviet domestic and foreign policy; the worldwide Marxist revolution was not required in order for Soviet communism to succeed within the USSR. Stalin was calling off the extreme wing of the party and signaling to the West that the Soviet Union was a stable system. Stalin was turning on the left wing of the CPSU and centralizing his authority. This pamphlet was a demand for loyalty to him.

What did Stalin mean in this document? Robert Service argues that Stalin's pronouncement of "socialism in one country" represented "an exposition of ideological inclination."⁴⁹ Stalin was deeply committed to the success of the revolution without foreign ties. In addition, this revisionist interpretation of Lenin provided the philosophical ammunition for the purges of the Left Opposition, the followers of Leon Trotsky, who demanded international revolution no matter the reality. Robert Tucker asserts, however, that "Socialism in One Country" was not the exposition of Stalin's deeply held ideas, but a "case, rather, of the confluence of expediency and political belief." Stalin seized the mood of the moment and crafted a position to support his ambitions.⁵⁰ "Socialism in One Country" also gave Stalin the power to rein in the Comintern. Starting in 1929 Stalin tightly controlled the Comintern with the expulsion of Bukharin from the executive Committee. Stalin wanted to ensure that foreign communist parties would not damage the interests of the USSR.⁵¹ For Stalin, internal social and economic revolution was too important.

After Lenin's death, Stalin had to create a distinct intellectual persona. His declaration of socialism in one country set the stage for the philosophical battle with the Trotskyites; a battle begun with words, but one that would end in brutality. With the resolution of the Fourteenth

Party Conference adopting Stalin's thesis, radical domestic reforms commenced. After his victory at the conference, Stalin presented a report to the Activists of the Moscow Organization of the Russian Communist Party on May 9, 1925 outlining the work of the conference and took the occasion to explain his position in greater detail. He singled out Trotsky for special attention while he slowly amassed power.⁵² Trotsky emerged from this diatribe as the enemy of socialism and Stalin had identified his first target. For Stalin, loyalty to socialism in one country was loyalty to himself; he treated criticism as a personal affront. Stalin could now pursue his enemies as the defender of a new socialist orthodoxy.

Stalin contrasted the victory of socialism in a single country with the final victory of socialism which, he agreed, must await the international proletarian revolution. Stalin's thesis was a major deviation from communist doctrine. Lenin explained that socialism could *begin* in a single country but could not be completed short of world upheaval.⁵³ Stalin countered that socialism could begin and end in one country, Russia. Essentially, Stalin simply admitted the realities of the time; Russia had to survive in a hostile world, reform its domestic system and maintain international balance while preparing for the inevitable upheaval. "Socialism in One Country" became a declaration of both domestic and foreign policy. It was a call to other nations that Russia accepted its position in the international community. At this point, socialism was only for the Soviet Union. In furthering the Decree on Peace, "Peaceful Co-Existence" (first used by Chicherin in June, 1920) blended with "Collective Security" to define the substance of Soviet foreign policy after Lenin's death. Stalin's assertion set the stage for the purges of the 1920s and 1930s. Anyone who disagreed with him on any point became an enemy of the people. He did not seek confrontation with foreign nations because he created enough turmoil at home.

Stalin's personality drove every aspect of his policy. Stalin was a Slavic nationalist who viewed the outside world as hostile and threatening. He perceived enemies where there were none and used terror as an instrument of power. He had to construct a foreign policy that would protect both him and the revolution. Raymond Birt argues that:

The narcissistic element of Stalin's paranoia was fed by the fact that even as child Joseph was physically repulsive...He suffered from a nearly fatal bout with smallpox at age 4 and thereafter had a severely pocked face, which Soviet photographers were careful to retouch...So, in terms of a narcissistic element needing protection from perceived aggressors, Stalin was like the bull who travelled with his own china shop... Stalin's behavior in power is indicative of the need of the paranoid to protect his fragile narcissistic ego from external threats...the paranoid had created a system perfectly suited to his personality needs.⁵⁴

Stalin's paranoia became a national obsession. Because literally everyone was a potential enemy, the atmosphere of terror reached into every aspect of Soviet society. Life and death revolved around the unstable Georgian. Both domestic and foreign policy existed for defensive purposes. Stalin had to create enemies even if none existed.

Starting in 1928, Stalin began to implement his interpretation of Marx. International peace became the springboard for domestic reform on a wide and brutal scale. Robert Service explains the importance of foreign policy to Stalin's revolution:

The economic transformation, in Stalin's opinion, could not be accomplished unless the USSR stayed clear of military entanglements abroad. His five-Year Plan was premised on the Kremlin's need to purchase up-to-date machinery from these powers. It would obviously be difficult to induce foreign governments and business companies to enter into commercial deals if there remained any suspicion that the Red Army might be about to try again to spread revolution on the points of its bayonets.⁵⁵

With the pronouncement of "socialism in one country" and treaties with Major European states, Stalin asserted that the USSR should avoid involvement in the affairs of other countries. Service concludes that, "Foreign policy during the Five-Year-Plan was made subordinate to

domestic policy more firmly than ever.”⁵⁶ Timothy Snyder argues that, “The Soviet Union was both a state and a vision, both a domestic political system and an internationalist ideology. Its foreign policy was always domestic policy, and its domestic policy was always foreign policy. That was its strength and its weakness.”⁵⁷

Socialism in One Country set the intellectual tone for Stalin’s revolution, while the five year plans set the economic baseline. After assuming power after Lenin’s death, Stalin unleashed unspeakable terror on the peoples of the Soviet Union in the name of collectivization and state planning. The Soviet Dictator turned on the market oriented New Economic Policy and implemented a rigorous transformation of soviet economics and society. No area of the vast Soviet Empire escaped his brutal wrath. He claimed to follow the master Marx in rationalizing the backward peasant base of exchange, that is in forcing the peasants into state planning. He asserted that the USSR had to industrialize in order to protect the gains of the revolution.

Stalin inaugurated his reforms with the First Five Year Plan in 1928. This vision called for the intense collectivization of agriculture while pouring vast amounts of income into developing factories. The peasant friendly NEP now turned into impossible quotas and grain seizures, resulting in wide-spread famines and death for millions of Soviet farmers. “By 1928, the industrialized capitalist economies were at the peak of the inter-war trade cycle. The gap in production per head of population between Soviet and Western European Industry was as wide as ever.” More importantly, the technological gap between Russia and the other Great Powers was considerably greater than in 1913.⁵⁸ The USSR was quickly slipping behind the capitalist world and Stalin sought a radical remedy.

Stalin took advantage of a significant rise in unemployment, by the end of 1926 some 9 per cent, to populate the early factories. Additionally, more farmers were leaving the land and migrating to the growing urban centers of the USSR. The key to initial success remained in the countryside. The peasants, however, were none too happy with the sudden end of the NEP. They decided to use what little power they possessed.

Stalin's new system face a severe test in 1927-1928, when the peasants sold only half as much grain to the official grain collection agencies as in the same period in 1926. With this downturn, the towns and military faced substantial shortfalls.⁵⁹ Instead of increasing the price of grain, Stalin reverted to a type of War Communism, utilized in the Civil War, and enforced wide-ranging compulsion. At least 10 million perished in the man-made famine in the Ukraine in the early 1930s. As a consequence, "Agricultural production per head of population in 1937-1939 was lower than in 1928 and only a few percentage points higher than in 1909-1913."⁶⁰ This "Third Revolution" was not at all irrelevant to the cause of Soviet diplomacy. Stalin was terrorizing his own population; he had no time or ability to terrorize others.

Collectivization replaced the New Economic Policy and the bloody purges of all aspects of Soviet society commenced. The first five year plan revolutionized the industrial base of the Soviet Union while Stalin forced the total mobilization of the population. Stalin quickly reversed the lax religious policies of the 1920s and centralized all administrative functions around his position. Stalin also oversaw forced famines, especially in the Ukraine, and unleashed indiscriminate oppression throughout the Soviet Union.⁶¹

In the late 1920s, Chicherin began to suffer from the effects of diabetes and polyneuritis. He took a leave of absence in 1928 and effectively lost control of the foreign commissariat. The

Deputy People's Commissar, Maxim Litvinov, took over the office in Chicherin's absence and became foreign commissar in 1930.⁶² Litvinov did not agree with the German orientation of Soviet foreign policy and shaped his own agenda. In his view, the Weimar Republic had taken a pro-western turn in 1925 with the Treaty of Locarno with Britain, Italy, Belgium, and France. He feared an anti-Soviet swing in German foreign policy. As a result of Locarno, Germany had joined the League of Nations in 1926 as a great power with a seat on the League Council. Litvinov argued that Russia had to develop a multilateral treaty arrangement system with the west and the new states bordering Russia in order to hinder German expansion and prevent war.

Litvinov was concerned about the rising level of anti-Communist nationalism (National Socialism) in Germany and the uncertain status of the Weimar Republic. Above all he feared a western coalition including Germany against the Soviet Union. He set out to court the western powers, particularly Britain, France, and the United States. The task was a difficult one. Prior to 1914, Great Britain and France had large financial interests in the Imperial Russian state. After 1917, they opposed the new government, especially since the Bolsheviks had defaulted on the tsarist debts. Furthermore, the western powers were terrified at the rhetoric of the Comintern and their own communist parties. Economic dislocation exacerbated their domestic problems. These nations were not seeking ties to a country which would add to their difficulties. They attempted to overthrow the Bolshevik regime in 1918-1919. They did not trust Russia and furthermore they feared the spread of the cancer of communism. Recognition was one thing; collaboration and exchange of information was quite another.

Litvinov attempted to engage the hostile nations in a series of non-aggression pacts.⁶³ This strategy illustrates Litvinov's goals in the 1930s: prevent war, support neutrality, and maintain

substantive diplomatic, political, and economic contact with the major capitalist powers, Britain, France, the United States, and Germany. He made clear Russia's desire for peace and stability in the world. He did not see the world revolution on the horizon. He doubted whether it would ever arrive. He understood the importance of international balance separate from doctrine.

Marxist/Leninist threats had no place in his vision of Soviet foreign policy.

While Litvinov pleaded for peace, the dogmatic zeal of the Comintern continued to undermine these benevolent efforts. Litvinov asserted to other diplomats and to the foreign press that this organization was a unit independent of Bolshevik policy. He knew otherwise. Still, he became so frustrated over the activities of the Comintern, that in 1929 he told Esmond Ovey, the British Ambassador to the Soviet Union that, "You can hang them [British communists] or burn them alive if you catch them."⁶⁴ During a conversation with Ovey in 1930, the Foreign Commissar called the Comintern "hopeless" and added that "Why don't you take the thing? You are a free country. We don't want it here. Do arrange for it to hold its sessions in London."⁶⁵ Litvinov was a realist in the strictest sense in that he sought accommodation with all states and wanted no interference in his conception of foreign policy. He understood the precarious position of Russia. The Comintern could quickly ruin his delicate balance. From the founding of the Soviet state, Russian foreign policy was a complex mix of doctrine and pragmatism. The foreign commissariat showed itself to be quite professional and accommodating in a hostile environment, both inside and outside the Soviet Union. This calculated juggling act protected Russia until 1941.

Events in Germany soon dominated the attention of the foreign commissariat. Germany, like Russia, had undergone profound changes. Germany and the new USSR had common goals

and problems. Germany's experiment with democracy was teetering under economic strains in the late 1920s. Of greater concern to the Soviets were those who sought to replace it. Litvinov and his staff found themselves on the front lines of an important struggle; the struggle for diplomatic stability and peace. While the Weimar Republic sought to construct a foreign policy which would favored a western orientation, with the Soviet Union a secondary player, Soviet diplomacy remained flexible, overlooking political differences. The new USSR had to survive in difficult and uncertain times, both foreign and domestic, especially with the advent of Stalin. The decade of the 1930s would prove decisive.

END NOTES

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- ²² Carr, 132.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 136, 323.
- ²⁴ Lenin, *Sochinenie*, vol. 30, (Moscow: State Publishing House for Political Literature, 1950), 422.
- ²⁵ E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, vol 3 (London: Macmillian, 1953), 22-26.
- ²⁶ Karl Radek, *Zur Taktik des Kommunismus: Ein Schreiben an den Oktober-Parteitag der KPD* (Hamburg, 1919), 11-12, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 318 (emphasis in original).
- ²⁷ Lenin, *Sochinenie*, vol. xxvii, (Moscow: State Publishing House for Political Literature, 1935), 117-118.
- ²⁸ Stalin, *Sochinenie*, vol. v, (Moscow: State Publishing House for Political Literature, 1935), 117-120.
- ²⁹ Lenin, *Sochinenie*, vol. xxvi, (Moscow: State Publishing House for Political Literature, 1935), 14-15.
- ³⁰ Debo, 26-27.
- ³¹ Hilger, *Soviet Russia* (N.Y.), 14 August 1920, 48 as quoted in Carr, 323.
- ³² Richard E. Pipes, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Affairs," *Russian Foreign Policy: Essays in Historical Perspective*, Ivo J. Lederer(ed.), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 151-152.
- ³³ Robert C. Tucker (ed), *The Lenin Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 207.
- ³⁴ *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, No. 2 (June 1919), cols. 149-150, as quoted in Carr, 137.

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- ³⁵ See chapter 2 for details.
- ³⁶ Roberts, 31-32.
- ³⁷ Service, *A History*, 124.
- ³⁸ Tucker (ed), *The Lenin Anthology*, 503-510.
- ³⁹ Service, *A History*, 125.
- ⁴⁰ Lenin, *Sochinenie*, vol. 32, (Moscow: State Publishing House for Political Literature, 1950), 191,192, 196.
- ⁴¹ Lenin, *Sochinenie*, xxv, 485, (Moscow: State Publishing House for Political Literature, 1935), 485.
- ⁴² Roberts, 31-32.
- ⁴³ Lenin, *Sochinenie*, vol. 33, (Moscow: State Publishing House for Political Literature, 1950), 238, 239, 260, 261.
- ⁴⁴ Tucker, 728.
- ⁴⁵ Tucker, 728.
- ⁴⁶ Joseph Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (New York: International Publishers, 1934), chapter VI.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65 (emphasis in original).
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, chapter VI.
- ⁴⁹ Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2004), 245. Hereinafter referred to as Service, *Stalin*.
- ⁵⁰ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary, 1879-1929, A Study in History and Personality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 378.
- ⁵¹ Service, *Stalin*, 282.
- ⁵² J.V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 7, 1925 (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1954), 90-134.
- ⁵³ Donald W. Treadgold, *Twentieth Century Russia*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 7th ed., 1990), 201-202 (emphasis added).
- ⁵⁴ Raymond Birt, "Personality and Foreign Policy," *Political Psychology*, vol. 14, no. 4 (Dec. 1993): 616.
- ⁵⁵ Service, *A History*, 177.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 177-178.
- ⁵⁷ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 74.
- ⁵⁸ R.W. Davies, *Soviet economic development from Lenin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30-31.

⁵⁹ Davies, 31.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶¹ Snyder, chapters 1-3.

⁶² Uldricks, 90. Also, Craig and Gilbert, chapter 11.

⁶³ Roberts, 42.

⁶⁴ Hugh D. Phillips, *Between Revolution and the West: A Political Biography of Maxim M. Litvinov* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 107.

⁶⁵ Phillips, 107. He made similar remarks to the Norwegian Ambassador. Phillips, 206, note 45.

CHAPTER TWO: GERMANY'S GREAT EXPERIMENT: WEIMAR DEMOCRACY AND FOREIGN POLICY

When the guns fell silent in November 1918, Imperial Germany was gone and the economy lay in ruins. While a popular revolution determined that Germany would become a republic rather than a communist state, the allies forced democratic institutions on Germany in 1918 without understanding their impact. Despite the bloodshed of 1918-1919 and the Kapp *putsch*, Germany hesitatingly became a democracy. Creating a full-fledged, stable democracy in interwar Germany was no easy matter. In addition to the difficulties all states in this era faced in attempting to stabilize their currencies and political systems in the wake of the devastating Great War, the new Germany had inherited a rather mixed tradition of broad popular participation, competitive campaigns, well-organized political parties and authoritarian rule from above. In the age of Bismarck, the Second Reich had become a contradictory mix of royal absolutism and parliamentary functions.¹ Power continued to be concentrated in the hands of the Kaiser and Chancellor; while individual states in the federal union retained a great deal of sovereignty. The Reichstag had little oversight authority, especially with respect to military and diplomatic issues. Nationalism, generated by Bismarck's wars and sustained and enflamed, at least amongst the middling and upper classes, by Wilhelm II's *Weltpolitik*, held the state together, in spite of a burgeoning socialist movement.

Weimar politicians, largely socialist, struggled with the imperial legacy while attempting to create viable democratic institutions. Friedrich Ebert, the first President of the Republic, wanted to destroy the vestiges of the Wilhelmine system and, acting pursuant to the liberal Weimar constitution of 1919, constructed a fully parliamentary democracy with complete proportional representation of political parties. Unfortunately for the Republic, this system

encouraged chaos in the Weimar Reichstag as parties dedicated to the destruction of democracy took seats in the parliament in proportion to its vote. Economic dislocation fueled political confrontation in the streets of Germany's cities. Although Berlin succeeded in restoring confidence from 1924-1929, the new Republic would prove unable to stabilize Germany in the long run.

In this chapter I will discuss the foundation and goals of Weimar foreign policy in the 1920s, with emphasis on German-Soviet relations. Germany was attempting to forge a delicate path between east and west, realizing that it needed support from all quarters. Specifically under the able leadership of Gustav Stresemann, first as Chancellor in 1923, and then as Foreign Minister until 1929, Weimar foreign policy would at first attempt to undermine the Russian Revolution economically and then, in an act of Bismarckian *Realpolitik*, conclude economic and diplomatic arrangements with the Soviet state.

Until May, 1919, Germany had faced the devastating allied blockade, which had starved the nation during the hostilities while food remained scarce for some time thereafter. With the allied demand for reparations and the Franco-Belgian invasion of the Ruhr valley in January, 1923, the economy collapsed. Economic and political uncertainty reined in this one proud nation of Goethe and Frederick the Great.

In the troubled years of the early Republic, German politicians struggled to forge a new identity for their state. Liberal and socialist leaders sought to do away with the nationalist excesses of the past and to seek support from the victorious allies. Some, like Gustav Stresemann, the Chancellor and long serving Foreign Minister who dominated German foreign policy from 1923 until his death in 1929, even advocated exploring rapprochement with the ally

Germany had defeated in 1918, revolutionary Russia. Under Stresemann, Weimar foreign policy attempted to stabilize and enhance the historic position of Germany and return it to great power status.

Both Germany and Russia suffered as a result of the Great War. Imperial Germany lost the war and Russia fell into revolution. Both were seeking status and recognition on the world stage; both were coping with new economic and political systems; both wanted to revise the Treaty of Versailles. Western powers distrusted these nations and marginalized them. Despite their similarities, Russia and Germany had significant differences, not the least of which was the ever-present threat of communist upheaval in Germany. The Russian Revolution forever altered the landscape of Imperial Europe. The great question in the west was, what do we do about it?

Gustav Stresemann, the Chancellor and long serving Foreign Minister who dominated German foreign policy until his death in 1929, realized that Germany possessed a potentially powerful economy with vast natural resources that could lure western interests. He had to navigate between east and west in order to address the needs of the German economy. He could not afford to alienate either side.

Weimar Germany maintained the twin pillars of the Empire: the army and industry. E. H. Carr records an agreement between General Paul von Hindenburg and Friedrich Ebert, the Social Democratic president of the Council of People's Commissars and future Reichspresident on November 10, 1918 (the day after the Kaiser's abdication and the day before the armistice), whereby the army would support a Social Democratic regime and maintain order. The implication was that the new government would support the Reichswehr and not undermine its authority. German industry settled outstanding disputes with the trade unions on November 15,

1918. Ownership and labor would work together.² On March 15, 1919, the new, republican Reichswehr emerged, now under the ostensible control of the Reichspresident.

These twin supports were attractive to the USSR. The Red Army needed the expertise of the Reichswehr and the struggling economy required credits. German heavy industry needed markets for its products and looked to both the east and west for outlets.³ International trade would be the foundation for German recovery. Despite the dislocation of World War I, Germany retained a larger population and greater economic assets than France. Stresemann, unlike Hitler, was willing to sacrifice economic nationalism for the moment for more practical considerations. Moreover, he had to illustrate to the United States the devastating effects of reparations. If America intervened on Germany's behalf, Germany could regain its rightful place in world affairs. He needed to tie the U.S. economy to German recovery, while recognizing that Russia remained a secondary, but important factor in the German economic agenda. German foreign policy had to face both east and west.

1919 TO RAPALLO

After 1919, the clear answer to the Bolshevik question was: do nothing and hope the Communists would go away. President Ebert favored a western orientation and distrusted Russia.⁴ Communist theory identified Germany as the home of the anticipated proletarian liberation and the establishment of a socialist state. Indeed, Germany possessed powerful socialist and communist parties. Local governments as well as the Republic itself were subject to left- wing upheaval. In 1919, a short-lived communist republic emerged in Bavaria. How could Weimar Germany and Communist Russia cooperate for their common benefit? Herein lay the conundrum of Weimar foreign policy.

Weimar politicians employed economic policy for political ends regarding the USSR. Comintern propaganda continued to target the new republic as the home of proletarian revolution. The German communist Party [KPD] agitated in the streets for an end to democracy and the establishment of a People's Republic. Within the Foreign Office some diplomats believed that if the Russian economy somehow stabilized, then the workers would reject the oppressive yoke of communism and Russia would become a "moderate" nation. Diplomacy became a tool for the manipulation, and, the ultimate destruction of the Bolshevik menace. The Wilhelmstrasse sent Carl Graap, an expert on the Soviet economy to Russia in October, 1919. After travelling widely and observing the Russian economic landscape, Graap concluded that:

A massive, large scale [military] offensive [against Bolshevism] is impossible, a defensive strategy questionable, and a campaign of enlightenment and propaganda too late. Salvation can only be brought about by working to remove Bolshevism's root causes. Only thus can the Bolshevik ideal as envisioned by utopians lose its appeal among the broader masses....The struggle against, or perhaps, more accurately, the cure for Bolshevism can only be achieved through the reconstruction of Russian economic life.⁵

Germany would undertake substantive economic relations in the hopes of returning capitalism to Russia while enjoying the benefits of exchange. By spring 1921, Berlin, both inside and outside of the Wilhelmstrasse, had come to adopt Graap's analysis.⁶ Trade policy had a decidedly ideological tone.

Germany and the USSR were extremely short of hard currency needed for trade. Military materials and training were limited at best. Britain and France pressed demands for reparations payments. On May 6, 1921, the day after an allied ultimatum to Germany threatening sanctions in the event of non-compliance with treaty obligations, Germany and Russia signed a trade agreement. This action had far-reaching implications. Weimar Germany expressly recognized the Soviet government as the legitimate power in the former Czarist Empire. The new Bolshevik

system would now interact with capitalist powers. This arrangement provided the impetus for substantive interaction between the two nations: economic and military connections. Germany had to extricate itself from the shackles of Versailles and the Red Army sought German military expertise. Before the formal conclusion of the trade agreement, on April 7, 1921, Victor Kopp, the Soviet representative in Berlin, reported to Trotsky with copies to Lenin and Chicherin, that a project had been worked out under which airplanes would be manufactured in Russia by Albatrosswerke, submarines by Blöhm and Voss, and guns and shells by Krupp. Kopp further suggested that a mission of five or six German technicians should go to Moscow for detailed discussions. Kopp demanded the highest secrecy. The German mission arrived in early summer 1921. Results were mixed, but a front company appeared in Berlin under the names of Gesellschaft zur Förderung gewerblicher Unternehmungen. It acted as a cover on behalf of the Reichwehr and of German firms for illicit arms transactions with the USSR.⁷ In an article in 1922, Leonid Krasnin, Commissar of Foreign Trade, bluntly discussed the economic positions of Germany and the USSR, while including a historical perspective. In this position, Krasnin echoed Lenin's speech of November, 1920 to the eighth All Russian Congress of Soviets⁸:

Russia and Germany, to judge by their former economic relations, were so to speak, made for each other... None of the western European countries has such experience of working with Russia or such profound and exact knowledge of all conditions in our country as Germany. Hundreds of thousands of Germans used to live in Russia before the war; many of them are complete masters of the Russian language, and have the most extensive personal connections throughout the length and breadth of Russia. Finally our whole civilization, in particular our technical development, industry, and trade, have been based for decades past mainly on work done in partnership with Germany, and it is easier for the Russian industrialist, merchant, and even worker to get on with the German than with any other foreigner.⁹

Because “none of the western European countries has such experience of working with Russia or such profound and exact knowledge of all conditions in our country as Germany,” economic ties would soon lead to political cooperation.

Russia was a vast market with unlimited potential for the western nations. With the financial uncertainty of the 1920s, Germany, Britain, and France all recognized the possibilities of substantive economic relations. Each also wanted to block the others from dominating the Russian business landscape. Diplomacy took on a decidedly negative tone and this “preventative” status would dominate the interaction between Europe and Russia until the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 23, 1939. The race for the Russian market was on. Diplomacy now existed as a catalyst for western economic penetration of the Bolshevik state.

In the 1920s, France and Germany sought carefully to exploit the Russian economy, but with each nation serving as a buffer for the other. Neither France nor Germany had the resolve to go it alone in relations with Russia. The Comintern’s threats of world revolution caused extreme fear in Paris and Berlin. The Third Republic and Weimar Germany both faced extensive economic pressures after the First World War and each looked to Russia for relief. In the mid-1920s the franc collapsed on world markets and French politicians scrambled to re-establish fiscal stability. French business needed new markets and ventured eastward. As mentioned above, in the words of the Soviet trade representative, “Russia and Germany were made for each other.” Especially during the New Economic policy, the Soviet Union employed capitalist practices in an attempt to stabilize its economy and establish political order making it attractive for western investors.¹⁰ Each nation had its own agenda, however, concerning the USSR.

France was divided in its policy between the Foreign Office, the Finance Office, and private business interests. The French Government disliked the huge trade deficits which the USSR accumulated in the early 1920s and the Soviets' delay in implementing a repayment plan. France demanded recognition of the Czarist debts and the sanctity of contract in international business agreements.¹¹ France had won the war and it wanted economic security in its dealings with the USSR.

Germany saw a different Russia. By the end of 1921, the Wilhelmstrasse had already concluded trade talks and an economic agreement arrangement with the USSR. Herbert von Dirksen, then Chief of the eastern European division of the foreign office, in a memorandum of July 19, 1927, concluded that the German government, despite the Comintern, hated Versailles more than it feared Communism. Because both Germany and the Soviet Union wanted to revise Versailles, they had a common point of reference, and Germany regarded Russia as a "necessary evil" to counterbalance France and Great Britain as well as to limit the effects of Versailles.¹² Because substantive trade relations continued during periods of communist agitation in Germany, "Even Soviet complicity in an abortive Communist rising in 1923 did not disturb German policy. In fact, stern repression of the 1923 putsch gave the German government confidence that it could trade with the Communists in Russia, while safely shooting them at home."¹³ Furthermore, as a result of secret talks concerning military collaboration in 1921 and 1922, the German army operated three military bases in the Soviet Union beyond the reach of Versailles and the Weimar government sought economic stabilization in Russia in order to enhance its own military expansion. According to George Kennan, the two nations entered into a military relationship "for reasons of the coolest expediency: by the Germans, because it [the

collaboration] enabled them to evade some of the restrictions imposed by Versailles on their rearmament; by the Russians, because it permitted them to get German help in rebuilding the new Red army.”¹⁴ Unfortunately George Stein reports that specifics concerning Russo-German military cooperation remain difficult to re-construct because the Reichswehr destroyed the primary military documents for security reasons. In the German diplomatic dispatches, however, Red Army leaders evidenced a deep respect for German military methods. Additionally, primary source material dealing with German technical assistance is virtually non-existent.¹⁵

As was the case in most western nations, the goals of the German Finance and Foreign Offices often conflicted, leading to an inconsistent and duplicitous policy toward the Soviet Union. The German diplomats wanted all of the benefits of Soviet trade with none of the political risks. These two offices, in particular, evaluated the results of the Communist revolution through different prisms. The Weimar Government had to improve the economic conditions in Germany if it had any hope of survival. This fact meant that if trade was indeed necessary with Bolshevik Russia, so be it. German business did not care where its capital came from. German diplomats, on the other hand, feared the “infection” of Communism and advocated a more restrained position.

With Lenin’s New Economic Policy and a Soviet-German agreement in May 1921 regarding the repatriation of prisoners and the establishment of official missions, communist Russia seemed to be well on the way to economic, and as the Germans predicted, political “evolution.” Ago von Maltzan, director of the Russian Desk at the Wilhelmstrasse, sensed a definite shift in Soviet policy:

Along with Lenin, [the Commissar of Foreign trade Leonid] Krasin is an advocate of a moderate form of Bolshevism, leans toward a policy of evolution and prefers the new

principle of state capitalism to that of communism. Such policies...have gained a great deal of influence in Moscow. The practical results of these policies would mean the reintroduction of trade, a closer approximation of the capitalism of the western states, the granting of concessions, and exceptions regarding private property and the acquisitions of foreigners in Russia.¹⁶

Maltzan optimistically reported that these reforms would lead to a re-adaptation to the economic systems of non-Bolshevik nations.¹⁷ While he cautioned against “exaggerated hopes,” he argued that recent developments could offer “considerable prospects for the future.”¹⁸ Expectations were high in Weimar Germany as 1922 dawned.

In the face of tremendous obstacles, the Weimar government attempted to bring order to a tattered and defeated Germany. The new system needed recognition and a place in the world community. It had to prove somehow that it indeed could do what to the west (and to many within Germany) seemed impossible: re-build the greatness of Germany within a full-fledged democratic model. In this endeavor Weimar Germany had something in common with Soviet Russia. Each was struggling for existence. Because England and France ostracized both nations and demanded payments for debts, the two newest states looked to each other for support. Both sought international recognition in order to construct domestic stability. Each suffered severe economic dislocation. Germany and Russia felt isolated in an increasingly hostile world and they strove for diplomatic attention. Each waited for the proper moment. The moment arrived in 1922.

RAPALLO

An international conference convened in the Italian city of Genoa to discuss the European economic situation, and, specifically, the issue of Czarist debts owed to European nations, the inclusion of Russia in the process of European integration, and the question of German

reparations. French President Raymond Poincaré did not want to give the Germans the opportunity to debate the reparations issue. The conference was left with the sole problem of Russia.¹⁹

Foreign Minister Chicherin led the Soviet delegation. Genoa represented the first time that a Soviet representative had appeared at a major international gathering. Chicherin made the most of the opportunity. He had to convince the western powers of the Moscow's peaceful intentions. He chose his words carefully. The communist government sought substantive ties to the capitalist powers freed from ideological constraints. Britain and France demanded substantial concessions from the Bolshevik government despite its rather weak economy. The Soviet delegates responded with detailed counter arguments and evidence illustrating the suffering and damages which the World War visited on Russia. Russia wanted to reduce any debts. After all, as Chicherin asserted,

As for Russia, her war losses were greater than those of any other country: she accounted for 54 per cent of the Entente's losses. The Russian Government spent 20,000 million gold rubles on the war, the profits from which went exclusively to the other side. That is why when speaking of war debts it should be borne in mind that our [Russian] counter-claims are far in excess of the amount of war debts.²⁰

In his address to the delegates at Genoa, he explained the importance of mutual recognition and of economic interdependence despite political differences. Communist and capitalist must interact peacefully for the common benefit. He explained that "in the first place, the Russian delegation wish to state that they have come here in the interests of peace and of the general reconstruction of the economic life of Europe..." While the Moscow was not abandoning its "communist principles...economic collaboration between the States representing these two systems of property is imperatively necessary for the general economic reconstruction."²¹

Chicherin skillfully laid out Russia's case and its economic status. He attempted to allay the fears of the still uncertain western powers. As the Foreign Commissar explained, the Soviets were acting, not out of blind self interest, but in the spirit of good faith cooperation. He asserted that "the problem of universal economic reconstruction is, in present conditions, so immense and comprehensive that it can only be solved if all countries, both European and non-European, sincerely desire to co-ordinate their efforts..." Chicherin then outlined Russia's philosophy on peaceful relations and the avoidance of war. The Foreign Office looked forward to proposing its own ideas for stability. It wanted to be a part of the international conversation seeking:

To support every proposal designed to lighten the burden of militarism, on condition that this limitation is applied to the armies of all countries, and that the rules of war are supplemented by the absolute prohibition of its most barbarous forms, such as poison gas, aerial warfare, etc.,²² and in particular the use of means of destruction against peaceful populations.

Chicherin concluded that Moscow welcomed the opportunity to play its part in the new order and reminded his audience that "[we] are prepared to support all proposals of a progressive nature made by other countries."²³ The Soviet position was clear. Chicherin was re-asserting Lenin's peace principles from 1917. In the Soviet view, common diplomatic action could block the outbreak of any conflict.

Casting aside these rational arguments, the wartime allies wanted re-payment of their lost investments. Quickly, the conference split and the Soviets began to look elsewhere for binding alliances in order to maintain at least some position in diplomatic discussions. The Soviets could not afford international isolation lest the allies turn on the Soviet state in its time of economic dislocation. Weimar Germany provided the perfect partner because the conference had ignored German concerns over reparations. The Soviets shared this German isolation. The German-

Soviet delegations decided to meet at the nearby village of Rapallo where the Russian diplomats resided for the conference. As would occur in 1939, the anti-Soviet policies of Britain and France left Germany and Russia little alternative; they forced the anti-Versailles powers together.

Friedrich Ebert, the German President, looked westward while a powerful coalition of “Easterners” emerged in the Foreign Office. Even Ebert soon realized that the wartime allies had little interest in Germany or its recovery. The Germans sought compromise, “Three times in that first week of the conference, Rathneau asked for an appointment with Lloyd George. The German Chancellor made the same request. None of these requests was granted—a fact which in itself was a signal discourtesy.”²⁴ As both Russia and Germany stood outside the substantive discussions at Genoa, representatives from both sides decided to explore mutual interests. Ebert followed the diplomatic correspondence closely and reluctantly supported an agreement. He had little choice. The delegations worked long into the night and early morning of April 16, 1922, Easter Sunday. Resurrection for the dispossessed was at hand.

Although the British and French would later claim German-Soviet duplicity, in fact, the Germans attempted to inform the English of their plans:

At five o’clock in the morning, therefore, word was sent to the Russians that the Germans were willing to talk. Two attempts were made, in the early morning hours, to get in touch with Mr. Wise [advisor to Lloyd George] and to let the British know of the German decision. On the first occasion word came back that Mr. Wise was asleep and could not be disturbed. The second time a chilly voice answered that the gentleman has gone out of town for the day, and could not be reached.²⁵

British representatives were uninterested in the German position. German diplomats did not attempt to hide or disguise their intentions, trying instead to inform the British in the hopes of moving the discussions in a substantive direction. A German-Soviet meeting did not arouse British curiosity.

Despite, or possibly because of, the rebuke of the English delegation, Bolshevik Russia and Weimar Germany concluded the Rapallo Treaty. The agreement provided for the resumption of diplomatic and consular relations between the parties, the renunciation of claims, and most favored nation trade status. The Soviet Union received *de jure* recognition. Republican Germany became a substantive player on the world stage, despite its dire economic situation, because Russia's vast trade potential was now open to German business. No longer could the western powers discount Germany and Russia. In addition to the diplomatic articles, each party agreed "to co-operate in a spirit of mutual goodwill in meeting the economic needs of both countries." The treaty restored hope to the tattered nations and opened the potential for far reaching agreements. With the western economies struggling, Germany and the Soviet Union formed a powerful bloc. Although important, and contrary to popular belief, a military accord allowing German tank, air and chemical officers to train in the Soviet Union in order to avoid the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty, was not part of the Rapallo agreement, but resulted from secret conversations in 1921 and 1922. This military arrangement developed for reasons of necessity for both nations quite apart from political considerations.²⁶ In any case, both political and military ties bound the two states together in a deep spirit of understanding despite the ideological differences. Each complemented the other as a force in international relations.

AFTER RAPALLO

When the pact became public, France and Great Britain were incensed. Before leaving Italy, Lloyd George inquired of the Germans why they had not informed him of the negotiations. The Germans replied calmly that they had indeed attempted to contact his advisor, Mr. Wise. As George Kennan relates, "Lloyd George's reply to this argument stands as a classic example of

the political art: ‘Who’ he asked with ruffled brow, ‘is Mr. Wise.’”²⁷ Lloyd George did not even know the name of his own advisor. Unfortunately, such narrow- minded incompetence would become characteristic of the English foreign office in the 1920s and 1930s. The elitism was palpable.

Chicherin worked to spread the Soviet position of peace and cooperation. He would speak to anyone who would listen. The intensity of Soviet diplomacy illustrated its position of European stability and the avoidance of conflict. Chicherin deftly explained the impact of Rapallo in an interview with the London *Observer* on August 13, 1922:

All I can say is that Russia needs money and technical equipments too, and these last she can best obtain from Germany, whose engineers, in my opinion, have been those to show the most initiative when setting up plant and industries in a foreign country. But the money Russia is willing to take from anybody who will befriend her. France is suffering from an illogical psychology. Hostile to both Russia and Germany, what is more natural than that the two should be driven into one another's arms?

He continued and repeated the consistent line of Soviet foreign policy. “Russia” declared the People’s Commissar, “Desires peace, and an offensive is the last thing in the world entering our minds at present.” However, he warned that, “This menace to universal peace is a very real one indeed, necessitating constant watchfulness. . .”²⁸ Chicherin severely attacked French policy towards Russia in another *Observer* interview on August 20. He made it clear that it would be a mistake to underestimate the power of the Soviet Union. Russia remained a force in international politics. While the USSR “needs economic collaboration with other countries... we can afford to wait... Russia suffers as well as the whole continent from the aggressive policy of French imperialism. . .”²⁹ Although the USSR sought partners in its quest for peace, Chicherin was clear that the Soviet Union would be nobody’s fool.

Although Rapallo was a bright light for both states in the darkness of the early 1920s, the stability for Germany was still far away. Partly because of the allied demand for reparations and other fiscal limitations, because the war had been financed “off the books”, and the German government insisted on paying striking workers in the Ruhr, inflation wracked Germany in 1923; France and Belgium invaded the Ruhr causing further economic dislocation, the mark was trading at one trillion to the dollar, radical political parties fought each other in the streets. The new Republic was torn from the right and the left. In November, 1923, a small Bavarian radical group, the National Socialist German Worker’s Party, attempted to seize power while Bavarian separatists sought to establish a new state. In Saxony and Thuringia, Socialists and communists rose against the local governments. A mood of uncertainty permeated German society. Weimar foreign policy faced tremendous domestic challenges.

While Franco-German antagonism continued, by 1924 cooler heads prevailed across this wide divide in the persons of Gustav Stresemann and Aristide Briand. In Soviet eyes, Germany seemed to adopt a western orientation, particularly because the Weimar Republic seemed to be under the economic domination of the United States with the Dawes Plan. With Stresemann’s conciliatory policy toward France, Soviet uneasiness increased. The always suspicious Soviets now feared a western alliance, including Germany, directed against the Soviet Union. Stresemann would carefully steer German policy on a middle path without destroying the Russian connection.

Perhaps the new Republic had found a substantive and less dangerous partner. As the talks in Genoa and Rapallo illustrated, Germany was luring its eastern friend into the western

camp of capitalist states. Herbert von Dirksen, who served in the Eastern Section from 1925-1928 and then as Ambassador to Russia from 1928-1933, echoed Maltzan's assessment:

German policy toward Bolshevik Russia consisted and consists of the efforts to establish and then constantly intensify political, economic and cultural relations with Soviet Russia and thereby gradually to moderate the revolutionary and subversive tendencies of the Soviet government and bring it closer to the West.³⁰

Stresemann also recognized the value of the USSR as well as its threats. He advocated a cautious but direct approach:

We have carried on credit negotiations with Russia and are involved in active trade with Russia, not only because we need this, but because I am of the opinion that it is necessary to so bind up the Russian economy with the capitalist system of the Western European powers that we thereby pave the way for an evolution in Russia which in my opinion presents the only possibility of creating a state and an economy out of Soviet Russia with which we can live.³¹

Both the Dirksen and Stresemann recognized the potential of close economic relations with the USSR. Both hoped to create the fiscal pre-conditions for a more moderate Soviet Union.

Economic evolution continued in 1922 and 1923 as Lenin's NEP took shape and stabilized the foundations of the Soviet economy. Peasants and workers were motivated by the lure of profit, even if it was to be minimal. With Lenin's illness and death in early 1924, economic flexibility dissipated. A power struggle ensued in the Kremlin. Russia looked inward and old fears of the west re-emerged. In Berlin, the Wilhelmstrasse began to re-assess the implications of the NEP and whether it was leading the USSR away from Communism. Further complicating relations, German police raided the Soviet Trade mission in Berlin. By early 1924, trade with the USSR seemed anything but hopeful. During 1923, German exports to the Soviet Union constituted only 1.2 per cent of total German exports; German imports from the USSR accounted for only 2.4 per cent of total imports. By late 1924, trade with Germany quickly

declined, economic treaty negotiations were broken off, and a mutual distrust permeated relations.³²

Erich Wallroth, head of the Eastern Section, became convinced that Lenin's death marked a turning point in Soviet economic and political expansion. In a detailed memorandum entitled "Russia at the Crossroads", he predicted that the first half of 1924 would clarify Russia's "evolution":

Over the course of the next six months one will be able to ascertain whether the present Soviet regime will end up in a hopeless dead end or whether perhaps under Trotsky's leadership or that of other determined, reform-minded communists the Soviet government will yet come to its senses.³³

Unfortunately, no "reform-minded communist" entered the arena to continue Russia's movement to the west. Instead of Trotsky, Joseph Stalin would emerge as Lenin's successor. He quickly set out to quickly destroy all remnants of the NEP and thereafter established a rigid and brutal dictatorship. The Soviet economy went from the New Economic policy to a type of forced grain requisition. From the euphoria of the early 1920s, Wallroth soon realized that the "evolution" just would not occur; the Weimar government must change course in its relations with the Soviet Union. He expressed these views in another memorandum in late 1924:

This important prerequisite [Russia's evolution from communism to capitalism] seemed at that time (i.e. the signing of the treaty of Rapallo) to be altogether the case, because at the Moscow Communist Party Congress of December 1921(sic) Lenin had successfully put the entire weight of his forceful personality behind the New Economic Policy...the beginnings of German-Russian co-operation in economic reconstruction glimmered at that time on the eastern sky of a promising new dawn both economically and to a large and fundamental extent politically, in all of these hopes Russia has proved a bitter disappointment.³⁴

While "disappointed," the Weimar Republic could not afford to sever ties completely with the Soviet Union.

Most of the diplomats and economic experts in the Wilhelmstrasse agreed with Wallroth's assessment while German-Russian relations bent but did not break. Russia's economic and political "evolution" simply did not occur. Russia remained an important component of Weimar foreign policy, but with complications. Germany now viewed Russia with great trepidation and distrust. This was not an atmosphere in which to develop substantive relations. Russia realized its possible isolation and continued its policy of a western orientation, at least in foreign policy. The Soviets did not want Germany drawn exclusively into the western orbit as negotiations opened in early 1925 leading to the Treaty of Locarno. Chicherin reported to the All-Union Congress of Soviets in May, 1925, that "If the pact of guarantee with the western Powers should be put into operation...if Germany should enter the League of Nations," then Germany will "find itself in a position which will make it scarcely possible to continue, at least in the same degree as hitherto, the relations established between us."³⁵ Despite the Soviet concerns, the USSR understood that it had to be politically flexible in order to survive.

Although the United States Senate had refused to ratify the treaty of Versailles, the United States introduced the Dawes plan in late 1923 and the German market began to stabilize by early 1924. Until the outbreak of the Great Depression, Stresemann's policy proved successful. Under the provisions of the Dawes plan, an American economic expert could modify reparations if the German economy faltered. Germany gained a protector in the United States. As U.S. investment increased, the voices of radical revolution dimmed as Germans returned to work, invested money, and came to support the teetering democracy. They came to believe that Gustav Stresemann would re-direct German foreign policy and restore the once shattered nation to world prominence.

GERMANY AND THE WEST

As Franco-German relations slowly improved in 1924, both nations sought to establish a *détente*. In early January, 1925, the German Foreign Office circulated a memorandum suggesting a border settlement in the west, guaranteed by Italy and England, and arbitration agreements in the east with no specific finality concerning the boundaries of Poland. The eastern territories remained a point of contention with possible revision at a later date. In this way, Germany would appear peaceful and conciliatory to the western powers, while keeping the hope of eastern revision alive. Both Britain, which by 1925 had already begun to doubt the wisdom of the Versailles policy toward Germany, and France, had received the memorandum with interest. Briand and Austen Chamberlain, the British Foreign Secretary, were skeptical however, of a long term settlement and both wanted further guarantees for Poland. Chamberlain was quite enthusiastic about the prospects of German recognition of at least a part of the Versailles Treaty. Briand amended the German plan with a demand that Germany join the League of Nations as a great power. Briand was not becoming a German patriot; he wanted the provisions of the League Covenant to apply to Germany, making Germany a tool of the league and subject to League control.

Stresemann understood Briand's intent and deftly maneuvered the powers to exempt Germany from the military provisions of the League Covenant because of Germany's weakened armaments position. Stresemann realized that he had to walk a fine line, both at home and abroad. He could not appear to be relinquishing revision of the hated Treaty of Versailles while acquiring western support for his policies. He clearly understood the political value of cooperation, especially, peaceful relations with the west, at least to a degree. He explained to his

domestic critics that Germany could not exist solely on the basis of hatred of Versailles. While in May, 1919, he referred to the treaty as “a moral, political and economic death sentence,” he now understood that Weimar Germany must subtly “revise” the harsh provisions of the treaty while working through diplomatic channels.³⁶ The Republic had to enter the world arena in order to modify it over time. With western support, Germany could continue to discuss possible revision of the border with Poland. This new arrangement would at least buy time for Germany to make its case as a European power. He would not compromise on the eastern border with Poland, which he referred to as “unpolitical and oppressive.”³⁷

Stresemann was caught between support for and revision of Versailles. While the USSR remained skeptical concerning German intentions, Stresemann was careful to maintain close contact with the Soviets. Germany concluded a commercial treaty on October 2, 1925 and followed up with a railway convention, a navigation convention and an agreement on taxation signed in Moscow on October 12, 1925. After some rather tense negotiations between Britain, France, and Germany, the parties signed the treaties of Locarno on October 16, 1925. The western powers further agreed that the provisions of the agreement would come into force only when Germany entered the League of Nations as a great power with a seat on the League Council, which it did in 1926. This breakthrough, “the Spirit of Locarno,” which cost Germany nothing, was a major component of Stresemann’s policy.

In a mere six years from the humiliation of Versailles, Germany had now regained a substantive place on the world stage with a seat at the table as an equal partner. Germany now had diplomatic recognition in the east and west. With the Dawes plan in full swing, Stresemann turned his attention to economic interaction with Russia. Although he clearly favored a

Westorientierung, he did not want to destroy the Soviet connection. He feared the reach and threat of Bolshevism and hoped that western support would lessen Germany's need to look to the east. As most western statesmen, he simply distrusted and detested the Soviet Union. He felt that Bolshevism constituted a fundamental and long term threat to western stability. He cautioned against entrance into the Soviet orbit.

We should avoid the utopia of flirting with bolshevism. When the Russians are in Berlin, the red flag will at once fly over the palace and in Russia, where they want world revolution, they will be quite content to have bolshevized Europe as far as the Elbe and they will leave the rest of Germany to be devoured by the French.³⁸

While Germany should not “flirt” with Bolshevism, Stresemann could not ignore the position of Russia as a base for stability in foreign affairs. “Russia”, he asserted in the Reichstag on the eve of the arrival of the Soviet delegation on its way to Genoa, should not be treated “as a colony for international capital to exploit.” Further, Germany should not become “a member of an international consortium economically hostile to her.”³⁹ The USSR, Stresemann acknowledged, was not going away, and in his view substantive diplomatic relations would make for a better policy than confrontation. Like Bismarck, Stresemann could keep his hand on the diplomatic pulse if Germany and the USSR aligned. The Soviet Union should not become a free agent in the world community.

TREATY OF BERLIN

Stresemann and the Foreign Office allayed Soviet fears of an anti-Communist western alliance with the conclusion of the Treaty of Berlin, signed on April 24, 1926. The treaty contained a guarantee of neutrality in the event of a war between the Soviet Union and a third party despite the “peaceful behavior” of the USSR. In addition, Germany agreed not to join an

economic boycott of the Soviet Union. Finally, Germany succeeded in avoiding sanctions against a third party (Russia) as long as it was disarmed.⁴⁰ The Soviets did not need to fear a hostile Germany entangled in the legal requirements of the League of Nations. The Soviet foreign ministry was satisfied with the arrangements and tried to deepen economic relations. Germany, though taking a decidedly western path, could not afford to alienate a powerful nation with the potential of the Soviet Union.

After the treaty of Berlin, German foreign policy steered a course between *Ausschaltung* (exclusion) and *Alleinbleiben* (isolation). German fears centered, on the one hand, a Russia drawn into a western orbit through alliances with Poland and France, and, on the other hand, a Germany drawn into Russia's isolation. The Berlin treaty represented the median point in German relations with the Soviet Union. The mechanism for the implementation of this policy was the so-called "Schlesinger Line," named for the German Foreign Ministry's expert on trade and financial relations with the USSR, Moritz Schlesinger. A group of private German banks granted the Soviet State Bank a short-term financial credit of 100 million marks in October 1925. The German cabinet followed this gesture, approving a long-term credit of 300 million marks in February 1926. Although private German funds accounted for the credit, both the Reich and Länder governments agreed to guarantee 60 per cent of the credit against default.⁴¹ This credit was to form the basis of political negotiations between Moscow and Berlin.

For Schlesinger, economic interaction was the most important factor in German-Soviet relations. Both states could benefit from close financial connections and Germany could monitor Soviet policy and guide the USSR away from the western camp. Germany must support the stability of the USSR as its major eastern ally and trading partner. Schlesinger's method was the

extension of German credits to the Soviet Union. Germany would become the USSR's middleman.⁴² Thus, he was binding together both economic and political partnerships.

In late 1929, Weimar-Soviet relations underwent a test during the "Colonist" crisis involving German-speaking Mennonites inside the Soviet Union. These peasants reacted to forced collectivization by leaving their traditional lands and moving to Moscow seeking permission to leave the country. Initially, they sought to immigrate to Canada, but Canadian officials resisted the influx of such a large group. The Weimar government offered to allow these people into Germany. Initially, the USSR allowed the Mennonites to leave for Germany quickly, but then reversed this decision. Tensions mounted and the German press took an anti-Soviet tone. Finally, in late November, the USSR allowed about 5,600 to leave for Germany.⁴³

In the early 1930s, the Comintern and the KPD increased pressure for upheaval in Germany. These calls for action, largely limited to rhetoric, strained the economic ties between the two states. German industrialists demanded increased trade while diplomats sought to smooth the anti-soviet press. Continuing military contacts became more important. The Reichswehr had just entered a new phase in its rearmament program. At a contentious cabinet session on February 20, 1930, Reichswehr Minister Wilhelm Groener underscored the importance of the military interests, "Only relations with Russia give the army the opportunity to familiarize itself with the most modern weapons and to keep abreast of manufacturing processes."⁴⁴

While German-Soviet relations stabilized in the early 1930s, internal pressures threatened the fabric of the Weimar Republic. The western financial collapse destroyed the fragile German economy. Germany's dependence on American capital was now a hindrance to recovery as U.S. funds no longer flowed into the Weimar economy. In fact, they were being pulled out after the

stock market crash of October, 1929. Radical voices all along the political spectrum emerged with renewed vigor. Weimar politicians seemed helpless against the rising tide of revolution. One group in particular, the radically anti-Soviet National Socialist German Worker's Party, felt that the time was ripe for electoral victory and eventually the seizure of power. Weimar diplomats, even after the death of Stresemann, attempted to continue his legacy of a balanced east-west policy. With the worldwide depression deepening, Soviet foreign policy now faced its greatest threat.

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CHAPTER THREE: EVERYTHING CHANGES: HITLER IN POWER

On January 30, 1933, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor of the German nation. Initially, the government of the Soviet Union welcomed this change in the German leadership. Even before his appointment as Chancellor, *Pravda* asserted that extreme fascist terror would merely serve to sharpen the class struggle and the growth of the KPD.¹ In early 1933, *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional* announced that, “Hitler’s rise to power hastens the revolutionary crisis.”² Some communist theorists, such as Karl Radek, predicted that Hitler’s election represented the first step toward the proletarian revolution in Germany;³ others in Russia preferred Hitler over Franz von Papen, Chancellor from June to December 1932, who was a staunch anti-communist and a supporter of closer ties with France.⁴ The Soviets had read *Mein Kampf* but felt that it was aimed at a domestic audience for internal political consumption.⁵ In any case, the Soviets believed that Hitler could not last long owing to the domestic difficulties plaguing Germany at the time.⁶ This early optimism soon faded as Hitler and the National Socialist government pursued a narrow-minded, dogmatic, and inflexible policy of conflict and confrontation with the Soviet Union and world communism.

In this chapter I will argue that the Nazi regime effectively destroyed a substantive and viable relationship with the USSR in the name of doctrinal purity while the Soviet Union continued to practice its policy of collective security in seeking to avoid conflict of any kind. The USSR showed itself the more flexible partner in the face of ever-increasing German pressures. The Soviet Union then became an international voice for the containment of fascism within the European diplomatic system. Hitler succeeded in forcing a shift in Soviet revolutionary policy from confrontation to conciliation. England and France refused to heed the USSR’s warnings at a

time when Hitler's revolution was still somewhat weak. Hitler would quickly put the Soviet position to the test.

HITLER'S ANTI-SOVIET ACTIONS

As the self proclaimed bulwark against Bolshevism,⁷ Hitler ignored the economic and political linkages that had been forged between Germany and the Soviet Union during the Weimar era. After the conclusion of the Berlin treaty the German military, limited by the treaty of Versailles to a professional army of only 100,000 and deprived of an air force, had continued the substantive relationship with the Red Army formed in 1921, whereby German soldiers and airmen trained in the Soviet Union, to the benefit of both parties.⁸

But Hitler had clearly explained his Eastern Policy in *Mein Kampf*, his political manifesto, written while imprisoned after the failed *Putsch* of November 1923:

If land was desired in Europe, it could be obtained by and large only at the expense of Russia, and this meant that the new Reich must again set itself on the march along the road of the Teutonic Knights of old, to obtain by the German sword sod for the German plow and daily bread for the nation.⁹

Later, in the famous Chapter XIV dealing specifically with his eastern orientation, Hitler was more specific, "if we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only *Russia* and her vassal *border* states."¹⁰ The Soviet Union remained his primary objective; only in the vast regions of the Soviet empire could he obtain "daily bread for the nation." Because his ideology was vehemently anti-slavic, he had to apply it to all aspects of his party.

Hitler predicted the collapse of Bolshevism in the Soviet Union because the communists deprived Russia of the German minds that organized and built the Russian state system. In addition, Judaism had infected the Slavic spirit and made it "impossible for the Russian by himself to shake off the yoke of the Jew by his own resources [and] it is equally impossible for

the Jew to maintain the mighty empire forever. He himself is no element of organization, but a ferment of decomposition.”¹¹ “Jewish-Bolshevism” was the greatest threat to the German *Volk*, and this disease had to be eradicated.¹² Jews and Slavs were peoples “des Lebens unwürdiges Leben” (unworthy of life). He had no intention of modifying his anti-Russian, anticommunist stance after coming to power. He was going to move eastward; the only question was when.

War in 1933 was, of course, out of the question. Germany, at the time of Hitler’s *Machtergreifung*, was a deeply troubled nation. With the spread of the depression, unemployment and monetary instability were rampant, communism and socialism constant threats to his leadership. Germany needed stability, both at home and abroad. Hitler needed time to rearm and to defeat his internal enemies. He had to establish himself and his cabinet as responsible and capable leaders while turning his attention to the military up the army. He made it clear, at least superficially, that he wanted no change in policy toward Russia. Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, the German Foreign minister, informed Herbert von Dirksen, German Ambassador in Moscow, by cipher letter on February 22, 1933 (shortly before the Reichstag fire), that, in general discussions with Hitler, the Chancellor wanted to distinguish between the “internal treatment of communism and international relations with the USSR.” Hitler, reported the Foreign Minister “would allow no change to take place in the political, economic, and military policy with respect to Soviet Russia.”¹³ For that matter the Führer made few changes in the German Foreign Office after becoming Chancellor until the shake-up of early 1938.¹⁴ He wanted to establish a feeling of continuity in foreign relations while he dealt with Germany’s mounting domestic difficulties and prepared for future conflicts.

Hitler, like Stalin, was a radical who employed terror as a means of social control. For

Hitler, war was a necessary element of his policy, a war directed initially against Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As early as 1933, Hitler had started to move the Germany economy into a rearmament mode. In a cabinet meeting on June 8, 1933, the financial underpinnings of Nazi militarism took shape. The cabinet agreed that military spending was to be almost three times larger than the combined total of all the civilian work creation measures announced in 1932 and 1933.¹⁵ Hitler had to plan carefully this racial struggle against Jewish Bolshevism; he certainly could not move too early. He began to establish the economic and political superstructure in 1933. He first eliminated opposition parties, especially the KPD, after the Reichstag fire and the resulting emergency legislation. He then turned on the Sturmabteilung in order to win the loyalty of the regular army. *Pravda*, the official organ of the Communist party, saw “the Night of the Long Knives” as the beginning of the open class struggle in Germany. On July 1, 1934, the day after Hitler’s purge of his private army, *Pravda*, even predicted the long awaited proletarian victory in Germany as the result of Hitler’s terror:

On June 30, 1934, the fascist dictatorship itself admitted *the failure of its policy*. It again resorted to machine guns, but this time *against its own guard*. No other way remains to it, even if the shots fired in Berlin and in other large centers of Germany at the same time destroy the confidence which the broad strata of the petty bourgeoisie had reposed in the fascist regime...¹⁶

On July 2, 1934, *Pravda* kept up the journalistic offensive and detailed Nazi problems inside Germany:

*Fascism has shown itself to be the most deadly enemy of the petty bourgeoisie, whose hopes it exploited to the full in the struggle against the revolutionary proletariat. Considered from this standpoint, the events of June 30 represent the biggest defeat of fascism, not only in Germany but also far beyond its frontiers.*¹⁷

Hitler’s terror had unleashed the power of the masses against Nazism, argued *Pravda*, and the

new regime had indeed constructed the foundations of its own demise. Hitler in a sense became a friend of the Soviet revolution and should not be bothered in his work of destroying Germany.

Despite *Pravda's* predictions, Hitler's personality would dominate the Nazi state and especially foreign policy. In Hitler's twisted mind, the National Socialist Movement faced dangerous enemies, both inside Germany and abroad. No matter the reality, for Hitler, the great menace was Russia and the Jews.¹⁸

DIPLOMATIC RESPONSES FROM THE WILHELMSTRASSE

In 1933, the German Foreign Office continued the Prussian tradition of professional diplomacy. At the time of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, Herbert von Dirksen was the German ambassador to the Soviet Union and had been since 1929. Dirksen was a career diplomat and deeply committed to his work. During his tenure in the Soviet Union, he had developed a deep respect for Russia and understood its value as a German ally. Dirksen had a successful career before the ascent of Hitler. He was one of the Foreign Office's most able diplomats, had been counsel general in Warsaw, spoke several languages fluently, and possessed a doctorate in law. Dirksen was a member of the DNVP (Deutschnationale Volkspartei) from its founding until its dissolution in 1933 when he then reluctantly joined the NSDAP in 1936. He was not an enthusiastic supporter of Hitler and distrusted the Nazi regime, but felt that good relations between Germany and Russia would continue and possibly improve because of "the strength of their mutual interests."¹⁹ He was able to put aside doctrinal differences and practice the subtle art of diplomacy. Hitler and the Nazi Foreign Office chose basically to ignore his rational suggestions.

On January 31, 1933, Dirksen reported to Bernhard von Bülow, the State Secretary for

Foreign Affairs, that the appointment of the Hitler-Papen (particularly Papen) cabinet caused "great uneasiness"²⁰ in the Soviet Union. He felt that he should return to Berlin to report to the new leaders and enhance his credibility with the Soviets.²¹ He explained his position to the State Secretary: because the Soviets knew that he "has no personal connections with the National Socialist party... it would therefore increase the effectiveness of my words and be important for my authority if I could speak on the basis of my own conference with those who are the leading persons at present."²² Bülow cabled Dirksen on February 6 and explained that, although he understood that there was "great unrest" in Moscow, he believed that the Soviets "overestimate there the importance in terms of foreign policy of the change of government. When they have the responsibility the National Socialists are naturally different people and pursue a different policy than they proclaimed before."²³ Bülow then rejected Dirksen's request that he return to Berlin because his visit "could arouse the impression that something is going on in our Russian policy..."²⁴ Bülow assured Dirksen that the diplomatic atmosphere was indeed stable. Bülow reported that "the situation here is much less tense than people abroad seem to suppose...at any rate, please do not let yourself be made uneasy or irritated in any way by any rumors which may circulate, even if they come from Berlin."²⁵ Bülow closed with an idiom, "es wird hier wie anders wo immer noch mit Wasser gekocht"²⁶ (Things are boiled in water here like anyplace else). The Nazi government had to keep up impressions; it did not want to arouse Soviet suspicions. Internal matters took precedence at this moment in 1933.

On February 20, 1933, in a political report to the Foreign Minister and the Chancellor, Dirksen asserted that the new government should announce its position publicly regarding German-Soviet relations.²⁷ The Soviet Union had recently concluded a non-aggression pact with

France, and Germany wanted no increase in French influence in Eastern Europe.²⁸ The Foreign Minister agreed, but this must not be done in such a way "as to give the impression that we [Germany] were anxiously pursuing the Russians."²⁹ As the Foreign Minister explained, good relations with Russia were not that important.

Dirksen was attempting to mediate a delicate situation: Soviet doubts about the German position resulting from the latter's official silence, and a Foreign Office in Germany falling under the increasing influence of the new leader. The ambassador was looking for a positive statement of German policy towards the Soviet Union to allay Soviet fears and stabilize relations.

Hitler responded to these suggestions with a speech on March 2, 1933 in the Sportpalast in Berlin, wherein he attacked the entire Marxist-Soviet system, identified Russia by name, and also made reference to the famine in Soviet Ukraine:

Has this Marxism there where it has secured a one hundred percent victory, where it is in fact and without exception supreme, in Russia, --has it there removed distress? It is precisely in Russia that facts speak with such devastating effect. Millions of men are starving in a land which could be a granary for the whole world. Millions of men are reduced to misery in a country that could today overflow with abundance³⁰

He continued with a criticism of Marxist goals:

Freedom? Where does there rule a greater oppression? Where is there a greater fear lest one who is not a member of the Party should have a glimpse of things as they are? Where is one in greater trepidation before every photographer, before every reporter than in the land of freedom and of equality?³¹

Now Dirksen and the Soviets had their public statement of the German position.

SOVIET REACTIONS

Soviet diplomats were quite incensed over the Führer's words. Nazi policy was becoming clear. Leo Khinchuk, the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin, lodged a formal protest with the Foreign Ministry over Hitler's remarks on March 7. Khinchuk asserted that the Führer's speech "contained extremely violent attacks on my country." He further argued that Hitler

“characterized the economic, social, and political system and the condition of the USSR in a contemptuous and offensive manner.”³² Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, replied that he saw no grounds for complaint. Neurath explained that in the Reich Chancellor’s speech “all expressions were aimed exclusively at German communists.”³³ (Remember, Hitler mentioned Russia by name.) Dirksen, in a meeting with Litvinov on March 11, 1933, explained to the Soviet Foreign Commissar that:

the Reich Chancellor in his radio address had expounded his views on the Bolshevik ideology in general and had occasionally referred to the Soviet Union for specific examples...the drastic action of the German police authorities against Soviet citizens and the German Communists in the employ of Soviet institutions has a ready explanation in the events of the past weeks and the uncovering of Communist acts of terrorism as well as other treasonable plans.³⁴

Soviet diplomats, instead of receiving reassurance by a conciliatory statement on German policy, were now more unsure than ever. Nikolay Krentinsky, the Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, in a meeting with Dirksen on March 20, 1933, asserted that “the Soviet public was very uneasy and uncertain over the future attitude of the Reich Government on Russian policy.”³⁵ At a time when words alone could have solved problems, Hitler chose to remain doctrinally consistent. Dirksen found himself in a difficult position; he sought a consistent policy towards the Soviet Union. Unfortunately he could not get a handle on Nazi intentions. In the best Prussian tradition of obedience to authority, the Foreign Office began a slow shift to the National Socialist ideology.³⁶

German attacks on the Soviets were not limited to words. Soviet journalists were banned from the opening of the Reichstag in March 1933. Because a “divine service”³⁷ opened the session, the Germans felt that the Soviets would not be present and therefore need not attend the regular Reichstag session. Krestinsky saw through the charade and told Dirksen that “The Soviet

Embassy had been told, in reply to representations it had made in the Foreign Ministry, that the representatives of the Soviet press had been barred from the opening session because of the tone they had used in recent weeks.”³⁸ Relations were quickly deteriorating as the German attitude grew more threatening.

In March 1933, S.A. men arrested and private citizens harassed Soviet nationals, searched and looted Soviet businesses and clubs, and occupied Soviet trade missions.³⁹ Litvinov complained sharply to Dirksen, who countered that these events should not become a political matter. Soviets, too, were abusing Germans in Russia without German protest. If Hitler feared internal communism, as he explained, continued attacks on Soviet individuals and business interests in Germany served no useful foreign policy purpose. These attacks only alienated the Soviets and strained a profitable economic relationship.

Hitler relaxed the tense atmosphere somewhat by his speech on March 23, 1933:

Toward the Soviet Union the Reich Government intends to cultivate friendly relations, advantageous to both parties. It is precisely the Government of the national revolution that finds itself in a position to pursue such a positive policy toward Soviet Russia. The fight on communism in Germany is our internal affair, in which we shall never tolerate interference from the outside. Political relations with other powers with which we are linked by important interests in common are not affected thereby.⁴⁰

This presentation cleared the air temporarily, but it was not to last. Hitler was assuring the USSR that his emphasis was on the KPD; he was not waging war on external communism.

Anti-Soviet actions continued in Germany after the speech. On April 1, the police searched the premises of the Soviet commercial mission in Leipzig. On April 3, Dirksen cabled the Foreign Ministry and reported on the attacks in the Soviet press concerning this incident.⁴¹ While the Soviet Union attempted to coordinate rhetoric and practice, in Hitler’s Germany, words and

actions were entirely different matters when it concerned the USSR.

In a private letter to State Secretary Bülow on April 4, Dirksen asserted that, "Developments of the past few days have led to a very serious crisis. The great tension which already existed here was temporarily relaxed as a result of the Chancellor's speech. The new incidents of recent days then filled the cup to overflowing."⁴² Dirksen, always attempting to solve problems and bring some sense of reality to the Foreign Office, demanded that the anti-soviet policy stop unless there are "really cogent reasons for it."⁴³ He requested that the searches and arrests cease and evidence be produced offering reasons for the raids. Dirksen maintained that the alternative could be devastating. "One thing is certain," he cabled, "If we do not reach a settlement, we must expect a conflict with the Soviet government, the consequences of which will be *very severe* in a political and economic respect."⁴⁴

Surprisingly, the Foreign Office agreed and instructed Dirksen to inform Litvinov that the Reich Government would look into police excesses and would allow Soviet businesses to operate without interference.⁴⁵ Dirksen remained optimistic that relations could be salvaged if German policies stabilized. However, German policy was too firmly entrenched in anti-Soviet ideology to undergo long term change and Nazi practice quickly reverted to anti-Soviet actions.

Shortly after carrying out his instructions and informing the Soviets that excesses would cease and Soviet business interests would be allowed to operate undisturbed, information that pleased the Soviets,⁴⁶ the German police searched the house of a Soviet trade representative. This incident outraged Dirksen, who cabled the State Secretary personally on April 14 and complained that, "The officers who conducted the search had behaved with extreme rudeness."⁴⁷ He continued, "Renewed police action contradicts the promises made by me to Litvinov by

direction of the Foreign Minister and serves to complicate the situation in so far as the police authorities seem this time to have disregarded diplomatic prerogatives established by treaty.”⁴⁸ This episode characterizes the shallow, shortsighted and contradictory attitude of the German political and foreign policy leadership towards the Soviet Union. The Nazi government chose to embarrass a career diplomat and contribute to the separation of the two nations. Career, diplomats, such as Dirksen, sought a positive and straight-forward Soviet policy; the Nazi officials both inside and outside of the Wilhelmstrasse, continued their assault on domestic communist influence.

German actions continued to upset the Soviets. Hitler, promising to receive Leo Khinchuk, the Soviet Ambassador, for a formal visit since March 7, did not do so until April 28.⁴⁹ At this meeting, Hitler informed the Soviet representative that “no change must occur in the friendly relations between the German Government and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics....both states had common enemies, and their economic interests were complementary in many ways.” Furthermore Hitler assured Khinchuk “that he was trying and would continue to try to order German-Russian relations on a permanently friendly basis.”⁵⁰ Perhaps the Reich Chancellor had forgotten the earlier anti-Soviet policies while in the presence of the Soviet ambassador. Hitler sought to maintain a modicum of contact with the USSR while dealing with domestic concerns.

In attacking the Soviet Union from all sides, the Nazis alienated a powerful ally. Dirksen asserted in an incisive, detailed political report of May 5, 1933 that the value of German Russian relations was to be found in their potential, not in their present state. Dirksen analyzed the positions of Russia and Germany in 1933 and looked to the future. As he stressed, substantive

relations with Russia remained in Germany's best interest. The Nazis should quickly moderate their attitude and actions. There was no reason to change course:

In German-Russian relations it was never the *present* ratio of strength that exerted a political effect with respect to third countries. The world has always been aware of the present weakness of Germany and of Russia. To this extent it has been entirely correct of speak of a Rapallo bluff. The strong positive political effect which the Rapallo policy has always had, despite this realization of the weakness of the two partners, lay in the realization of the *potential* strength of the two countries.⁵¹

Dirksen clearly understood the position of Soviet Russia and its value as an ally. He realized that it would take some time for the Soviet Union to manifest its position in world affairs, but that Germany could only benefit from continued close cooperation with such a potentially powerful ally.

But Dirksen could not halt the street violence and finally, in June 1933 the Soviet government retaliated. The three joint Russo-German military stations inside the Soviet Union were to be closed and dismantled.⁵² The intimate military cooperation, which served to rebuild the defeated German army after World War I, was now a casualty of the National Socialist anti-Soviet policy. What took years to develop, the new German government had destroyed in a matter of months. Additionally, the German army now lost a source of influence and intelligence. Hereafter, the Soviet military and its operations remained outside of German eyes. Perhaps more importantly, the atmosphere of trust and respect, built up during the Rapallo years of cooperation, was now nearly dissipated.

Again, Dirksen responded with a rational, sensible approach to the problem. In August he suggested that the German government take the initiative and approach the Soviets regarding a discussion of fundamental principles.⁵³ The Soviets themselves provided a perfect opportunity: Nikolay Krestinsky, the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, was

planning to visit Germany in September or October. Therefore, the Germans would not be 'running after the Russians'.⁵⁴ As in the past, Dirksen's suggestions went unheeded. The Foreign Office did not reply to his proposal.⁵⁵

Although the anti-Soviet incidents severely strained relations, hope remained for a *rapprochement*. At the farewell dinners for German military commanders leaving the Soviet Union, Red Army leaders expressed regret at the unfortunate turn of political events and hoped that the past cooperation could be re-established quickly.⁵⁶ However, it was now up to the Germans to show their good faith towards the Soviet Union by taking concrete initiatives toward the total normalization of relations.⁵⁷ The Soviet Union understood the value of Germany as an ally and hoped that the prior military cooperation would serve as the basis for a meaningful interaction. The Soviets now waited for the Germans to show their good faith.

On September 22, 1933, the Nazi government responded in characteristic fashion. Two Soviet journalists, who were denied permission to cover the Reichstag fire trial at Leipzig, as was the entire Soviet press corps, were arrested.⁵⁸ The Soviets reacted by lodging a protest the next day and requesting that all German journalists leave the USSR within three days.⁵⁹ Hitler explained that the Russian journalists could not possibly report the proceedings objectively, owing to their communist ideology. Therefore, they were not permitted to cover the trial. Instead the Russian press representatives were forced to rely on second and third hand information, increasing the possibility of distortion. On September 26, 1933, the Soviet Ambassador visited von Bülow and the two diplomats discussed the confusion caused by the Leipzig incident. Von Bülow reported that the Ambassador agreed to send his Counselor of the Embassy to Moscow "in order to bridge the present tension in some way or other."⁶⁰

As the German domestic situation quieted, Hitler paid more attention to the conduct of foreign affairs. Because the British would not agree to German partial re-armament and frustrated with the progress of the Geneva talks, in October 1933 he withdrew Germany from the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference.⁶¹ Rudolf Nadolny, a non-Nazi, replaced Dirksen as ambassador to Russia.⁶² Nadolny was a career civil servant who once served in the Reichspräsident's office in 1919 and later headed the German delegation to the Geneva Disarmament Conference. Dirksen became ambassador to Japan, and by his own admission, "was merely an observer."⁶³

Nadolny arrived in Moscow in November 1933 with instructions to "restore a better atmosphere" in German-Soviet relations.⁶⁴ The Foreign Office regarded Russia as a "valuable" ally and sought, at least officially, to re-establish close ties. However, it was now too late for mere words and promises. The Foreign Office had no intention of instigating substantive changes.

As Franco-Soviet relations warmed after the conclusion of the 1932 non-aggression pact, on December 20, 1933, the Soviet Politburo promulgated its proposals for collective security. The USSR wanted to reach out to the European nations in order to secure the balance of power and preserve the precarious peace after Hitler's *Machtergreifung* and the continuing anti-Soviet actions. The proposals contained conditions for Russia's entry into the League of Nations, the creation of a regional agreement concerning mutual defense from aggression on the part of Germany, and the compulsory participation of France and Poland. Further, the USSR demanded that:

Independently of the commitments under an agreement on mutual defense, the participants in the agreement must undertake to render each other diplomatic, moral and,

as far as possible, also material assistance in the event of a military attack not provided for in the agreement, and, in addition, to influence their press accordingly.⁶⁵

Litvinov explained the importance of the collective security policy in a speech to the Central Executive Committee on December 29. Notice that the People's Commissar was addressing his comrades in the party. If Soviet policy was a ruse, as the German school asserts, was he misleading his own colleagues? Seeking his own glory before the "Great Stalin?" Collective security was indeed the foundation of Soviet foreign policy. Litvinov began by outlining the parameters of Soviet foreign policy in the face of a quickly shifting landscape. He then asserted that Europe now stood "at the junction of two [diplomatic] eras." He then told his audience that the consequences of the present international climate had direct ramifications for the USSR. He argued that,

The responsibility resting on our diplomacy is great and is growing greater, for all or nearly all the international problems I have mentioned touch or may touch the interests of our Union... The guiding thread of our foreign policy has been put in Comrade Stalin's brief but expressive formula: We do not want any foreign land, but we shall not give up an inch of our own. Since we do not want foreign land, we cannot want war... That is why we shall not only continue but intensify our struggle for peace, which was and is the chief task of our diplomacy.⁶⁶

Litvinov explained the vital role of Soviet diplomacy in the overall stability of Europe; He specifically mentioned the example of treaty revision. The USSR must be concerned, Litvinov stated, that treaty revisions do not create greater problems than they are supposed to solve. Essentially, all international issues involved the Soviet Union. Litvinov further explained that the USSR did not exist in a vacuum; it was ready to enter into international arrangements designed to secure the peace:

The ensuring of peace cannot depend on our efforts alone; it requires the collaboration and co-operation of other States. While therefore trying to establish and maintain friendly relations with all States, we are giving special attention to strengthening and making more close our relations with those which, like us, give proof of their sincere

desire to maintain peace and are ready to resist those who break the peace. We have never rejected and do not reject organized international co-operation designed to consolidate peace.⁶⁷

Litvinov was again reaching out for international support in his peace initiatives. As he stated, “peace cannot depend on [Soviet] efforts alone.”⁶⁸

In the wake of this speech, while relations with fascist Italy and republican France improved, the new Nazi regime in Germany proved a bit more difficult. Before the Hitler revolution, as Litvinov explained “for ten years we have been bound to Germany by close economic and political relations... Germany held first place in our foreign trade. Enormous advantages, both for Germany and for us, followed from the political and economic relations established between us.” With the advent of the Hitler government, according to Litvinov, Soviet relations with Germany became “unrecognizable.” Still he asserted that the USSR has “no desire to expand to the West or to the East, or in any other direction. We bear no hostility to the German people...” He was not looking to pick a fight with anyone. Litvinov concluded by reminding his audience of the uncertain times while assuring them of the resolve of the Soviet Union. He did not want the Central Executive Committee to interpret his peace platform as a sign of weakness:

Since we are compelled to provide for our self-defense, we shall as before, and even more than before, continue to strengthen and improve the chief defense of our security, our Red Army, Red Navy, and Red Air Force. We shall bear in mind that, should the united efforts of the friends of peace fail, the attack on peace may be directed in the first instance against us.⁶⁹

Litvinov’s speech aroused considerable German attention and the new German ambassador reported to Berlin quickly thereafter.

Nadolny took his instructions to heart. If Hitler believed that the new ambassador was only to function as a messenger, he was soon to be quite surprised. In a long, detailed, and

insightful political report to the Foreign Office in January 1934 wherein he referred to Litvinov's speech of December 29, 1933, Nadolny recommended substantive changes in German foreign policy toward the Soviet Union, such as limiting support for Japan and suppressing the anti-Soviet German press. In his opinion, Russia was too valuable and powerful an ally to lose to such foolish German actions. Nadolny feared that Nazi actions were driving the Soviets into the French camp. Additionally Germany should exploit the economic benefits of Soviet commerce "in order to supplement and further our political intentions, we should consider measures in the economic field, particularly such as entail an intensification of German-Russian trade and which might particularly serve to document our confidence in the Soviet Government."⁷⁰

Nadolny was clear that there was no time for delay, "I would assume that if we take immediate energetic steps in this direction, we might still succeed in frustrating the intentions of Litvinov aimed at the inclusion of Soviet Russia in the French ring. If she overcomes her aversion to participation in a community of states, her importance may even increase. In these circumstances, we must do everything to prevent her going over to the other side."⁷¹ Nadolny saw no sense in continued confrontation with the Soviets over insignificant issues. Both he and Dirksen understood the potential power of the Soviet nation and the benefits of that power for Germany. The Nazi government was preoccupied with ideology and the historical conflict between Teuton and Slav.

Not surprisingly, the Foreign Office rejected Nadolny's proposals. Neurath replied that:

The attitude of the German government toward Russia has not changed in any way of late; it is ready for friendly relations in all areas, economic, political, and military. Thus it depends *solely* on the Russians whether and to what extent the former friendly relationship with Germany can be restored. Concrete offers and proposals in this respect on our part are out of the question at present.⁷²

Neurath continued with his instructions to Nadolny concerning German-Soviet relations. The Foreign Minister suggested that “no initiative be taken in conversations...about the German-Russian relationship,” but that “one await further developments in cool, self assured reserve.”⁷³ This rather narrow response illustrates a complete misunderstanding of Russia's value as an ally. Nadolny was not demanding that the Nazi government abandon its philosophical foundation; only that it treat the Soviet Union with the diplomatic formalities befitting a major power and former partner.

Nadolny, a diplomat in the Dirksen mold, requested that the Foreign Office re-examine his proposals.⁷⁴ This time von Bülow replied that Germany's "field of vision (and the scope of our worries) is larger, and consequently Moscow is less in the foreground for us."⁷⁵ Answering every Russian claim specifically would create a dangerous precedent for Russia and other nations. Russia was important, but not overly so. Bülow felt that German policy toward the Soviet Union, as articulated by the Foreign Office, was to remain unchanged.

Finally, after presenting his recommendations to Hitler personally,⁷⁶ only to be rejected again, Nadolny submitted his resignation in June 1934, never to re-enter public service.⁷⁷ He could not convince the Wilhelmstrasse of the importance of the USSR in German affairs and the benefit of close relations for Germany. With the increasing frustrations of rejection, the ageing diplomat did the honorable thing and resigned.

Nazi policy also caught the attention of Josef Stalin, who commented on the change in the German attitude in his remarks to the Seventeenth Party Congress in January 1934. He suggested that German policy had fragmented into the “old policy reflected in the treaties between the USSR and Germany” and the “new policy which...recalls the policy of the former

German Kaiser, who at one time occupied the Ukraine and marched against Leningrad...” Stalin concluded that the fact that the advocates of the new policy were gaining supremacy “cannot be regarded as an accident.”⁷⁸

After the series of outrageous actions in 1933, by early 1934, the Soviet leadership finally noticed publicly a dangerous shift (“new policy”) in the German outlook. Now the Soviet Union began to follow a policy of cautious pessimism regarding Germany and the Rapallo atmosphere quickly dissipated.

POLAND

Poland remained something of a threat as well as a much-resented buffer state for both the Soviets and the Germans. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Germany feared a Polish attack in the east. Poland’s army more than held its own in the conflict with the USSR, leading to the Treaty of Riga in 1921. In early 1932, Lithuania invaded German-populated Memel and deposed the Minister President. The Germans considered this provocative action as a prelude to a joint Lithuanian-Polish attack on East Prussia.⁷⁹ Josef Pilsudski was a dedicated nationalist and realized Poland’s important geo-political position. He would not allow Poland to become the pawn of either Germany or the USSR while he sought to restore Poland’s historical boundaries and pursued a cautious yet forceful foreign policy.

This paranoid fear of Poland drove German politics to the right in 1932 with the fall of the Brüning and Papen cabinets. Polish diplomats reported that this rightist shift would probably bring Hitler to power, but that his entry into the government would split the party. The Polish leadership did recognize the increasing tension in German-Polish relations in the early 1930s. With the rise of Nazi agitation in Danzig, the Poles now feared a Nazi attack. When the Papen

cabinet made overtures to France, Poland's most powerful ally, Pilsudski had to re-consider contacts with his old enemy, the USSR. Even after the settlement at Riga, Pilsudski still considered the Soviet Union his greatest threat. Polish troops concentrated on the eastern borders rather than the facing Germany. He may have looked to the USSR in order to get Germany's attention. Finally, in April, 1932, the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact with Poland. Pilsudski had, for the time being, neutralized the Soviet threat. Although Poland would sign a similar agreement with Hitler's Germany in 1934, the 1932 understanding acted as a barrier to perceived German-Polish actions against the USSR. Pilsudski and his successors maintained a delicate balance between Germany and the Soviet Union, concluding non-aggression pacts with both, but formal alliances with neither. The Soviets, in particular, were quite careful in preventing its western neighbor from slipping into the Nazi orbit.⁸⁰ Hitler would unilaterally renounce this pact on April 28, 1939.

After the conclusion of the pacts with the USSR and Germany, Pilsudski turned his attention to domestic politics while continuing to enhance Poland's international position as independent of either soviet or Nazi influences. Unfortunately for Poland's Jewish population, Pilsudski succeeded in building a conservative authoritarianism which incorporated the worst elements of extreme anti-Semitism. After the dictator's death in 1935, the radical rightist parties continued and intensified the anti-Semitic practices.⁸¹

In 1934, Soviet distrust of German intentions became so great that, even when German diplomats made substantive suggestions with the support of the Foreign Office in response to Soviet initiatives, the Russians refuted them. On March 28, 1934, Litvinov proposed that Germany and Russia unite to guarantee the borders of the Baltic states "in the effort to improve

mutual relations between the two countries.”⁸²

This cooperation, Litvinov believed, would serve as a foundation for the restoration of meaningful relations. Nadolny, ambassador at this time, countered with the idea that the parties eliminate the artificial necessity of protecting nations that were not in danger, and, instead, work together under the auspices of the Treaty of Berlin, which already contained in Article 1 a clause that the Governments of Germany and the Soviet Union should maintain friendly contacts in order to bring about agreement on all questions of a political and economic nature affecting their two countries.⁸³ Litvinov, aware of German actions in 1933, took this counter proposal as a rejection of his plan and an example of German unwillingness to cooperate in international affairs. On April 21, Litvinov verbally informed Nadonly of his “sincere regret” at the German position. As Litvinov explained to the German ambassador, the proposal “was dictated by the Soviet Government's policy of consolidating peace in general, and in particular in those countries bordering on the Soviet Union. Incidentally, the realization of this proposal would have unquestionably resulted in the restoration of relations of confidence between the Soviet Union and Germany.” He then indirectly questioned Germany’s good faith, “Obviously, the point of any measure designed to consolidate peace is directed against those States which intend to violate this peace, but no State should see it as directed against itself if it does not entertain such intentions.” Expressing a sense of frustration, Litvinov explained that the USSR was simply complying with German wishes:

You yourself, Mr Ambassador, have asked me to point out some means whereby this estrangement might be overcome or mitigated. I have, therefore, attempted to propose to you one such means, which would sound more convincing than any speeches and declarations, not only to the Soviet Union, but to the whole world. It remains for me only to express once more my regret that this means has been rejected by your Government and without any convincing reasons.

Litvinov, though thoroughly disappointed, kept the door open for future arrangements. For the Soviet Foreign Commissar, Germany now must keep its word and act as a rational member of the international community. The Soviet Union sought substantive relations with all nations in an attempt to maintain the peace. He concluded this difficult meeting with a message of hope:

I can assure you, Mr Ambassador, that we shall always be prepared to give favorable consideration to any concrete proposals of the German Government which would in fact lead to an improvement of relations and strengthen mutual confidence between our countries.⁸⁴

German credibility was now slipping in Russian eyes. The events of the prior year had caused a fundamental shift in the Soviet view of Germany.⁸⁵

WESTERN INITIATIVES

In late April 1934, France proposed a multilateral treaty system, to include Germany and Russia, which would guarantee the borders of the east European states.⁸⁶ After Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations, France sought a substantive treaty system in order to curtail the encroaching menace of the Nazi state to its east. Russia was the perfect partner in such a plan. France sought to guarantee the sovereignty of the East European states, especially those bordering on Germany.

André François-Poncet, the French Ambassador to Germany, delivered the outline of the plan to the Germans for analysis on instructions from Foreign Minister Louis Barthou.⁸⁷ Notice that the Soviets were dealing with Germany with and through third parties. The close cooperation and understanding of the prior decade had now given way to a Soviet reluctance to deal with Germany on a one-to-one basis. The Soviets made their position clear; if the treaty system was not ratified, then Russia would align with France in a pact of mutual assistance.⁸⁸

Russian policy toward France had now come full circle, from Litvinov's explanation in 1933 that Russia would not align with France as this was not a goal of Soviet policy,⁸⁹ to Russian readiness to join the French security system.

Alexis Leger, the Secretary-General of the French Foreign Ministry, declaring that he was speaking in a personal capacity, proposed the conclusion of two interconnected pacts: an Eastern Locarno pact in the form of a multilateral regional mutual assistance pact to include the U.S.S.R., Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Baltic states (but without France) and a bilateral Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact. The regional pact would include mutual obligations on the part of the parties. Further Germany and the USSR would be obligated to “render each other assistance as neighbors.”⁹⁰ Leger argued that this arrangement was the most effective formula for co-operation between the U.S.S.R. and France against Germany.⁹¹ The Soviet Union was now a major player in world politics and important to the west.

Pursuing to the policy of collective security, the Soviet diplomats responded to the French proposal. The Russian Foreign Office suggested modifications in May, 1934, which included the participation of Germany in a mutual assistance pact and a pact with France to guarantee French assistance as well as including the USSR in the Locarno treaty.⁹² The Soviet Union wanted to maintain close contacts with Paris and Berlin as a means of keeping the peace.

On June 27, 1934, the French government handed the British government its draft of an Eastern pact. Both France and the USSR sought British participation in the security system. Ivan Maiskii, the Soviet ambassador to England, reported in the summer of 1934 that the British Government's attitude towards the idea of an Eastern Pact had always been “unfavorable.” Because such an Eastern pact “would considerably strengthen our international positions, make

secure our Western frontier and ease our position in the Far East...the attitude of British diplomacy towards the proposed Eastern pact could not be enthusiastic.”⁹³ Maiskii quickly understood that Britain would be a major stumbling block to collective security. He quickly brought his concerns directly to the British government.

On June 19, 1934, Maiskii informed Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that public opinion in the Soviet Union “ascribes to Britain the role of inciting both Japan and Germany towards war with us and sees this as the only reason for Britain’s resistance to an Eastern pact.”⁹⁴ Britain appeared as the obstructionist and followed a narrow policy of self-interest. England then demanded that Germany re-arm as a condition of acceptance of the Eastern pact. After talks with France, the British government moderated its demands and agreed to accept the proposed pact.⁹⁵ England’s agreement did not translate into its enthusiastic support.

British policy was decidedly split regarding the USSR and the threat of Germany. Historians have fixated on England as the center of the “appeasement” policy toward Nazi Germany and a prime cause of the Second World War.⁹⁶ More sober, objective, and non-ideological analysis serves to illuminate Britain’s position and its policy choices. Though short-sighted and conservative, British foreign policy was not pro-German, but anti-Soviet. British policy makers painted the international aspirations of the USSR with a broad brush and distorted the reality of the canvass. They ignored the sincere Soviet efforts at collective security without investigating its value. If a proposal came from the USSR, in the English view, it must be suspect. The west feared Communism more than Nazism.

Western leaders believed that the best way to avoid war was to move Hitler eastward.

Orme Sargent, British Assistant Permanent Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, opposed close relations with the USSR. “If” minuted Sargent on April 12, 1935, “We closed to Germany all means of expansion in the east, where she is less likely to come into conflict with British, or indeed any other, interests than elsewhere, we must be prepared for German pressure down the Danube to be increased proportionately.”⁹⁷ Eric Phipps, British Ambassador to Germany, quipped that England and France should not set up too much “barbed wire” in the east or south otherwise the Nazi “beast” would be forced to the west.⁹⁸ Sargent concluded the exchange stating that, “I have never quite been able to accept the truth of M. Litvinov’s dictum about the ‘indivisibility of peace.’”⁹⁹ In December, 1935, Winston Churchill invited the Soviet Ambassador, Maiskii, to dinner. During the meal Churchill informed his guest that “in England there are influential pro-German circles, who want to allow Germany freedom of action in the East.” He concluded, perhaps to calm the ambassador, that “they are only a minority.”¹⁰⁰ Britain wanted Hitler engaged in conflict far away from the Empire, no matter the effects on the other states involved.

After Russia withdrew from World War I and the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917, Britain and other allied powers dispatched forces to Russia to oppose the Soviet regime. The British government sent vast supplies and munitions to support anti-Bolshevik fighters. In spite of western efforts and against long odds, the Bolsheviks prevailed by 1921 and began to build a socialist state.¹⁰¹ Relations between the Soviet state and Britain did not get off to a good start. Officially at least, both wanted to destroy the other.

British officials were conflicted as to the status and importance of the communist regime. Some, such as David Lloyd George, took a pragmatic approach, while the conservatives,

including Winston Churchill, decried the “foul baboonery of Bolshevism.”¹⁰² England formally recognized the Soviet Union in 1924 and trade increased. Pragmatism followed the purse, at least for a little while.

In May, 1927, the British government broke relations with Russia over the so-called ARCOS affair, when the British police arrested Soviet employees in England and accused them of espionage. The raid turned up no substantive evidence of criminal activity and the Soviets protested vehemently. The British action also set off a “war scare” in the USSR, as the Soviets became convinced that a western plot existed to destroy the Soviet Union. The anti-communist British press had a field day after learning of the raid on the Soviet office. In the hysteria, truth became a victim. Public opinion guided the establishment of foreign policy in Britain. After all, the politicians needed to be re-elected. Better to follow the popular will. Unfortunately western policy was blind to diplomatic realities. While the USSR was no ordinary state in the classical sense, the Soviet Union remained a viable and important entity in world affairs in spite of its earlier actions in renouncing the Czarist debts and threatening Poland. The USSR had illustrated its good faith in trade policy.

Although diplomatic relations ruptured between Britain and Russia, economic contact continued, and a new Labor government restored full relations in 1929. Labor was willing to take the political risks of contact with Russia and also to reap the economic benefits. Even the conservatives, who thrived on anti-communist rhetoric, were supportive of the Labor gamble.¹⁰³ While Labor sought to expand trade relations in the form of credit guarantees, anti-Russian propaganda limited its options. One foreign office official commented that “if the British anti-communist press called ‘a truce in the long range bombardment of Moscow...half their copy

would go...’”.¹⁰⁴ In 1931, after the formation of a Tory dominated National Government, the new foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon received a more ominous briefing paper from the foreign office:

It is one of the unfortunate legacies of the War that Anglo-Soviet relations have become a subject of the most acute internal political controversy.... From being a pre-war enigma Russia has become a post-war obsession...a matter of party strife at most of the post-war appeals to the British electorate. So long as one section of opinion, even if a small one, hitches its wagon to the Soviet star, and another longs for nothing so much as the star's eclipse, the task of reducing Anglo-Soviet relations to normal remains hopeless....¹⁰⁵

Events in the early 1930s illustrated the depths of the “hopelessness” and the power of public opinion enflamed by the British press. In 1932, the British government cancelled the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement; as payback for the ARCOS incident, in March 1933, Soviet police arrested British engineers in Moscow working for the Metro-Vickers Company. Indeed, relations deteriorated quickly in the atmosphere of fear that was Britain. Meanwhile another dark cloud appeared on the horizon. Shortly after the Metro-Vickers affair, Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler chancellor of Germany. Britain now found itself in the middle of two dangerous powers. Which one posed the greater threat to the Empire became the guiding question of British foreign policy. Throughout the 1930s the British Foreign Office chose to ignore and discount substantive Soviet overtures designed to insure a peaceful balance in Europe and prevent war. In British eyes, the Soviet Union was the greater danger.

Maxim Litvinov, who understood the value of substantive relations with the west, personally intervened in the Metro-Vickers affair. He travelled to London in the summer of 1933 to renew old contacts with British officials and to patch up dangling relations. His visit bore fruit and the two nations settled the dispute and resumed trade negotiations concluding a trade agreement on February 16, 1934. The Soviets had illustrated their good faith and publicly called

for improved relations. British intentions were a bit more juvenile; at a luncheon marking the signature of the trade agreement, the British delegation could not agree who would attend or who would pay the bill. Assistant Permanent Undersecretary Sir Lancelot Oliphant complained that it [attendance] “was a *corvée* and the Secretary of State should be spared the bother. Let someone else go instead.”¹⁰⁶ Despite the continued efforts of the People’s Commissar, the Soviets now began to doubt English policy. The actions of the parties were clearly not equal. While Stalin’s actions inside of the USSR caused great consternation in the west, Soviet diplomatic initiatives received short shrift.

Diplomatic and press discourse continued to drive a wedge between Britain and Russia. The British government constantly complained about Soviet propaganda while conveniently ignoring its own. The Soviets were forthright in their quest for peace. In February, 1934, the Russian government sent a message through Ankara that it wished improved relations with London. The British ambassador expressed the negative British feelings toward Russia, “A very large proportion of opinion in England held the view that the whole political system and creed of Soviet Russia was the work of Satan and that in my country such widespread opinion had to be taken into account.”¹⁰⁷ If Russia was the great Satan what hope existed for interaction between these nations? The Soviets were willing to put aside doctrinal differences in exchange for a security system beneficial to all. Maiskii concisely explained his government’s position, “At first we were very excited with our revolution—and so were you! We thought your system could be overthrown in a few months, and you thought we could not last beyond a few months. Now we know that we must put up with each other.”¹⁰⁸

For all of the anti-Soviet emotion in the English foreign office, some level-headed

diplomats indeed advocated a stable relationship with Russia. Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign office and Laurence Collier, head of the Northern Department, understood the value of Russia as a counterweight to an overtly aggressive and dangerous Germany. Winston Churchill came to defend this position in the Parliament and the press, or that portion of the press that would listen to him. Churchill, who earlier had referred to Bolsheviks as “foolish baboons,” realized the implications of events in Germany. He advocated a type of *Realpolitik* and forcefully argued for closer relations with Russia. He described his position in 1933, “Nobody can watch the events which are taking place in Germany without increasing anxiety about what their outcome will be. At present Germany is only partly armed and most of her fury is turned upon herself. But already her smaller neighbors...feel a deep disquietude.”¹⁰⁹ His words would prove prescient. The views of these parties would be in the minority, but they continued to press their agenda against the tide.

French policy was also undergoing revision. On October 9, 1934, during a visit of the King of Yugoslavia, a Croatian nationalist assassinated the King and the French Foreign Minister, Louis Barthou in Marseilles. Pierre Laval took over as Foreign Minister. Quickly, right wing politicians demanded a new course in French international relations, particularly toward Russia. Shortly after the assassination, “The French ambassador in Moscow, (Charles) Alphand, informed the Soviet government that the Embassy’s Counsellor had received a letter from Henri de Kerillis, well-known Right-wing journalist, who wrote that ‘Right-wing circles, seized with fear of the Popular Front, demanded a revision in France’s foreign policy.’”¹¹⁰ The ambassador reported that these right-wing circles, who earlier advocated an agreement with the USSR, “Now think that the Communist danger is nearer than the German...”¹¹¹ Alphand concluded that the

possibility of a Franco-German agreement “is gaining more and more adherents in France.”¹¹² Fear of Bolshevism, largely grounded in theory, now served to prevent substantive agreements against the common German enemy. The Soviet diplomats understood the danger of the western orientation to Germany, both to the west itself and to Russia. The Foreign Office clearly realized that it could not substantively trust German intentions without a binding multilateral alliance system. After the first meeting between the Soviet ambassador, Vladimir P. Potemkin, and Laval on October 19, 1934, the People’s Ambassador noted that France’s pro-German policy was “aimed only at intimidating Germany in order to wrest bigger concessions from her, in other words, that France is only making use of us in her game.”¹¹³ The Soviet Union was in no mood to play; the stakes were simply too high as events would prove.

On February 3, 1935, Britain and France published a communiqué proposing to conclude a “general settlement” with Germany, including an Eastern Pact and an arms agreement, replacing Part IV of Versailles. This position served to undermine the Soviet policy of collective security in Europe. In conversations with the Soviet Ambassador, Leger quickly blamed Britain for the change in direction. Leger said that “the British were at first persistent in persuading the French to entirely omit an Eastern Pact from the general scheme set out in the London Agreements.”¹¹⁴ Britain continued to exhibit something of a balancing act between Germany and the Soviet Union. In a conversation with Vansittart on February 13, 1935, Maiskii reported that “Generally speaking, all this part of our conversation left me with the impression that the British Government’s position in regard to an Eastern Pact is very evasive, to put it mildly.”¹¹⁵ The Soviets simply could not trust Britain and France. The continued Soviet efforts at collective security, reflecting the ideas of Lenin, illustrate the substance of the policy: peace and

multilateral relations. Litvinov's December 29, 1933 speech clearly illustrated that the USSR respected the Nazi threat and reached out for assistance. The western powers proved "evasive" in their dealings with the USSR, ultimately destroying the possibility of a united front against Hitler, even after he had regained the lost German territory. By adopting a policy of collective security, they could ensure that Hitler would have no soft spots to attack.

After visiting Hitler in Berlin, Sir Anthony Eden, the Lord Privy Seal, stopped in Moscow for talks with the Soviet Ministry for Foreign Affairs in late March, 1935. Originally, Sir John Simon, the English Foreign Minister was scheduled to make the visit, but he cancelled at the last minute. Perhaps, this diplomatic initiative was not that important for Britain. The Soviets reiterated their position on mutual assistance pacts and made it clear that Germany was to be a part of this collective security system:

We [the soviets] do not want to encircle anybody. We do not seek for Germany's isolation. On the contrary, we desire to maintain friendly relations with her. The Germans are a great and valiant nation. We never forget this. It was not right to keep this nation fettered by the Versailles treaty for a long time. Sooner or later the German people had to throw off the Versailles chains....However, the forms and circumstances of this liberation from Versailles are such that they are capable of causing serious alarm on our part, and in order to exclude the possibility of any unpleasant complication a certain warranty is now required. This warranty is an Eastern mutual assistance pact, naturally with the participation of Germany, if this is at all possible.¹¹⁶

The Soviets reasoned that in order to control German aggression, Germany needed to be part of the treaty system. Although the talks covered a variety of topics, the British did nothing to facilitate the conclusion of an Eastern Pact. Beginning with the introduction of general conscription in March 1935, Hitler and the Nazis relished the western contradictions and prepared for conquest.

France, unlike Britain, feared the threat of fascism in Germany and its implications for

the Third Republic, especially after the riots of February, 1934 and increasing right-wing extremism. Although the Eastern Pact did not materialize, France and Russia continued discussions for a mutual assistance pact. France wanted to limit the threat from Hitler by turning economic interests with the USSR into political and military agreements. After attempting to include Germany in diplomatic arrangements, France and the Soviet Union embraced each other, recognizing the common threat.

As in 1890, Germany did not believe that Russia and France would align. Even if they did, the treaty would have no meaning because Russia could not support France in Europe and France could not support Russia in Asia or in Eastern Europe.¹¹⁷ Therefore, Germany rejected the Eastern Pact and ignored Soviet threats of alignment with France.¹¹⁸ The present Nazi leadership forgot about the Franco-Russian Pact of 1894 and its disastrous effect on German history. But, as the old adage has it, those who forget the past are fated to repeat it. Nazi policy forced France and the USSR together. Had Hitler simply followed the advice of his own diplomats, the USSR may have taken a different track.

In September 1934 the Soviet Union Russia enhanced its position in the world community by joining the League of Nations, replacing Germany. Litvinov welcomed the invitation to join the League. The Soviet Union desperately needed the international status of a member of this organization. The Soviet Minister was direct and frank in his remarks to the League in September 1934. Again following Lenin's Decree on Peace in 1917, Litvinov made it clear that the USSR sought an international balance of power in order to prevent war. He stated that, "as to the first condition which we have named, the peaceful coexistence of different social-political systems at a given historical stage, we have advocated it again and again at

international conferences.” The USSR, asserted the People’s Commissar, was like any other state, “With regard to common aims, these have long ago been established in many spheres. Workers in the fields of science, art and social activities in the Soviet Union have long been co-operating fruitfully with representatives of other States, both individually and on organized lines, in all spheres of science and culture and on problems of a humanitarian nature.” He reminded his audience of the Soviet record of peaceful relations, “The Soviet Government has also not abstained from co-operation of a political nature whenever some alleviation of international conflicts and increase of guarantees of security and consolidation of peace might reasonably be expected from such co-operation.” He gave the example of Soviet activities in the Preparatory Commission of the Disarmament Conference and the Conference itself as well as the Soviet demand for the definition of aggression. Finally, Litvinov could not restrain himself, “The organization of peace! Could there be a loftier and at the same time more practical and urgent task for the co-operation of all nations?” While clearly excited, Litvinov concluded on sobering note, returning again to the theme of peace:

We are now confronted with the task of averting war by more effective means. ...Finally, we must realize once and for all that no war with political or economic aims is capable of restoring so-called historical justice, and that all it could do would be to substitute new and perhaps still more glaring injustices for old ones, and that every new peace treaty bears within it the seeds of fresh warfare.¹¹⁹

At Geneva, the USSR had a worldwide platform in which to advocate its policy of collective security. Perhaps, the nations of the League would carry out the dictates of the League covenant against the Nazi threat. Soviet entrance into the League shocked the German government, which felt that Russia was now supporting anti-German positions.¹²⁰ Hitler decided to test the coherence of the newly expanded League of Nations.

SOVIET PLEAS FOR ACTION

Convinced of the weakness and disinterest of the west, in March, 1935, Hitler re-introduced general conscription (Allgemeine Wehrpflicht), in direct contravention of the Versailles treaty. He calculated that England and France would not intervene in internal German affairs while he began to test the limits of western tolerance. Hitler was right as the western powers showed little interest in this blatant act of defiance. On April 17, Litvinov, sensing problems, appealed to the League of Nations in impassioned tones. He implored the members of the League to undertake aggressive action against this overt assault on the Versailles settlement. He questioned the very essence of the organization. He sought to confront the dictator with the full weight of the League. Although he was quite focused, he proposed an interesting example in order to illustrate the seriousness of the German threat: (The whole story needs to be told in Litvinov's words to demonstrate his resolve for collective action)

May I be allowed, in order to make my line of argument clearer, to resort to the following illustration? Let us suppose that in a certain town private citizens are allowed to carry arms. Theoretically this right should be extended to all the inhabitants of such a town. Should, however, any citizen publicly threaten his fellow-townsmen, near or far, with attack or with the destruction of their houses, the municipality is scarcely likely to hasten to issue to such a citizen a license to carry firearms, or quietly to tolerate his furnishing himself with such arms by illegal means. The promises of such an aggressive individual to spare certain quarters and only to give free play to his arms in other quarters can hardly be taken very seriously. The municipality is bound to preserve the peace of the whole town. Moreover, is not an individual who is capable of infringing the law and attacking his fellow-citizens also capable of breaking his promise with regard to the precise object of his threats? The least that the town would be likely to require from him, first and foremost, would be effective guarantees of good behavior. The inhabitants of those quarters with regard to which the aggressive individual demands a free hand would be the first to insist on such guarantees, and it would scarcely be reasonable to expect them to defend the illegal acquisition by him of arms on the ground of the abstract principle of equality.¹²¹

Litvinov believed in the League and urged a collective front against this direct attack on the Versailles Treaty and European peace. His colleagues were not so concerned. The USSR had to take care of itself. He concluded his impassioned presentation by re-asserting the Soviet "aspirations to collaborate in the creation of an international order under which the

infringement of peace...would be hampered to the utmost possible extent.”¹²² His reasoned and factual arguments fell on deaf ears.

On May 2, 1935, the Franco-Soviet alliance became a reality. What the Germans felt was impossible to carry out now acted as a major obstacle to their policy in the east and west. On May 16, the Soviets concluded a similar agreement with Czechoslovakia. Germany was now diplomatically isolated, cut off on all sides by potentially hostile enemies.¹²³ Only a minor nonaggression pact with Poland, tenuous at best, remained to tie Germany into the world community. Herein lay the fruits of Nazi policy: an isolated and distrusted Germany.

Although the Pact of 1935 was not nearly as far reaching and concrete as the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894, Adam Ulam concluded that:

The importance of the treaty lay precisely in the fact that it blocked, insofar as any written agreement could block, the first phase of the German attempt to gain a free hand against the U.S.S.R. Stalin was under no illusions that the essentially right-wing government that signed the agreement was motivated by tenderness toward the U. S . S .R. or that it would cease its efforts to relax the tension between France and Hitler (especially in view of the British pressures toward that end.) But the possibility of Western support for Russia could no longer be excluded from German calculations. If Hitler’s whole anti-Communist stance was an attempt to isolate the U.S.S.R. diplomatically and make sure that Germany could deal with her at her leisure, then the Franco-Soviet agreement was a resounding defeat for that policy and propaganda. In the nature of things and given the conditions of 1935, it forced Hitler to look to less risky adventures.¹²⁴

After the conclusion of the pact, Hitler had at least to consider the possibility of joint Franco-Soviet cooperation.

NAZI REACTIONS TO THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT

German reaction to the Franco-Soviet Pact took a European rather than a national perspective. The Germans argued that the Franco-Soviet agreement violated the collective security provisions of the Rhine Pact of Locarno. The Nazis were quite concerned that they were now “encircled” by hostile powers. The Germans asserted that the Franco-Soviet pact would de-

stabilize Europe. Foreign Minister Neurath circulated a telegram to the West European embassies explaining Germany's position; accompanying it were orders to hand deliver a memorandum to the respective governments clarifying German objections to the Franco Soviet agreement. The German government felt that the provisions of the recently concluded Franco-Soviet arrangement violated Article 16 of the League Covenant "in that France claims for herself, in the event of a conflict between Germany and the USSR, the right to take military action against Germany...even if she cannot cite a recommendation or some other decision of the Council of the League of Nations..." The Foreign Minister concluded that actions undertaken outside the scope of Article 16 would "consequently, constitute a flagrant violation of the Treaty of Locarno."¹²⁵

In a similar vein, Adolf Hitler addressed the Reichstag on May 21, 1935 and commented on the ramifications of the recently concluded Franco-Soviet agreement. No matter the shortcomings of the pact, Hitler had to deal with the possibility of a two-front conflict. He told his audience that "an element of legal insecurity has been brought into the Locarno Pact." He continued, stating that "these military alliances are contrary to the spirit and letter of the Covenant of the League of Nations."¹²⁶ Perhaps he had forgotten that he had withdrawn Germany from the League of Nations in October, 1933. Neurath and the Foreign Office were concerned that the Franco-Soviet alliance would allow unilateral military action against Germany without intervention of the Locarno powers. By these reactions Germany was attempting to create an atmosphere of European concern over the new alliance.

Besides the Locarno argument, Germany, concerned about its own security, felt that the purpose of the Franco-Soviet Pact was distinctively anti-German.¹²⁷ The introduction of the USSR into western European arrangements changed the balance of forces and put Germany on a

collision course with the Soviet Union. Neurath echoed this attitude when he reported on Hitler's interview with the British Ambassador, Sir Eric Phipps, during which Hitler commented that "if, by means of treaties of alliance, Russia was now to be drawn into the European system, then we, the country after Poland most directly affected, would have to take this fact into account when determining the army strength required for our defense."¹²⁸ Phipps asserted that it would possibly reduce tension by bringing the Soviet Union into the European security system rather than to exclude the USSR from Europe through an anti-Soviet front. Hitler replied that this seemed to him like "having plague germs shut up in a cupboard and then believing that one could make them less dangerous by opening the door and letting the germs loose on mankind."¹²⁹ This strange comparison illuminates Hitler's inflexible attitude toward the Soviet Union in general and European security in particular. Hitler's mind was made up and unwavering toward the Soviet Union, no matter what the reality.

Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, German Ambassador to Russia since Nadlony's resignation, illustrated a more realistic understanding of the importance of the Franco-Soviet agreement when he commented in a report to the Foreign Ministry that "Nevertheless, the fact that, despite all difficulties, the Franco-Russian *entente* has been consolidated by a treaty is a political factor which will have far reaching effects on our Eastern policy, since, as far as can at present be seen, the Soviet Union and France will now pursue a common policy in Europe."¹³⁰ Schulenburg also felt that Soviet Foreign policy had taken a decided shift toward collaboration in an effort to maintain domestic stability. As the Ambassador reported, the new alliance shifted the diplomatic landscape in a way that Germany could not afford to ignore.

Germany, by appealing to the signatory powers of Locarno, was attempting to protect herself from the potentially harmful effects of an unchallenged East-West anti-German coalition.

If the Locarno powers agreed that the Franco-Soviet agreement indeed constituted a breach of the Locarno Pact, then perhaps France and Russia, under organized European pressure, would dissolve, or at least modify their relationship. Such was not to be the case. Germany now had to deal with major powers east and west; powers at least potentially dangerous and adverse to German expansionism.

Despite the pact with France and recent German affronts on all sides, the Soviets maintained their moderate attitude. They sought to re-establish the close ties of the Weimar and early National Socialist periods. Litvinov understood that collective security would be more substantive with Germany as an active participant. As in the past, the People's Commissar did not want to close the door on German-Soviet arrangements.

In the spring of 1935, the Soviets sought an improvement in relations with Germany. Schulenburg reported on a conversation with Litvinov on May 8, 1935, less than one week after the pact, wherein Litvinov expressed his hope that “. . . the Franco-Soviet Treaty would soon be followed by a general pact of the kind suggested by Germany.” Further, according to Schulenburg, “He (Litvinov) considered the conclusion of a general pact urgently desirable.”¹³¹

Litvinov also displayed outward feelings of a pro-German attitude. At the farewell dinner for Fritz von Twardowski, the departing Counselor of the German Embassy in the Soviet Union, Litvinov raised his glass and commented in a loud voice to Schulenburg "I drink to the rebirth of our friendship."¹³² The Soviets desperately desired German support and cooperation and entrance into a European treaty system in order to ensure that war would not break out accidentally and destroy the Soviet Union. Litvinov moved Soviet policy toward France only because of continued and unrelenting German attacks and not because of any special trust or favoritism for the French. The Soviets hoped that the Franco-Soviet alliance could somehow

pressure Germany into entering a binding arrangement with the Soviet Union and other nations.¹³³

Soviet economic representatives attempted to illustrate Russia's willingness to improve relations with Nazi Germany. Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, the Reich Director of the Economics Ministry, reported that the leader of the Soviet trade delegation, David Kandelaki, questioned him as to the possibility of improving German-Russian political relations. Schacht replied that these negotiations and requests should take place through the Foreign Ministry and not through the Economics Department.¹³⁴ This visit has aroused a great deal of controversy concerning the intentions of the parties. Who was courting whom? Was Kandelaki's mission an example of the Soviets pursuing the Nazis in an attempt to reach a secret agreement and prepare for the dissection of Europe or did the Germans actively seek a settlement with its old ally? The documentary evidence is conflicting, depending on the source. Although Schacht concluded that Kandelaki broached the subject of substantive political relations, on April 12, 1935, Sergi Bessonov, a counselor in the Soviet Embassy in Berlin and Kandelaki's aide in the economic negotiations, had a different interpretation:

Schlacht spoke a lot about the need for closer economic *rapprochement* between the Soviet Union and Germany. He said that it will be hard to keep to the course of improving relations with the Soviet Union, in which *rapprochement* he saw a guarantee of the prosperity of both countries...Returning to the question of the necessity of *rapprochement* with the USSR, Schlacht reiterated, to both me and Comrade Kandelaki, that his course of *rapprochement* with the USSR was being carried out with the consent and approval of Hitler.¹³⁵

Unfortunately to date, regarding subsequent meetings, we have only the self-serving German records, which indicate Soviet demands for closer ties to Germany. Soviet actions in the later 1930s seem to contradict Herr Schlacht and the Nazi Foreign Office. However, some Soviet diplomats in Germany inquired about the possibility of improving German-Soviet relations. One

even went so far as to suggest that the Berlin Treaty be supplemented by a bilateral non-aggression pact between Germany and Soviet Russia.¹³⁶

Finally, the Red Army, long a proponent of close ties with Germany, continued in its pro-German stance. Von Twardowski reported that at his farewell reception the Deputy Commissar for war, Marshal Tukhachevsky, commented that, “. . . even today the Red Army still felt great sympathy for the Reichswehr.” While the Soviet Union was indeed communist and Germany fascist, the Marshall concluded that “that ought not to present any obstacle to our cooperation.”¹³⁷ Tukhachevsky clearly understood the implications and authority of a German-Soviet arrangement, particularly from a military viewpoint. Had Germany and Russia aligned in a substantive, binding pact, this would have created a major political and military east-west bloc upsetting West European arrangements. That is, England and France would have had to take both the USSR and Germany more seriously and not attempt to play off against the other. This dimension of power politics obviously eluded the German Foreign Policy leadership.

INCREASING DISTRUST OF NAZI INTENTIONS

Despite the bantering between Germany and Russia concerning improved political and economic relations, Jacob Surtiz, the Soviet Ambassador in Germany, penned a prescient letter on November 28, 1935 to Litvinov. While he met a great number of eminent “Nazis,” all of his contacts with the Germans had “only strengthened [his] earlier conviction that the course against us [the USSR], on which Hitler has embarked, will remain unchanged and that we[the Soviet Union] cannot expect any serious alterations in the immediate future.” Unfortunately for the Soviets, concluded the Ambassador, “There is nothing we can do, it seems, but wait patiently and continue to strengthen and develop our economic work.”¹³⁸ Surtiz was clearly aware of the mood in Germany and argued for a united front of anti-fascist powers to oppose Hitler’s clear

intentions. He knew that Russia had economic authority with which to entice Germany into at least discussions and to maintain German interest in Russia. Hitler and his entourage, as Surtiz explained, could not be trusted and the USSR had to make other plans and make them now.

Vyacheslav Molotov, Chairman of the Council of Commissars and future Foreign Minister, also sought a cautious policy toward Germany as he explained in a speech to the Central Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet in January, 1936. Again, he was addressing his comrades in the party. If there was a “secret plan” to align with Germany, as the German schools asserts, why not discuss this possibility with his own party members? Molotov cited the portions of *Mein Kampf* specifically mentioning Russia as the lands of German conquest. He further stated that the present Nazi government had done nothing to disown these plans of aggrandizement. He was careful in his remarks, however, not to close the door on improved relations in the future:

I must say quite frankly that the Soviet Government would have desired the establishment of better relations with Germany than exist at present. This seems to us unquestionably expedient from the standpoint of the interests of the peoples of both countries. But the realization of such a policy depends not only on us, but also on the German Government.¹³⁹

He quickly shifted tone with a long, detailed criticism of Nazi intentions:

Everybody knows that German fascism is not merely confining itself to elaborating plans of conquest, but is preparing to act in the immediate future. The German fascists have openly transformed the country which has fallen into their hands into a military camp, which, owing to its position in the very centre of Europe, constitutes a menace not only to the Soviet Union but to Europe in general.¹⁴⁰

These arguments do not indicate a desire to unite with Hitler and the Nazis in an axis of domination. Soviet diplomacy correctly assessed the German threat and called for united action. France and England, like other “bourgeois” individuals, were more afraid of communism than fascism. These deeply held attitudes served to limit Soviet effectiveness.

German intransigence and the rightwing movement in the German position regarding the

Soviet Union resulted in a fundamental shift in communist ideology and practice. The Comintern, the organ of international communism centered in Moscow, strictly prohibited collaboration between communist parties and left wing social democratic movements in Western Europe. The communists had viewed social democracy as their main enemy and rival for working class support among the masses of Western Europe. Stalin had stated in 1924 that fascism and social democracy were twins.¹⁴¹ In the heated atmosphere of the mid-1930s, the twins separated and Moscow now considered Social Democracy as an anti-fascist weapon.

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF THE NAZI DANGER

Unrelenting German actions and contradictory policies altered this official communist view of social democracy. The Comintern by 1935 understood clearly that Hitler's position was quite permanent and that his policies and practices threatened not only German communism, but also the entire international communist movement. At the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, held in Moscow in July-August 1935, communist ideology shifted course in response to changing conditions. The Congress called for the formation of a "Popular Front" of communist, socialist, and democratic elements in an attempt to halt the spread of fascism in Europe.¹⁴²

Georgi Dimitrov, elected Secretary General of the Comintern, reported to the Congress the importance of collective action and he explained the real threat of fascism. He posed the provocative question regarding the limitation of the fascist threat. "How can fascism," he inquired, "be prevented from coming to power and how can fascism be overthrown after it has been victorious." To counter this condition, communists must "form a united front to establish unity of action of the workers in every factory, in every district, in every region, in every country, all over the world." He argued that "unity of action of the proletariat on a national and international scale is the mighty weapon which renders the working class capable not only of

successful defense but also of successful counter-offensive against fascism.” Finally, while “joint action by the parties of both Internationals against fascism, however, would not be confined to influencing their present adherents” he concluded that “it would also exert a powerful influence on the ranks of the Catholic, anarchist and unorganized workers, even on those who had temporarily become the victims of fascist demagoguery.”¹⁴³

Dimitrov's report led the Congress to pass a resolution which explained the new communist view of fascism. The Congress declared that it was “the main and immediate task of the international labor movement to establish the united fighting front of the working class.” It was the duty of communist parties everywhere to recognize the changed conditions and to seek reconciliation with working-class organizations in order to coordinate joint action on a local, regional, national, and international scale.¹⁴⁴

This modification in communist ideology fit perfectly with Litvinov's vision of collective security in foreign affairs. With the resolution of the Comintern, workers, peasants and diplomats now pursued a common front against the fascist cancer. International socialism, once the enemy of Bolshevism according to Stalin, could now aid the cause of Soviet diplomacy.

Germany found herself isolated politically, diplomatically, and ideologically. International Communism had now thrown its support behind anti-fascist policies. Despite the Franco-Soviet pact and the Popular Front, Hitler decided to test the diplomatic waters yet again in early 1936.

When German troops entered the demilitarized Rhineland in March, 1936, Litvinov quickly recognized the dangers inherent in this aggressive action. He again appealed to his colleagues in Geneva to take specific countermeasures against yet another violation of existing treaty arrangements. As he so forcefully explained, either the League of Nations followed its

own covenant or it did not. He reminded the delegates that:

This is the third time, in the short period of eighteen months during which the Soviet Union has been a Member of the League of Nations, that its representative on the Council of the League has had to speak on the subject of a breach of international obligations.

These circumstances have not in the past prevented, and will not in the present case prevent, the representative of the Soviet Union from taking his place among those members of the Council who register in the most decisive manner their indignation at a breach of international obligations, condemn it, and support the most effective measures to avert similar infringements in the future.

“This attitude of the Soviet Union” continued Litvinov “is predetermined by its general policy of struggling for peace, for the collective organization of security and for the maintenance of one of the instruments of peace—the existing League of Nations. We consider that one cannot struggle for peace without at the same time defending the integrity of international obligations...One cannot struggle for the collective organization of security without adopting collective measures against breaches of international obligations.” Peaceful intentions have their limit, however, and he explained that it was imperative that the League fulfill its obligations or risk losing creditability. He argued that if the League did not carry out its own decisions and pledges, that “such a League of Nations will never be taken seriously by anyone. The resolutions of such a League will only become a laughing-stock.” Litvinov addressed and refuted Germany’s arguments. He stated that the Franco-Soviet pact, the subject of Germany’s ire, was purely defensive in nature and posed no threat to Berlin. Neither the Soviet Union nor France sought to modify the borders of Germany. If Germany was indeed peaceful, as it asserted, it had nothing to fear from the recently concluded pact. As he pointed out to his party brethren in January, 1936, Hitler’s clear agenda in *Mein Kampf*, speeches, and recent publications in the German press, was the destruction of the Soviet Union. Hitler sought expansion by the sword, not collective security. The League could not overlook this direct threat. Litvinov asserted that Germany was not the target of aggression; quite the contrary. As he explained, “if there is one State in

the world which is threatened by no external danger it is Germany.” He knew of “not a single country which makes any territorial claims on Germany...and no literature preaching an attack on Germany.”¹⁴⁵ Germany’s claims of self defense were self serving.

Litvinov concluded with a reiteration of the Soviet position, “We are for the creation of security for all the nations of Europe, and against a half-peace which is not peace at all but war.”¹⁴⁶ The Soviets wanted peace, not a patchwork collections of meaningless resolutions. Collective security remained the Soviet position in face of the Nazi aggression. Litvinov needed the support of his European colleagues as all could become victims of Hitler’s wrath. He was astounded that he had to make these arguments in the first place. Why all the effort if the entire policy was a hoax to lure Hitler into an alliance?

Remaining consistent with the philosophy of *Mein Kampf* and National Socialism, Germany rejected the many-faceted Soviet overtures and continued to call for modification of the Franco-Soviet alliance along the lines of Locarno. Despite the threat that the pact and the Popular Front presented, Germany refused to abandon its isolation.

By the end of 1936, Hitler was convinced of the weakness and fear of the western powers and the inability of the USSR to find diplomatic supporters. He had violated the Versailles Treaty with impunity and now threatened Austria. The Franco-Soviet and Soviet-Czech pact did not concern him because of the difficulty of implementation and he was encouraged by the pro-German English attitude. He still had Russian economic ties, the respect of western leaders and the support of the anti-Soviet press. In spite of the heavy-handed German attitude and practices, the USSR remained resolute in its quest for collective security with or without German cooperation. Litvinov, Stalin and the Soviet foreign office correctly calculated the danger of war and overlooked any obstacle in order to create an effective coalition. 1938 would prove to be the

high point of the Führer's plans and the stress test for collective security.

END NOTES

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² *Ibid.*

³ Laqueur, 220; Gustav Hilger and Alfred G. Mayer, *The Incompatible Allies* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1953), 251-252.

⁴ Hilger, *The Incompatible Allies*, p. 250; also, Laqueur, *Russia and Germany*, p. 162.

⁵ Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-67* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 194.

⁶ Adam B. Ulam, *A History of Soviet Russia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 108.

⁷ Laqueur, *Russia and Germany*, 170.

⁸ Hans W. Gatzke, "Russo-German Military Cooperation During the Weimar Republic," *American Historical Review*, Vol. LXIII, No.3 (April 1958): 565-597; George H. Stein, "Russo-German Military Collaboration: The Last Phase, 1933," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol LXXVII, No.1 (March 1962): 54-71.; Karl Spalcke, "Begegnungen Zwischen Reichswehr und Roter Armee," *Aussenpolitik*, Vol. 8 (August 1958): 506-513; and Helm Speidel, "Reichswehr und Rote Armee," *Vierteljahrshefte fur Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. I, No. (January 1953): 9-45.

⁹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), 140.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 654 (emphasis in original).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 654- 655.

¹² Michael Kellogg, *The Russian Roots of Nazism: White Émigrés and the making of National Socialism, 1917-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 219-244; Brian E. Crim, "'Our Most Serious Enemy': The Specter of Judeo-Bolshevism in the German Military Community, 1914-1923," *Central European History*, vol. 44, no. 4, (December, 2011), 624-641. Also, *Mein Kampf*, 662.

¹³ U.S. Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series C, Volume I (Washington: States Government Printing Office, 1957), 71-72 hereinafter referred to as *Documents*.

¹⁴ Hilger, *The Incompatible Allies*, 273; also, Herbert von Dirksen, *Moscow, Tokyo, London: Twenty Years of German Foreign Policy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 108; Leonidas E. Hill, "The Wilhelmstrasse in the Nazi Era," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. LXXXII, No.4 (December 1967):546-570; Karl Dietrich Bracher, "Das Anfangsstadium der Hitlerschen Aussenpolitik," *Vierteljahrshefte fur Zeitgeschichte*, Vol.5, No.1 (January 1957):63-76.

¹⁵ Adam Tooze *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 55.

¹⁶ *Pravda*, July 1, 1934, 2 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷ *Ibid* (emphasis in original).

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- ¹⁸ Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin, Parallel Lives* (New York: Vintage, 1991).
- ¹⁹ *Documents*, Series C, Vol.I, 64.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 21 and Herbert Michaelis and Ernst Schraepfer (eds), *Ursachen und Folgen: Vom deutschen Zusammenbruch 1918 und 1945 bis zur staatlichen Neuordnung Deutschlands in der Gegenwart*, Vol. 10 (Berlin: Dokumenten Verlag, 1958),85.
- ²⁴ *Documents*, series C, vol. I, 21.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Documents*, series C, vol. I, 64.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 62, n. 3.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.
- ³⁰ Norman H. Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 257.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² *Documents*, series C, vol. I, 120.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 143-144.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.
- ³⁶ Marshall M. Lee and Wolfgang Michalka *German Foreign Policy, 1917-1933: Continuity or Break* (New York: Berg Publishers, 1987), 141-142.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.
- ³⁹ Hilger, *The Incompatible Allies*, 254; see also Laqueur, *Russia and Germany*, 162; Dirksen, *Moscow, Tokyo, London*, 109 and *Documents*, Series C, Vol. I, p. 241.
- ⁴⁰ *Dokumente der Deutschen Politik und Geschichte*, Vol. IV (Berlin: Dokumenten-Verlag, 1939), 35.
- ⁴¹ *Documents*, series C, vol. I, 241, n. 2.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 246.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* (emphasis in original).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 120, 355.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 389(emphasis in original).

⁵² Hilger, *The Incompatible Allies*, 257; also *Documents*, Series C, Vol. I, p. 609. The Reichswehr maintained three stations in the Soviet Union in conjunction with the Red Army: Lipetsk (Air Force); Tomka (Chemical Warfare); Kazan (Armored Vehicles).

⁵³ *Documents*, series C, vol. I, 746.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 748, n. 10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 768 and 857.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 824, 860, and 862.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 845, n. 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 846, n. 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 847.

⁶¹ U.S. Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1919-1945*, Series C, Vol. II (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1959), 1. See also, Tooze, 56 and Lee and Michalka, 132.

⁶² For an interesting discussion of Nadolny's life and politics, see Gunter Wollstein, "Rudolph Nadolny Aussenminister ohne Verwendung," *Vierteljahrshefte fur Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January 1980):47-93.

⁶³ *Moscow, Tokyo, London*, v.

⁶⁴ *Documents*, series C, vo. II, 122-123.

⁶⁵ *Dokumenty Vshnei Politiki SSSR* , vol. 16, n. 321, 876-877. Hereinafter referred to as DVPS.

⁶⁶ Jane Degras (ed.), *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. III, 48-61.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Documents*, series C, vol. II, 318-324.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 373(emphasis in original).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 408.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 474.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 860, n. 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 882. See also Hilger, *The Incompatible Allies*, 266-267

⁷⁸ *Ursachen und Folgen*, Vol. 10, 89.

⁷⁹ Paul N. Hein, "The Collapse of the Weimar Republic and the National Socialist Revolution, 1923-1933: The View from Warsaw and Moscow," *The Polish Review*, vol. 25, (1980), Issue 3/4, 30.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-48.

⁸¹ William Hagen, "Before the 'Final Solution': Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Interwar Germany and Poland," *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 68, no. 2 (June, 1996), 368-380.

⁸² *Documents*, series C, vol. II, 684.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 703, 739.

⁸⁴ Degras, vol. III, 79-83.

⁸⁵ Regarding Russian policy toward Germany, see Max Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, Volume I; 1929-1936* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947); Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*.

⁸⁶ *Documents*, series C, vol. II, 880.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, Series C, Vol. III (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1959), 20, 112.

⁸⁹ *Documents*, series C, vol. I, 144.

⁹⁰ Int. Affairs (Moscow), (June 1963):112. This edition of the journal was devoted to documents and notes on the inter-war period.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Michael Jabara Carley. "A Fearful Consternation of Circumstances: the Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-6," *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Mar., 1996): 29 note 3.

⁹⁷ Sargent's minute, 12 April, 1935, C2892/55/18, PRO FO 371 18834, as quoted in *ibid.*, 49.

⁹⁸ Phipps to Sargent, 4 April, 1935, *ibid.*, as quoted in *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ DVPS, xviii, 585-586.

¹⁰¹ Carley, 31.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰⁴ Minute by C.H. Bateman, Northern Department, 28 Jan. 1930, N499/77/38, Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office (hereafter PROFO) 371 14866 as quoted in *ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ "Notes on Anglo-Soviet Relations (1929-31)", Bateman, 25 Nov. 1931, N7818/225/38, PRO FO 371 15609, as quoted in *ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Minute by Oliphant, 14 Feb. 1934, N1116/16/38, PRO FO 371 18303, as quoted in *ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰⁷ Loraine, no. 12 saving, 22 Feb. 1934, N1316/16/38, PRO FO 371 18303, as quoted in *ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰⁸ Vansittart's minute, 27 March 1934, N1754/2/38, PRO FO 371 18298, as quoted in *ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰⁹ Carley, 33.

¹¹⁰ Int. Affairs, July 1963, 119.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, August 1963, 134-135.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

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- ¹¹⁷ *Documents*, series C, vol. II, 475.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 476.
- ¹¹⁹ Degras, vol. III, 89-96.
- ¹²⁰ *Documents*, series C, vol. III, 151, 378.
- ¹²¹ Degras, vol. III, 127-129.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*
- ¹²³ Raymond J. Sontag, *A Broken World; 1919-1939* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 284-285.
- ¹²⁴ Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, 225.
- ¹²⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series C, Vol. IV, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1962), 206.
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 172-173.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 512, 917, 933.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 918.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 919.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 129 (emphasis in original).
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 138.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*, 813.
- ¹³³ Zara Steiner, "The Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Czechoslovakian Crisis in 1938: New Material from the Soviet Archives," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3 (Sept, 1999):769.
- ¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 453-454.
- ¹³⁵ N. A. Abramov, "Osobaya Missiya Davida Kandelaki," *Voprosy Istorii*, nos. 4-5, (1989), 146-147.
- ¹³⁶ *Documents*, series C, vol. IV, 933.
- ¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 779.
- ¹³⁸ Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiky SSSR (DVPS), vol 18, doc. 424.
- ¹³⁹ Roberts, *Origins*, 37.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴¹ Laqueur, *Russia and Germany*, 207.

¹⁴² Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, 227.

¹⁴³ Walter C. Langsam, *Documents and Readings in the History of Europe Since 1918*(Chicago: Lippincott, 1951) 842- 844 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Degras, vol. III, 170-178.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER FOUR: 1938: THE TEST OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

British and French fear of a western European war allowed Hitler effectively to destroy the Versailles arrangement without firing a shot. The anti-German hysteria of 1918-1919 had long since dissipated, especially in England. In June 1935, England and Germany signed a naval agreement. In the 1930s English diplomats argued that the limitations of Versailles were indeed unjust. Anglo-French foreign policy seemed decidedly pro- German. Hitler seized on this position of weakness to forward his aggressive plans. In the west, Russia remained marginalized. Despite this unsettling situation, the USSR doggedly continued to espouse collective security. Even after the debacle of Munich, the Soviets re-energized their efforts to create an anti-fascist front against further German aggression.

In this chapter, I will argue that the USSR maintained its consistent anti-fascist policy, seeking to illustrate to the West the creeping danger of Nazism, despite the West's clear preference for Germany. Litvinov even tried to embarrass the League of Nations, hoping to rouse collective action as Hitler moved from one triumph to another without resistance. While a move toward Germany may have been easy for the Soviet Union while the West waived, Litvinov stayed the course of collective security.

If the Soviets had wanted to develop closer ties with Hitler and create a Moscow-Berlin axis, as the proponents of the "German School" assert, the time was now. The western powers seemed to favor Germany's eastward momentum toward the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the Baltic and Eastern Pacts in 1934-1935, the policy of collective security seemed dead. Litvinov was not ready to bury it. Now more than ever, he understood the need for a tri-partite front against Nazism; he had to convince the west that Hitler posed a threat to it as well.

Although Soviet diplomats recognized the dangers of Nazism, economic ties between Germany and the USSR remained solid in the 1930s and into the 1940s. The Soviet Union desperately needed German credits to sell its goods abroad, while Germany sought the vast natural resources of the Russian steppe. In addition, the Great Depression in the United States contributed to shrinking foreign and domestic markets as unemployment increased. While engaged in a political and diplomatic tug of war, on April 14, 1931 the two nations concluded a detailed credit and guarantee arrangement referred to as the Piatakov Agreement.¹ In this economic treaty, the USSR promised German industry additional orders for 1931 alone of industrial goods worth 300 million marks on the condition that further credits of the same value would be provided on terms more favorable than those for the credit in 1926, namely that the Reich and Länder governments would underwrite a 70 percent guarantee against default.² After the conclusion of this arrangement, German exports to Russia rose steadily to almost double of the 1929 level and in 1932, Germany provided 46 percent of Russia's total imports, while German exports to the Soviet Union reached 763 million Reichmarks.³ *Deutscher Volkswirt* declared on August 17, 1934, that, "As far as economic interests are concerned, nothing has altered the fact that no other countries complement each other in such a natural way as Germany and Russia."⁴ After extensive talks, another agreement emerged on April 9, 1935 with the controversial Kandleki mission, wherein Moscow would pay off half of its outstanding 200-million mark credit in gold and foreign exchange, the other half in goods, and would place additional orders to the extent of 200 million marks with German industrial firms on the basis of a new five-year credit from a German banking consortium. As the German and Soviet documents indicate, the economic representatives took this occasion to broach the subject of improved

political relations.⁵ The German credits were extended with another economic understanding signed on April 29, 1936. While diplomatic pressure increased, economic interaction remained cordial. Each needed the other to survive economically; each was willing to use the other for economic stability. Nazi-Soviet economic cooperation would continue until the Nazi attack of June 22, 1941.

Stalin's Soviet Union remained an attractive trade partner for Germany largely because of the economic success of the five year plans. While rigid state planning devastated agriculture in the USSR, the pure numerical increases in the production sector were indeed spectacular. For example, the rate of growth of the GNP amounted to 56 percent in the period 1928-1940, 10 percent if measured in 1928 prices.⁶ Industrial production in the rich Urals-Trans-Urals region increased from 11-12 percent of the total in 1928, to over 16 percent in 1940. In addition, employment increased while the number of children in school rose from 12 million in the school year 1928-1929 to 35 million in the school year 1940-1941.⁷ The USSR had products that Germany needed as Hitler concentrated on expansion.

In March, 1938, Hitler commenced his plan to incorporate Austria into the German Reich. Historians have chronicled in detail the events leading to the *Anschluss*. Our interest is the Soviet position and the policy of collective security. When it would have been quite easy to abandon its multi-lateral security policy and seek formal military relations with Germany, the USSR maintained a consistent course.

As early as January, 1938, Litvinov defended his position and explained the importance of a united front against fascism, "If we take a new position and show indifference, this would deliver a shattering blow to all organizations for peace."⁸ Both the Soviets and the western

powers expected a Nazi move on Austria; Hitler made it clear that Austria belonged in the Reich whether it wanted to be or not. The important question for the USSR was, how would England and France react?

As Hitler increased the pressure on Austria in early March, 1938, the show trials of Bukharin, Krestinsky and other ‘enemies of the people’ were winding down. Stalin needed the diplomatic stability to complete his internal revolution. He had already decimated the peasantry, the Red Army, especially those connected with the west, such as Marshall Mikhail Tukhachevsky, the left Bolsheviks and, finally, by 1938, the Right Opposition. Even the lucky few remaining officers recognized the weakness of the Soviet armed forces. The *Anschluss* actually occurred on the eve of sentencing of members of the Right Opposition. The Soviets did not protest Hitler’s occupation. International peace remained a necessary tool of Stalin’s domestic reform.

On March 14, 1938 Litvinov wrote to Stalin and others that the USSR should have made a public pronouncement condemning the absorption of a sovereign nation:

To be silent and to remain totally passive with regard to this event is incompatible with our policy of peace and our position in the League of Nations. I consider it extremely desirable for us to make our position clear in a statement addressed to the other states...I do not expect any official replies to our statement, especially from England, who does not want to tie her hands with any practical statements. Thus our statement will not lay any obligations on us, but will nevertheless achieve its aims.⁹

Litvinov asserted that a public criticism of the events of March, 1938, would serve to place the blame for Hitler’s success on England and to address opinion concerning the weakness of the USSR. Finally, the Minister for Foreign Affairs convinced Stalin to allow him to make a formal declaration in an interview with a foreign journalist condemning the *Anschluss*. The People’s Commissar repeated the Soviet position regarding collective security and regional pacts of

mutual assistance. With Stalin's permission, Litvinov explained that the Soviet Government "has never missed a suitable occasion to recommend the most effective guarantees of peace which it has seen in the organization of the system of collective security." While the USSR pursued peace, Litvinov pointed out the dangers of inaction against aggressors: "The Soviet Government has voiced a warning that international inaction and the impunity of aggression in one case would inexorably lead to the repetition and multiplication of similar cases." He then added a moral tone to the debate. He called on "all peace-loving States" to question their responsibility "for the destinies of the peoples of Europe, and not only Europe." Although the USSR supported conferences, he concluded with a direct dose of realism, which illustrated the seriousness of Soviet policy, "It [The Soviet Union] is prepared immediately to take up in the League of Nations or outside of it the discussion with other Powers of the **practical** measures which the circumstances demand. It may be too late tomorrow."¹⁰ Practicalities had to outweigh doctrinal differences because the risks and the common threat of Hitler were simply too great. Litvinov was pleading with the west to wake up.

Unfortunately for Litvinov and the USSR, the western powers persisted in their fear of communist rhetoric and revolutionary goals, hoping that Hitler would simply go away, or, at least be satisfied with seizing territory in the East. Britain and France sought desperately to avoid the debacle of 1914, but failed to understand Soviet policy as peaceful in all respects, that is, the USSR wanted no war in any area. Objectively, the western lethargy towards Hitler seemed to indicate a preference for his actions as long as they were directed eastward. Britain was conducting a split foreign policy in negotiating with both Russia and Germany. France, with its ties to Russia and Eastern Europe, was hoping for a diplomatic miracle and a settlement short of

confrontation. Hitler and the Nazis were not waiting for events; Czechoslovakia, the most stable inter-war democracy, lay directly in Hitler's sights. It would prove a more substantive opponent than Austria. Litvinov believed that a unified bloc must confront Hitler sooner rather than later.

Soon the test arrived as both France and Russia had treaties with Czechoslovakia, they had to consult and confront this latest threat to peace. Under the Soviet-Czech agreement, France had to act first before the Soviets would be bound to defend Czechoslovakia. The diplomatic and political give and take began in early in the crisis. Who would act first? Would the USSR protect its Slavic brothers in union with France? The year 1938 would prove crucial, though not fatal, to the Soviet policy of collective security.

Hitler's incursion into the Sudetenland has been well chronicled. The historiography of the Czech crisis remains contentious, particularly concerning appeasement. Our focus is on the Russian position while facing a direct threat to an allied nation. Could collective security withstand the strain of Hitler's wrath? Recently released documents shed some light on this confusing time.¹¹ Litvinov saw this latest Nazi move as a central test of western resolve and a serious concern for the USSR. Initially, the Soviet Union urged caution in its relations with Czechoslovakia.

As the summer wore on in uncertainty, Litvinov issued instructions to Sergi Alexandrovsky, the Soviet ambassador in Prague. He urged the ambassador to "reinforce the spirit of the Czechs and their resistance to that [Anglo-French] pressure." Litvinov reminded him that "we are not at all interested in the forcible solution of the problem of the Sudeten Germans and we should offer no objections at all to such measures, which, while preserving Czechoslovakia's full political independence, would be able to diffuse the tension and prevent

the danger of a military confrontation...”¹² Litvinov could not commit the USSR to military action alone and wanted to avoid conflict altogether, while forcing a collaborative anti-German front. He needed to proceed carefully without arousing the ire of Hitler. Ideally, the Czechs would offer the needed resistance.

Later in June, 1938, Litvinov continued to explain the necessity of a consistent yet forceful foreign policy. Hitler’s position was clear; he wanted a confrontation over Czechoslovakia and he wanted to gauge western intentions as he had since 1935. He was convinced that Britain and France, despite treaty obligations, would not fight for Prague. The People’s Commissar continued to plead his case. He used the occasion of a pre-election speech in Leningrad to analyze critically the international situation. He knew that he had to convince his domestic audience and opponents within the Soviet hierarchy of the validity of collective security. Again, he was explaining the policy of collective security to an internal party meeting. He had no occasion to mislead his listeners with a false depiction of Soviet diplomacy. He did not mention an alliance with Hitler. He was quite detailed and thorough, resting his substantive arguments on the foundation of history. As he explained in emotional language, one could not simply ignore the past and cling to theory and dogma; the reality was clear, “No special study of international relations is needed, it is enough to read any daily newspaper in order to see and to understand the alarming and ominous character of the present international situation.” He informed his comrades that the German threat was indeed real:

The point, however, is this, that Germany is striving not only for the restoration of the rights trampled underfoot by the Versailles treaty, not only for the restoration of its pre-war boundaries, but is building its foreign policy on unlimited aggression, even going so far as to talk of subjecting to the so called German race all other races and peoples. It is conducting an open, rabid, anti-Soviet policy...

He continued with a concise explanation of the interests of the USSR in the present international situation. "Peace," he opined, "Claims the interest of the working people of all countries, to whose fate we cannot be indifferent. After all, is it not the ruling classes but the working people who pay with their blood, their lives, their meager property for violations of the peace, for the destruction inevitable in war."¹³ A broad based peace was in the interests of all nations, not just the USSR, although it seemed that only the Soviet Union gave voice to its concerns.

He concluded with a criticism of the narrow-minded, popular western appeal of anti-Bolshevism in the face of the fascist cancer. He seemed to have a handle on the limitations of popular politics:

Further, there are not a few people among the governing classes of western countries who naively believe that fascism is really a solid barrier against an advance of the working class. And since the aggressor States are at the same time the bulwark of fascism, they fear that a defeat of the aggressor states in a war, or even their diplomatic defeat, might prove to be a defeat for fascism and destroy that artificial dam against the labor movement.

As if these misguided arguments were not enough, he asserted to the party faithful that "to this is added one more apprehension, that for the necessary balance in the struggle against the aggressor countries, co-operation with the Soviet Union is essential, and this, it appears, might also have repercussions upon the domestic political struggle." The ramifications of this mentality could have disastrous repercussions:

Thus it appears these reactionary circles prefer to sacrifice their national interests, to endanger and even lose their State positions for the sake of preserving their social and class positions. These are the kind of considerations that explain the inertia and passivity of the foreign policy of certain foreign countries, the servile and conciliatory attitude to the fascist aggressors which has radically changed the correlation of forces in Europe and in the entire world.

Finally, he assured his audience that the USSR would not stand idly by and witness the destruction of the European order, “If, however, contrary to our expectations, the worst happens and it will not be possible to preserve peace despite our policy, we know that the defense of our country is in strong and capable hands.”¹⁴

Litvinov had to maintain the integrity of his policy in the face of a crumbling west. In July and August, 1938, the USSR adopted a type of wait and see attitude. Britain and France were attempting to discover Hitler’s motives and his next move. They were doing nothing to deter the German dictator, preferring, as Litvinov indicated, to maintain the façade of domestic stability. Starting in March, 1938 and pleading throughout the year, Litvinov urged an international conference of western powers to discuss the delicate Czech situation.¹⁵ The proximity of Czechoslovakia to the USSR was not lost on Soviet diplomats. The Soviet Union was the voice in the diplomatic desert pleading for action. Nothing in the documents indicates that the USSR sought an accommodation with Hitler at this crucial juncture. On the contrary, the Soviet Union was Germany’s most vocal critic.

In early August, 1938, Litvinov, in a cable to Alexandrovsky in Prague, summed up the precarious diplomatic and political position of the Soviet Union:

Of course, we are extremely interested in the preservation of Czechoslovakia’s independence, in the hindrance of the Hitlerite drive to the south-east, but without the Western powers it is doubtful whether we would be able to do anything serious, and those powers do not consider it necessary to seek our assistance, ignore us and decide everything concerning the German-Czechoslovak conflict among themselves. We are not aware of Czechoslovakia herself ever pointing out to her western ‘friends’ the necessity of bringing in the Soviet Union. In such circumstances, for us to criticize officially and publicly the actions of England and France would result in accusations of us trying to sabotage their ‘peaceful action’, and encouraging Czechoslovakia’s unyielding attitude which would not be of any help to Czechoslovakia herself.¹⁶

As the western powers collapsed under powerful public pressure, Litvinov had to walk a political tightrope and convince England and France of the importance of this moment. Because Litvinov linked Soviet action to French participation under existing treaty obligations (a Czech requirement in 1935) and remained vague as to Russian willingness to act unilaterally, the Czechs themselves did not trust Soviet intentions, adding to Litvinov's challenges.¹⁷ Collective security became a diplomatic nightmare but Litvinov was undeterred.

Summer turned to fall with Europe on the precipice of war. It became clear that France would not honor its treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia and the Soviets would have to act alone, if at all. The feared western coalition against the USSR, with the Soviet Union bearing the brunt of military operations, seemed a close reality. France was waiting for the Soviets to declare their position and the USSR wanted French assurances of aid to Czechoslovakia. Both nations contributed to the atmosphere of uncertainty. Hitler was in no mood to wait.

As usual, Litvinov took the initiative and again addressed the League Assembly on September 21, 1938. He began his analysis with substantive support for the authority of the League of Nations and a call for united action at this most critical time. He pleaded with his audience to accept the clear facts of the international situation. As he correctly stated, the aggressor states had expanded their influence with little or no opposition. They had formed a bloc of interested nations spreading the danger of conflict. He placed the responsibility for the present tensions "with those States which restrained the League from resistance to the aggressors when they were still weak and divided, and were still making only their first timid attempts to break the peace."¹⁸ He was attempting, again, to illustrate the extreme urgency of the situation.

What then should be done to counter this dangerous aggressive tendency? Where were the splits in League policy? He demanded that the League enforce its own policies. “The aggressor” explained Litvinov, “Should be met with the program laid down by the League covenant, resolutely, consistently and without hesitation.” He then illustrated what he called “another conception” which was a not so thinly disguised attack on Anglo-French policy. This conception recommends “as the height of human wisdom, under cover of imaginary pacifism, that the aggressor be treated with consideration, and his vanity not be wounded.” He went on to give examples of the current Franco-British practices in attempting to engage Germany in “conversations and negotiations...compromise agreements and breaches of those very agreements overlooked.” The results of this activity, he asserted, has brought “three wars, and threatens to bring down on us a fourth. Four nations have already been sacrificed, and a fifth is next on the list.”¹⁹

Despite the inertia of the League of Nations, Litvinov announced that:

We intend to fulfill our obligations under the pact and, together with France, to afford assistance to Czechoslovakia by the ways open to us. Our War Department is ready to immediately to participate in a conference with representatives of the French and Czechoslovak War Departments, in order to discuss the measures appropriate to the moment...It was necessary, however, to exhaust all means of averting an armed conflict, and we considered one such method to be an immediate consultation between the Great Powers of Europe and other interested states, in order if possible to decide on the terms of a collective *démarche*.²⁰

Litvinov tried his best and, in forceful and clear language, carefully laid out the Soviet position.

At the Munich conference in late September, Britain and France gave away the Sudetenland and Hitler had yet another bloodless victory. Despite this devastating defeat, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs and the Soviet leadership clung to collective security. The only other option

was the distasteful prospect of alignment with Germany and waiting for the promised attack on the Soviet Union. Soviet aggression was not part of the plan.

Vyacheslav Molotov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, later to become Foreign Minister, summed up the crucial year 1938 in a speech in Moscow on November 6, the eve of the celebrations of the anniversary of the Revolution. Like Litvinov earlier, Molotov was addressing a domestic audience. He had no reason to mislead his listeners as to the true motives of Soviet policy. Again, there was no mention of alliance with Germany. He underscored the crucial failure of western policy and the increasing danger of war. He urged a pragmatic approach and identified "at least two victories" which endangered the peace, "the first decisive event in the Czechoslovak question was the victory won by England and Germany over the Government of France. Two Governments, the English and German, 'defeated' the French Government by persuading it to renounce its treaty of assistance with Czechoslovakia." As a result, noted the Chairman, "The fascist and so-called democratic Powers of Europe came together at Munich and the victory over Czechoslovakia was complete." While the western powers rushed to appease the Nazi dictator and France renounced its treaty obligations, "The Soviet Union showed that its attitude to international treaties is utterly different. It demonstrated to the entire world that its fidelity to the treaties it has concluded for fighting the aggressor is unshakeable"

Molotov then assessed the implications of the failed western position. Britain and France had allied with the fascist powers and brought Europe to the brink of war in the name of peace. He was not seeking a *modus vivendi* with Germany. He pointed out that "despite the allegedly peaceful character of the Munich Agreement, all who took part in it are now busily increasing

their armaments, expanding their armies, increasing their military budgets. The bargain between the fascist governments and the governments of the so-called democratic countries, far from lessening the danger of the outbreak of the second imperialist war, has on the contrary added fuel to the flames.” He argued that “At such a moment we cannot expect the second imperialist war to cease or be extinguished. On the contrary, the danger of its breaking out at new points and expanding its scope is obvious.” While pleading for peace and a realistic approach to aggression, Molotov left no doubt as to the readiness of the USSR to defend itself, “Only the Soviet State, strong in its foreign policy, ready for any test from the outside, only our State is able to pursue a consistent policy of peace, firm in the defense of its frontiers and of the interests of socialism. Anyone who wants to be convinced of the strength and power of our forces is welcome to try.”²¹ Molotov did not want the fascist powers to mistake diplomacy for weakness. If conflict was indeed the last resort, the USSR would fight for its survival.

Munich may well have represented the nadir of western diplomacy towards aggression. Hitler became even more convinced of the inherent weakness and disinterest of England and France in Eastern Europe. As a last resort, the Soviet Union could have sought an accommodation with its fascist neighbor, although that neighbor was ineluctably opposed to communism, and taken part in the spoils of great power diplomacy. The fact that it did not is a testament to the status of collective security and peace, at least for the moment, as a foundation of Soviet policy. The USSR was still reeling from the purges and collectivization while the Red Army struggled to face the challenges of the vaunted Wehrmacht. War might have been on the horizon, and, in communist doctrine, inevitable, just not in 1938. Although the forces of capitalism remained the great theoretical enemy of the Bolshevik experiment in Russia,

seemingly only the leaders of Soviet diplomacy realized that the Nazi menace was indeed a great threat, not only to the USSR itself, but to the whole of Europe. Soviet diplomats tried to explain to the western powers that war anywhere, east or west would be devastating for all.

At the end of 1938, Hitler turned his aggressive gaze to the remainder of Czechoslovakia and then Poland, having no evidence that the western powers would risk a general war over these Eastern nations. Litvinov understood that 1939 must be the year of direct diplomatic confrontation with England and France. That is, he would make them an offer that they could not refuse. They would have to “put up or shut up.” The peaceful rhetoric would have to be supported with conciliatory gestures, including an alliance opposing fascism. In any case, Litvinov would finally flush out British and French intentions. The peace of Europe and the world depended on their response.

END NOTES

¹ Harvey Leonard Dyck, *Weimar Germany & Soviet Russia, 1926-1933: A Study in Diplomatic Instability* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 216-225.

² *Ibid.*, 223-224.

³ *Ibid.*, 216. Edward E. Erieson, III, Karl Schnurre and the Evolution of Nazi-soviet Relations, 1936-1941.” *German Studies Review*, vol. 21, no. 2 (May, 1998), 264.

⁴ As quoted in Walter Laqueur, *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict*, (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1965), 173-174.

⁵ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941*((New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 348-349.

⁶ R. W. Davies, *Soviet economic development from Lenin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 42.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁸ *Archiv Vnshnei Politiki Rosskoi Federatsia* (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, Moscow), fond 05, opis 18, papka 137, delo i, vol 1, list 118, 4 Jan. 1938. Hereafter AVP RF. Later citations shortned to f., op., p., d., l., as cited in Zara Steiner, “The Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Czechoslovakian Crisis in 1938: New Material from the Soviet Archives,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Sept, 1999): 753.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 754. AVP RF f. 05, op. 18, p. 137, d. 1, vol. 1, l. 118, Litvinov to Stalin and others, 14 Mar. 1938.

¹⁰ DVP, vol. xxi, doc 82 (emphasis added).

¹¹ See DVPS, Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second world War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933-1941* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), and Voprosi Istorii.

¹² Steiner, 758, AVP RF, 11 June, f. 05, op. 18, p. 149, d. 166, II, 16-17., Litvinov to Alexandrovsky.

¹³ Jane Degras (ed.), *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951-1953), vol. III, 282-294.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Steiner, 759, 763, 764,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 759, AVP RF, 11 Aug., f. 01, op. 18, p. 149, d. 1, l. 66., Litvinov to Alexandrovsky.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 760, 761, 765.

¹⁸ Degras, vol. III, 299-304.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, 308-311.

CHAPTER FIVE: 1939: THE SHOE FALLS

Although British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich in 1938 with what he thought was “peace in our time,” his beliefs were illusory. Hitler had simply succeeded in buying time for his planned invasion of Poland, and, ultimately, the Soviet Union. Still hoping to avoid a general war, Britain and France capitulated to the Nazi pressure at the Braunhaus and watched as the remainder of the Czechoslovak state disappeared in March, 1939.

In the face of such bold Nazi actions, especially after Hitler’s promise at Munich that he was satisfied with the Sudetenland, it seemed that the western powers understood the danger of Germany and the need for substantive political and diplomatic relations with the other nation in the path of the Nazi juggernaut, the USSR. Britain and France were prepared to fight for Poland. Such utopian hopes quickly dissipated and the Soviets were faced with a difficult choice in August, 1939: they could continue to bang their heads against western delay, or sign a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany. Although Poland appeared doomed despite western promises, the Soviets did not collect their portion until September 17, unleashing Stalinist terror on the population. Collective security died a slow and agonizing death in 1939. Russian policy remained consistent in the face of a wavering west. Certainly the Soviet Union was defending its interests and geopolitical position but not to the exclusion of the remainder of Europe. The Soviets argued that a general war would devastate the entire continent. The Soviets were not seeking to move Hitler westward and isolate a conflict; although Stalin sent the NKVD into Poland and Latvia to root out opposition, the USSR wanted to avoid all war. For the USSR, collective security meant anti-fascist coalitions, not a benevolent relationship with its eastern buffer states.

In this chapter, I will argue that the USSR tried valiantly to create an anti-fascist front until the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Again and again, before both foreign and domestic audiences, the Soviet Union preached collective security. Only when western inaction and downright contempt for Russian initiatives became evident, did the USSR entertain German overtures.

COLLECTIVE SECURITY ALIVE AND WELL AFTER MUNICH

After the Munich debacle, Litvinov refused to abandon collective security and argued for a more forceful approach to England and France. He knew that he had to illustrate to the west that the Nazi threat was equally dangerous to all nations and that Hitler could just as easily move against France as against Russia. A collective pact of mutual assistance was the only hope of deterrence. While the western powers feared war in 1939, fear of Bolshevism proved more powerful than the fear of fascism. Western diplomats and politicians played to public opinion. In many cases, such as Chamberlain and Daladier, political ambitions took precedence over national security. The anti-Soviet press actually saw some favorable positions in Hitler's Germany and continued to berate the Soviet Union. In Britain and France, most leaders did not want to seem soft on Communism no matter the risk.

Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin commented at length concerning the precarious international situation and western fears in his speech to the Eighteenth Congress of the Communist Party, the first since 1934, on March 10, 1939. Like Litvinov earlier, Stalin was urging collective security to a domestic audience. If Stalin himself opposed this policy, he would have said it and destroyed it. After reviewing the events from 1935 and the increasing bellicose climate worldwide, Koba (Stalin's Georgian nickname) added a bit of sarcasm to his comments regarding Europe. His feigned humor illustrated his frustrations:

A military bloc of Germany and Italy against the interests of England and France in Europe? Good gracious, do you call that a bloc? 'We' have no military bloc. All 'we' have is a harmless 'Berlin-Rome axis'; that is, just a geometrical formula about an axis. A military bloc of Germany, Italy and Japan against the interests of the United States, Great Britain and France in the Far East? Nothing of the kind! 'We' have no military bloc. All 'we' have is a harmless "Berlin-Rome-Tokyo triangle"; that is a slight penchant for geometry.

A war against the interests of England, France, the United States? Nonsense! 'We' are waging war on the Comintern, not on these states. If you don't believe it, read the 'anti-Comintern pact' concluded between Italy, Germany and Japan.

He continued with a harsh condemnation of British and French policy:

The chief reason [for concessions of territory without conflict] is that the majority of the non-aggressive countries, particularly England and France, have rejected the policy of collective security, the policy of collective resistance to the aggressors, and have taken up a position of non-intervention, a position of 'neutrality'.

He was especially contemptuous of non-action, "in fact the policy of non-intervention means conniving at aggression, giving free rein to war, and, consequently, transforming the war into a world war." The anti-soviet western policy was not lost on the Soviet Dictator. He asserted that England and France were "egging the Germans on to march farther east, promising them easy pickings, and prompting them: 'Just start war on the Bolsheviks, and everything will be all right.'" In fact", he continued," it must be admitted that this too looks very much like urging on and encouraging the aggressor..." He concluded with a straightforward presentation of the intentions of Soviet foreign policy. The USSR stood "for peace and the strengthening of business relations with all countries." He quickly added that peaceful intentions should not be confused with weakness, "we are not afraid of the threats of aggressors, and are ready to deal two blows for every blow delivered by instigators of war who attempt to violate the Soviet borders." He then summarized summary of the goals of Soviet foreign policy:

The tasks of the Party in the sphere of foreign policy are:

1. To continue the policy of peace and of strengthening business relations with all countries;
2. To be cautious and not allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers

who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them(to rake the fire with somebody else's hands-zagrebat zhar chuzhimi rukami);

3. To strengthen the might of our Red Army and Red Navy to the utmost;

4. To strengthen the international bonds of friendship with the working people of all countries, who are interested in peace and friendship among nations.¹

At the same Congress, Dimitry Manulisky, leader of the Ukrainian Communist Party, remarked that “the plan of the British reactionary bourgeoisie is to turn Germany towards the East—against the USSR—by sacrificing the small nations of Southeastern Europe to German fascism.” He continued his criticism of western intentions, “British reaction would like to use the Soviet Union to draw the teeth of German imperialism to weaken Germany for many years, preserving for British imperialism its dominating position in Europe.”² The Soviets were not playing favorites at this congress; all western powers came in for biting criticism. The threat of war was imminent and the USSR had to determine western motivations.

Some historians have viewed Stalin's speech as signaling a major shift in Soviet foreign policy toward Germany.³ Robert Tucker concluded that, “Stalin in his party congress speech set in motion talks leading to an alignment with Berlin.”⁴ In a mere five weeks, Russia would propose a major anti-German initiative; hardly an invitation for an alliance with Hitler. If this important speech was an invitation to Germany for improved relations and the conclusion of a diplomatic pact, most contemporary observers missed the point. The British ambassador, William Seeds reported to London that Stalin's presentation “contained little that was new or unexpected.”⁵ Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, the German ambassador in Russia since October 3, 1934, and former Minister to Teheran and Bucharest, reported on Stalin's speech in a memorandum to the Foreign Office on March 13.⁶ As Shore points out, it remains unclear when Hitler may have received this information. The original log books have been lost.⁷ This time delay may explain the lack of a substantive Nazi response to Stalin's polemic. Indeed, the

possibility of a pact may have dissipated at this crucial moment. Of course, Stalin attacked the west broadly and did not directly indicate a preference for Germany. Characteristically,

Schulenburg was reserved about Stalin's position. He related to Berlin that:

in that part of the speech devoted to foreign policy and in which was manifest unchanged adherence to the policy hitherto pursued, it was noteworthy that Stalin's irony and criticism were directed in considerably sharper degree against Britain, i.e., against the reactionary forces in power there, than against the so-called aggressor States, and in particular, Germany.⁸

Schulenberg perhaps ignored the direct criticisms leveled at Germany during the speech.

On May 26, Ribbentrop sent a detailed instruction to Schulenburg concerning future relations with Russia. The gap between March and late May, considering Schulenburg's memorandum of March 13, indicates that Ribbentrop did not learn of Stalin's speech for some time. The Foreign Minister was concerned that Anglo-Soviet talks were progressing and he suggested that "we need to emerge from our reserve more markedly."⁹ Schulenburg was to engage Molotov in discussions intended to improve relations. Ribbentrop continued:

From certain events in recent months we have thought we were able to detect signs that Russia's views had undergone a change in this respect[desist from attacking Germany with communist and world-revolutionary ideas carried into Germany itself]...we thought we could recognize certain signs that that Soviet views were tending in this direction in Stalin's speech in March.¹⁰

Ribbentrop then noted that, "a real opposition of interests in foreign affairs does not exist between Germany and Soviet Russia."¹¹ Stalin's rant got Germany's attention. It also seemed to arouse Britain and France. Stalin, summing up the international situation and calling attention to the danger of a devastating war, made it clear that Russia was nobody's patsy.

Litvinov and the foreign office used the occasion of the speech to press collective security on England and France once again. They had no intention of capitulating to the Nazi dictator as had England and France. Perhaps with the disappearance of the Czechoslovakian

rump in March, 1939, the west would finally pay attention. It was certainly in the USSR's interest to rouse the western powers. Although it was not in the interests of France and Great Britain to go to war over Czechoslovakia, but perhaps a collective anti-fascist front would prevent the feared conflict. To Litvinov, western inaction was merely provoking the very conflict that the USSR so desperately wanted to avoid.

SOVIET RELATIONS WITH THE BRITAIN AND FRANCE

Although relations between the USSR, Britain, and France had been strained in the 1920s and early 1930s, it was Litvinov's task to illustrate the common threat of annihilation linking them together. Time was of the essence before Hitler's next step toward war. The pace of diplomacy had to speed up before it was too late. The Soviet Union would take the lead as it had in the past and this time force the hand of England and France.

Perhaps the USSR should have learned from the events of 1937 that western intentions were not always what they seemed. Although Russia had concluded a mutual defense pact with France in May, 1935, ratification was delayed. The Soviet government wanted to test French resolve and proposed military staff talks. Actually it was Pierre Laval who first breached the subject in 1935.¹² While Soviet initiatives reflected its self-interest in participating in international politics, duplicity and delay characterized French policy and the talks never materialized. A powerful anti-Communist press, fear of communism, and the rise of the French left undermined cooperation. That the talks failed was one thing; how and why they failed were quite another.¹³

British political and diplomatic leaders began a substantive reappraisal of British foreign policy in early 1939. The voices of those who advocated a more realistic and forceful policy began to echo throughout Britain and Europe. Unfortunately, they would not be able to sway the

deeply held fear of communism in England and beyond.

Robert Vansittart, now demoted to chief diplomatic advisor, frankly commented on the state of English-Soviet relations on invitation of Lord Halifax. Vansittart noted that, “Anglo-Soviet Relations are in a most unsatisfactory state. It is not only regrettable but dangerous that they should be in this state, and a continuance of it will become a great deal more dangerous very shortly.” Relations were at a low ebb because, Vansittart explained, that, “it is an incontestable fact (at any rate it is a very widely stated one), that we practically boycotted them during 1938.” The result of this policy, he concluded “accounts for the gradual drift towards isolation that is going on in Russia. That fact and that tendency we ought to correct and correct soon.”¹⁴ England sent a trade representative to Russia in early spring. While Litvinov welcomed this gesture, he demanded a change in action not more rhetoric.¹⁵ Neville Chamberlain ignored Vansittart’s advice and discounted Russia’s value. England saw no urgency in the diplomatic interchange.

France sent a new ambassador to the Soviet Union in February, 1939: Paul Emile Naggiar. He continued the practices of his predecessor Payart: lots of possibilities but little substance. Soviet patience was wearing thin. Still, Litvinov plowed forward. In a letter of March 20, 1939, he declared that, “The Soviet Union is in a better position than any other country to provide for the defense of its own borders, but it still does not refuse to cooperate with other countries. It conceives of such cooperation only in terms of joining in actual common efforts to resist the aggressor.”¹⁶ The Soviet Ambassador in France, Jacob Surtis, recognized the dangerous game of great power diplomacy in a note to the Foreign Office on March 26, 1939. He correctly assessed the western position. “It is not necessary,” he began, “To remind anyone that the best way out for the Munichmen is to involve us in a war with Germany.” “But” continued Surtis, “If despite all their efforts, war breaks out somewhere else, and if the aggressor, instead of

moving in the direction pointed out to him by the Munichmen, actually attacks the Munichmen themselves, then, of course, they will accept assistance from the USSR.”¹⁷ As Surtis explained, the hypocrisy was palpable.

As Hitler increased the pressure on Poland for access to the sea, Britain and France took note of the threat, at least a little. On March 21, English ambassador Seeds submitted to the Soviet Foreign Commissariat a draft of proposed declaration of the USSR, Great Britain, France, and Poland:

We, the undersigned, duly authorized to that effect, hereby declare that, inasmuch as peace and security in Europe are matters of common interest and concern, and since European peace and security may be affected by any action which constitutes a threat to the political independence of any European state, our respective Governments hereby undertake immediately to consult together as to what steps should be taken to offer joint resistance to any such action.¹⁸

Following reception of the draft, the Soviets agreed and pushed for signature. The British would ultimately blame Poland for the failure of ratification, but England at least broached the possibility of common action against aggression.

Public fear was also increasing in France. On April 11, the Soviet Embassy in Paris informed the Foreign Office that, “everyone is now convinced that war is inevitable. At a time like this, aid should no longer be rejected, no matter where it comes from and that the Soviet Union should no longer be ignored. The French government cannot avoid taking these feelings into consideration.”¹⁹ On April 14, Bonnet, the French Foreign minister, proposed that the USSR and France should exchange letters stating the following:

In the event of France finding herself in a state of war with Germany as a consequence of her providing assistance to Poland or Rumania, the USSR shall provide France with immediate assistance and support.

In the event of the USSR finding herself in a state of war with Germany as a consequence of her providing assistance to Poland or Rumania, France shall provide the USSR with immediate assistance and support.

Both Governments shall without delay coordinate the forms of such aid and shall take

every measure to guarantee its full effectiveness.²⁰

The Daladier government was going beyond mere superficial gestures.

Picking up the spirit of conciliation, the British government sent the following note on April 14 to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs through its Moscow Ambassador William Seeds. "His Majesty's government" began the memorandum, "has noted Mr. Stalin's recent statement that the Soviet Union stands for the rendering of support to nations which are victims of aggression and which fight for their independence." Hence, concluded the dispatch:

it would therefore be in complete accord with this policy were the Soviet Government now to make a public declaration on their own initiative in which, ...they would request that in the event of any act of aggression against any European neighbor of the Soviet Union which was resisted by the country concerned, the assistance of the Soviet Government would be available, if desired, and would be afforded in such manner as would be found most convenient.²¹

Molotov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, immediately noticed the intentional vagueness and one-sidedness in the note. "Before we make any formal and public commitments," he cabled to Seeds on April 16 "we would like to know just what we are talking about."²² Molotov's attempts at definition would prove problematic.

SOVIET PROPOSALS AND WESTERN RESPONSES (OR NON-RESPONSES)

With the hope of cooperation in the air, the Soviet Union forced the issue on April 17, 1939 with a detailed proposal for collective action. This proposal would clarify the real intentions of England and France and detail commitments. It would become the basis of Soviet Foreign Policy until August 23, 1939. The Soviets delivered the proposal to Seeds, British Ambassador to the Soviet Union. The Soviet plan envisioned a mutual assistance pact between Britain, France and the USSR "in case of aggression in Europe against any one of the contracting parties." The parties also obligated themselves to assist the Eastern European states situated between the Baltic and Black seas as well as to enter into military discussions. Finally, the

parties were not to conclude a separate peace.²³ Soviet diplomats also made it clear to Seeds that, “mutual assistance pacts not reinforced with a corresponding precise definition of military commitments, often fail. The absence of such definition in the pacts between the USSR, France and Czechoslovakia undoubtedly played a negative role in the fate of Czechoslovakia.”²⁴ The Soviet Union had illustrated its good faith and peaceful intentions. The cards were now on the table and Russia called. Britain and France had to stop bluffing.

Britain was in no hurry to respond. Chamberlain was a committed anti-Bolshevik and Hitler and Mussolini were not concerned about the Soviet proposal. France was a little more serious, but remained intentionally vague in its intent. On April 25, 1939, the French government submitted its proposal to the Soviet Embassy in Paris. French the Quai d’Orsay finely tuned the language to put the burden on the USSR. Perhaps the Soviets would not notice:

If France and Great Britain found themselves in a state of war with Germany **as a result of the action which they had taken with a view to preventing all changes by force of the existing status quo in Central or Eastern Europe**, the USSR would immediately lend them aid and assistance.

However, “If the USSR found itself in a state of war with Germany as a result of the assistance it had given France and Great Britain under conditions stipulated in the preceding paragraph,” only then would “France and Great Britain would immediately lend it aid and assistance.”²⁵

Soviet diplomats quickly saw the one-sided nature of the French position. On April 26, 1939, the day after receiving the French document, the Soviet Embassy in Paris reported to the Foreign Office:

Mutuality according to this proposal... turns out that when France and Britain deem it necessary to fight Germany to protect the status quo in Europe we will automatically be drawn into the war on their side, but if we were to defend the same status quo on our own initiative, Britain and France would not be committed to anything. A strange equality.²⁶

Soviet ambassador Surtis met French Foreign Minister Bonnet on April 29 and explained the

Russian position. As Surtis reported Bonnet, “even feigned a little embarrassment, that he had not studied it enough and that the wording was unfortunate.”²⁷ The Soviets were better analysts than France thought. The USSR wanted a **mutual** system of alliances. The quest for parallel obligations remained the Soviet goal.

On April 29, 1939, France responded with what it thought was a clearer proposal:

If France and Great Britain found themselves in a state of war with Germany as a result of the action which they had taken with a view to preventing all changes by force of the existing status quo in Central or Eastern Europe, the USSR would immediately lend them aid and assistance.

If the USSR found itself in a state of war with Germany as a result of the action which it had taken with a view to preventing all changes by force of the existing status quo in Central or Eastern Europe, France and Great Britain would immediately lend it aid and assistance.²⁸

Although this reply was quick and to the point, it did not address the complete Soviet *demarche* of April 17, specifically a mutual aid pact in case of attack on one of the parties, guarantees to the Eastern European states between the Baltic and Black seas and the prohibition of a separate peace.

Britain continued its wait and see attitude. Other diplomats noted Britain’s dangerous game. Leger told American Ambassador to France, William Bullitt, that while Britain was demanding that the USSR give unilateral guarantees to Poland and Rumania, England “was not ready to give any British guarantees whatsoever.”²⁹ Bullitt continued in a note of May 5, 1939, describing the English position regarding the USSR as “the dilatory and almost insulting policy.”³⁰ Finally, Payart, the French Chargé d’ Affaires in Russia opined on the same day that “from the Soviet point of view”, British actions, or non-actions, “merely added insult to injury.”³¹ If these astute observers could clearly interpret British intentions, how much more frustrated and concerned must the Soviets have been in their attempts to craft a viable and reciprocal alliance? Still, Soviet policy remained anti-German.

These diplomats were correct. Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Chamberlain supporter who had replaced Vansittart as Permanent Undersecretary, concluded that there would be “great difficulty in refusing the Soviet offer. We have taken the attitude that the Soviet preach us sermons on ‘collective security’ but make no practical proposals. They have now made such, and they will rail at us for turning them down.” Cadogan identified a further risk, “if we turn down this proposal, the Soviet might make some ‘non-intervention’ agreement with the German government.”³² Despite his concerns, he recommended rejection.³³ Although other voices in the British government advocated a supportive approach, Halifax told Maiskii on April 29 that the British government was simply “too busy” to respond to the “very logical and well constructed” Soviet propositions.³⁴ British duplicity, fear of Bolshevism and war, or perhaps protection of its self interest was becoming clear. In any case, diplomatic formalities required respect for the Soviet efforts.

In the midst of these diplomatic maneuverings, Stalin intervened personally: on May 3, he summarily dismissed Litvinov and replaced him with Molotov. Stalin, in his usual mysterious way, explained the need for a change at the Foreign Ministry. The Soviet Dictator claimed that a “serious conflict” had arisen between Molotov and Litvinov owing “to the disloyal attitude” of Litvinov toward Molotov. Stalin announced that Litvinov requested “to be released from his duties as People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs.” Finally “Molotov has been appointed as People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs to serve concurrently as Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars.”³⁵

Was this appointment of a loyal and dedicated Bolshevik replacing a western leaning Jew the beginning of a shift in Soviet policy and the precursor of a pro-German orientation? Stalin never explained the alleged “disloyal attitude” of Litvinov. He continued to refer to the former

foreign minister as “Tovarich (Comrade)”. Litvinov was not purged, a fate that befell many members of the foreign office. As usual, Stalin’s motives remain unclear. In any case, Soviet foreign policy remained consistent: the construction of an anti-German alliance.

Reliance on only the German documents seems to support the idea that after Litvinov’s fall, the USSR began an all-out diplomatic assault on the Nazi state. Careful analysis of Soviet material paints a completely different picture. As Geoffrey Roberts explains, German diplomats understood the precarious state of Nazi-Soviet relations and wanted to project a positive atmosphere to Berlin. Soviet diplomats were under no such illusion.³⁶ As discussed in chapter 4, while diplomatic policy continued to diverge, economic relations increased in the 1930s.

Georgei Astakhov, the Soviet Chargé d’Affaires in Berlin met with Baron von Stumm, deputy head of the German foreign ministry’s press department on May 9, 1939 and clarified the Soviet position. “To all [Stumm’s] arguments,” explained Astakhov, “I made corresponding objections, pointing out that the German side openly and on its own initiative had caused the deterioration of German-Soviet relations, and that their improvement depended mainly on them.” He noted that “The Soviet side has never shunned an improvement in relations provided there was a basis for it.”³⁷

In order all remove all doubts concerning press reports of a *détente* between Berlin and Moscow, Astakhov sent a letter to Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Potemkin, on May 12. While the Germans were striving to “create the impression of an impending or even already achieved improvement in German- Soviet relations... only one thing can be stated as certain fact-this is a noticeable change in the tone of the German press in relation to us...” Astakhov declared that this change in the German attitude did not “warrant any serious consideration.” He went on to suggest that his reply inform the Germans “that for the present we

have no grounds for trusting the seriousness of this ‘change’, although we are always prepared to meet halfway when it comes to improving relations.”³⁸ Molotov was committed to collective security and continued the initiatives of his predecessor. He waited patiently for a substantive response to the Soviet proposal of April 17. His patience would be severely tested.

On May 8, 1939, Seeds, the British Ambassador in Russia handed Molotov the English response. It was less than enthusiastic. The British demanded that the USSR “should make a public declaration on their own initiative” and because of recent Anglo-French proposals concerning certain East European countries, “the Soviet government would undertake that in the event of Great Britain and France being involved in hostilities in fulfillment of these obligations, the assistance of the Soviet government would be immediately available if desired and would be afforded in such a manner and on such terms as might be agreed.”³⁹

Britain’s proposal justified Soviet fears of western manipulation of the diplomatic situation and the attempt to isolate the Soviet Union in a war with Germany without British and French aid. The Russian Foreign Office again made it clear that it sought reciprocity of obligations. English policy remained vague.

On May 11, 1939 *Izvestia* brought the diplomatic dispute to the Russian public in a detailed front page article:

The USSR has felt and continues to feel, that if France and Britain really want to create a barrier to aggression in Europe, the first thing that has to be done is for the four powers—Britain, France, the USSR and Poland or at least the three powers—Britain, France and the USSR, to form a united front, so that these three countries, bound on a reciprocal basis by a mutual aid pact, could provide guarantees to other states in Eastern and Central Europe who are threatened by aggression.

While the Soviet Union sincerely suggested mutual military responsibilities, the article criticized the narrow and one-sided Anglo-French attitude. *Izvestia* correctly asserted that Anglo-French proposals placed the burden of action on the Soviets alone. The article argued that because the

USSR had no mutual aid pacts with Britain, France, or Poland, “the USSR is committed to rendering aid to these three states, yet receives no aid from them, meaning that in the event of direct aggression against the USSR, the latter would have only itself to rely on.”⁴⁰ Soviet diplomats and the Soviet public were serious about mutual aid obligations directed against the clear German threat. Soviet foreign policy was now publicly directed against Hitler and the expanding Nazi state. If the Soviets really wanted a Berlin-Moscow axis, why not now? The west provided the perfect excuse for a Nazi-Soviet understanding: delay in the face of substantive Soviet initiatives.

On May 14, the Soviets replied to the British proposal of May 8. Again the Russians demanded reciprocity and comprehensiveness. While the USSR recognized the inconsistency of the western position, it proposed “at least three indispensable conditions for the creation of an effective barrier by pacific States against a further extension of aggression in Europe.” The Soviets remained determined to conclude a substantive pact of reciprocal obligations:

(1) The conclusion between England and France and the USSR of an effective pact of mutual assistance against aggression; (2) The guaranteeing by these three Great Powers of States of Central and Eastern Europe threatened by aggression including also Latvia, Estonia and Finland; (3) The conclusion of a concrete agreement between England, France and USSR as to forms and extent of assistance to be rendered materially to each other and to the guaranteed States, failing which (without such an agreement) there is a risk that, as experience of Czecho-Slovakia proved, pacts of mutual assistance may be ineffective.⁴¹

Despite these efforts, Halifax told the British ambassador in Japan on May 16, that, “The Soviet Government are still holding out for some closer arrangement than we are disposed to accept.”⁴² When Maiskii informed Halifax in Geneva on May 21, that the Soviet government only wished to “prevent aggression and war and that this is possible only if there is a concentration on the side of peace[mir] of such mighty forces as would eliminate any hope of possible victory for the

aggressor”, he concluded that, “judging from Halifax’s arguments, it was perfectly clear that the British government is avoiding a three-power pact purely from a desire not to burn its bridges to Hitler and Mussolini.”⁴³ The British did not take much time to analyze the new Soviet reply. As Maiskii reported, England did not want to burn its bridges with Italy and Germany.

On May 27, 1939, after Germany and Italy concluded a military-political alliance, the Soviet government received a new Anglo-French proposal. The western powers sought to muddle the language regarding the requirements of action on the part of the states. The obligation to intervene only arose if the target nation wished or requested aid. Finally, in the case of “aggression by a European power against the contracting parties, the parties are to act in accordance with the principles of Article 16, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Covenant of the League of Nations”⁴⁴ Russia was concerned that some nations in Eastern Europe may fall to Nazi aggression without seeking help from the USSR. The Soviet Union distrusted the non-action of the League of Nations and did not want to be bound by League bureaucracy. France, and especially England, played a dangerous linguistic game, inserting “consultations”, seeking to buy time in order to move Hitler eastward without entering a binding alliance which might have halted the dictator altogether.

Molotov and Soviet diplomats quickly identified the shortcomings of the proposal. Article 16 of the League Covenant called for a recommendation of the League Council before action could commence. Britain and France wanted more delay and uncertainty. The Soviets wanted to counter aggression with unified and definite commitments, not another roundtable. Words and resolutions were useless against the Nazi machine. As Molotov commented, “The USSR desires agreement on effective defense against the aggressor. It is not interested in, nor satisfied with, mere discussion.”⁴⁵ In addition, the provisions of assistance did not arise unless

one state acted with the “wishes” of the state under attack or that state “requested” assistance. Other diplomats understood the loophole in the proposal as well. On May 30, 1939, Charles Antoine Rochat, the Deputy Head of the Political and Trade Department of the French Foreign Ministry mentioned to Edwin C. Wilson, the Counsellor of the American Embassy in Paris, that “for instance, if Latvia or Estonia should be attacked by Germany and should not defend themselves or should refrain from appealing to Russia for assistance...then the pledge of mutual assistance would not come into play.”⁴⁶

What about the Germans? Russia and Germany enjoyed substantive economic interaction despite the diplomatic and political differences. Who wooed whom in terms of an improvement in the political climate remains unclear depending on the source, but Soviet documents illustrate a firm and resolute Soviet Union. On May 20, von der Schulenburg, the German Ambassador, approached Molotov concerning a new credit treaty. The commissar responded that the USSR had the impression “that the German government was playing some sort of game instead of conducting business-like economic negotiations...” If Germany wanted to play these games, it should seek other partners. He made it clear that the Soviet Union “was not going to participate in such a game.”⁴⁷ Molotov set the parameters for improved relations, “We had come to the conclusion that for the success of the economic negotiations it was necessary to create a corresponding political basis. Without such a basis, as shown by the experience of negotiations with Germany, it is not possible to settle economic questions.”⁴⁸ Germany was not a priority for Russia, but Russia was becoming a priority for Germany.

Diplomatic discussions continued in Germany concerning closer relations, the thrust of the pressure coming from the German side. Astakhov reported to the foreign commissariat that Ernst Weizsacker, State Secretary in the German Foreign Ministry, wanted to explore “the

possibility of negotiations with us about improving relations and to restrain our rapprochement with England.”⁴⁹ He further indicated that the Germans refrained, however from “committing themselves to any statement, avoiding even the term ‘improvement of relations.’”⁵⁰ The Nazis were testing Soviet resolve. Astakhov did not want to terminate all contacts. On June 14, he reported to Molotov that, “if we want to talk to the Germans about anything without particularly committing ourselves, in these cases it would be more expedient to do it here [in Germany].”⁵¹ Molotov was in no hurry and thus the merry-go-round with Britain and France continued.

Molotov would not give up. He addressed the Supreme Soviet (another domestic audience) on May 31, 1939. He roundly criticized the foreign policies of England, France, Italy, and Germany while reiterating the Soviet desire for peace. According to Molotov, the so-called democratic countries were victims of their own systems. The western powers ignored the aggressive nations because “they are still chiefly concerned with ‘pacifying’ public opinion, pretending that nothing of importance has happened recently.” Molotov argued that the democratic nations created a false sense of security in an attempt to satisfy public demands. “For us,” stated Molotov “it is clear that the attempt to hide from public opinion the real changes that have taken place in international affairs must be countered by facts.” He noticed an ominous tone to western practices. In the west, “it becomes obvious that soothing speeches and articles are necessary only to those who do not wish to hinder the further progress of aggression, in the hope of diverting it, so to speak, in a more or less ‘acceptable’ direction.” Here Molotov repeated to the Supreme Soviet a long standing Soviet fear: that western policy sought to force Hitler eastward and into war with the USSR. For Molotov, western policy was not benign and he urged his colleagues to remain “vigilant.” The People’s Commissar repeated that the USSR stood for peace and resistance to aggression. He reviewed the on- going negotiations with Britain and France and he concluded that

Anglo-French proposals placed “the USSR in an unequal position.” For all of the political conflicts, Germany and Italy could remain viable economic partners:

...While conducting negotiations with England and France, we do not by any means think it necessary to renounce business dealings with countries like Germany and Italy. As long ago as the beginning of last year negotiations were begun on the German initiative for a trade agreement and new credits. Germany at that time proposed granting a new credit of 200 million marks.⁵²

Molotov certainly did not want to close the door to cooperation with Germany and Italy. These states may in fact be a last resort for Soviet policy. Clearly, the USSR needed the economic interaction.

Following the lead of the People’s Commissar and tirelessly seeking compromise, the USSR submitted yet another draft on June 2, 1939 in response to the Anglo-French proposal. The Soviets suggested that the three states protect each other as well as “Belgium, Greece, Turkey, Rumania, Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Finland whom England, France and USSR have agreed to defend against aggression.” In addition, “the three States will come to an agreement within the shortest possible time as to methods, forms and extent of assistance which is to be rendered by them” as well as to consult and to act independently of the procedures of the League of Nations. Finally, the signatories are to conclude an armistice or peace only by joint agreement.⁵³

As logical and practical as the Soviet draft was, still the western powers sought a modification. This time the French Prime minister, Edouard Daladier, sought to expand Soviet commitments. While admitting the “logic” of the Soviet initiative, Daladier informed Surtis on June 3, that:

He would be inclined to work out approximately the following somewhat broader formula on this question: all sides pledge to come immediately to each other’s aid in the event of a direct attack in Europe on any of the parties to the agreement, as well as in the event of the parties’ being drawn into war as a result of aid rendered to any European state subjected to direct or indirect aggression.⁵⁴

Daladier did not want to list the nation states subject to protection, but wanted Soviet aid and support for the existing Anglo-French commitments in Europe. He also extended the

requirements for action to include both direct and indirect aggression, which is the threat of aggression or capitulation. He realized that Germany may choose indirect aggression against nations, especially those with already existing pro-fascist regimes.

After rejecting earlier Soviet overtures for a conference, Britain now supported the convocation of a roundtable meeting in Moscow. Halifax made this request to Maisky on June 8. Halifax added that he would like to attend personally, but the “complexity of the international situation chained him to London.” Halifax informed the Soviet ambassador that Seeds would lead the British delegation aided by Sir. William Strang.⁵⁵ While Hitler would send Ribbentrop personally, Halifax was simply too busy.

Halifax also questioned the required guarantees to the Baltic States referred to in the Soviet draft of June 2. He said that the British government could not accept the Soviet requirement that the states receiving guarantees be named. He proposed a compromise to the “justified” Soviet draft, namely that, “the document make no mention of the states to be guaranteed, but that it simply state that the pact commitments take effect in the event of a direct or indirect threat to the security of one of the parties to the agreement.”⁵⁶ Halifax conveniently ignored the Soviet request that the pact and military agreement be signed simultaneously.

On June 10, the People’s Commissariat instructed Maiskii to respond to the British concerns. The Foreign Office told the Ambassador to make it clear that if the USSR could not guarantee “the security of the USSR’s north-western borders by providing for decisive counteraction by the three consenting parties against direct or indirect attack on Estonia, Latvia or Finland, it will be impossible to satisfy public opinion in the Soviet Union.” Maiskii was to “explain to Halifax that this is not a question of technical wording, but a question of agreeing on the essence of the question, after which it will it will not be difficult to find a suitable

wording.”⁵⁷ Maiskii further informed Halifax that “his coming would be welcomed in Moscow.” Halifax again retorted that the critical international situation made it impossible for him to leave London. England would not commit to concrete action.

Pravda entered the fray with an extensive article on June 13, entitled “The Question of Defending the Three Baltic States Against Aggression.” The article asserted that the foreign press had finally recognized that, “the question of maintaining the neutrality of the three Baltic states is, from the point of view of the Soviet Union’s security, of vital interest and there can be no question that the peoples of the Baltic states are vitally interested in guarantees of their integrity from the great powers.” The party organ also underscored the powerful influence of other forces opposed to a united front of non-belligerent states:

It is quite possible that we are dealing here with certain influences from outside, if not with direct inspiration from those who wish to impede the formation of a broad defense front against aggression. At present, it is difficult to say just who the actual inspirers are: the aggressive states, interested in sabotaging the anti-aggression front, or certain reactionaries within the democratic states who want to limit aggression in certain areas, and not hamper its expansion in other areas.⁵⁸

Sadly, subsequent research has proven *Pravda*’s position correct. Britain, in particular had no intention of concluding a pact with the Soviet Union. For example, the Latvian envoy in Moscow informed his government on June 16 that the British military attaché in Moscow had told him that he personally was “against concluding a pact among Britain, France and the Soviet Union” and he further did “not believe that the pact will be concluded.”⁵⁹ The USSR faced a formidable task. Still, it continued in pursuit of the elusive agreement.

On June 15, Seeds handed Maiskii yet another British draft supposedly in response to the Soviet initiative of June 2. The requirement of an invitation on the part of the threatened state became just one option for intervention. Now, if the aggression constitutes “a menace,” joint action arises.⁶⁰ “Menace” was not defined. Despite the effort, the British draft continued to

ignore, avoid, or simply disregard the Soviet desire for specificity of obligations. The British Foreign Office simply sang a worn out tune. England's intentions were becoming increasingly clear: let the USSR protect the west while the parties discuss the possibility of aiding the USSR. Perhaps during the consultations, Hitler will finish the job the allies started after the Bolshevik revolution; the destruction of the Soviet Union.

Molotov and the Foreign Commissariat were relentless. On June 16 (notice the rapid response), the Soviets replied to the latest draft in specific terms. Molotov considered the latest proposal a "humiliation" for the Soviet Union because it placed the bulk of military obligations on the USSR without corresponding responsibilities on England and France.⁶¹ On the same day, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs cabled the Soviet Ambassadors in England and France concerning the present state of the negotiations:

In particular, we are being asked to render immediate assistance to the said five countries, but there is a refusal to give immediate assistance to the three Baltic states ostensibly in view of their refusal to accept such aid. This means that the French and the British put the USSR in a humiliatingly unequal position, something we cannot accept in any case.

We feel that the British and the French want to conclude a pact with us which would be advantageous to them and disadvantageous to us, that is, they do not want a serious treaty in line with the principle of reciprocity and equality of obligations.⁶²

Molotov and the foreign policy leadership realized that England and France, particularly England, were not "serious" about a binding and substantive alliance with the Soviet Union. At this point in the critical summer of 1939, the USSR could have looked to the other major power for assistance: Nazi Germany. The possibilities existed to broach the subject of improved political relations. The Germans certainly wanted a more stable relationship. The Soviets held on for dear life and continued the exchange of drafts with England and France.

On June 21, the British and French ambassadors handed Molotov a new draft of Article 1

regarding the Soviet draft of June 2:

The United Kingdom, France and the USSR undertake to give to each other immediately all the support and assistance in their power should one of these countries become involved in hostilities with a European Power as a result either of

1) Aggression by that power against any one of these three countries, or aggression by it, which being directed against another European state, thereby constitutes a menace to the security of these three countries, or

2) aggression by that Power against another European State which the contracting party had, with the approval of that State, undertaken to assist against such aggression.

Such support and assistance will be given in conformity with the principles of the League of Nations but without its being necessary to await action by the League.⁶³

British and French diplomats were not done. The British and French ambassadors made the following statement to Molotov:

Taking into consideration the view of the Soviet Government and the facts of a geographical nature, the Baltic States, Poland and Rumania are, if the two Governments are right, those neighboring European states the inviolability of which is one of the elements of security of the USSR. As regards France and Great Britain, Belgium, Holland and Switzerland are with respect to those neighboring European States which have to the security of France and Great Britain the same importance as the five above-mentioned States for Russia.⁶⁴

As in the June 15 British draft, what constituted a “menace” requiring intervention remained unclear, while Britain and France shifted Soviet obligations westward. Menace remained vague because it was undefined. What constituted a menace? Under what circumstances? Could the menace be diplomatic, psychological or intellectual? Did the target nation have to realize that it was subject to this menace? Like the word aggression, the Soviet Union wanted to know clearly what triggered the obligations under the proposed treaty. Soviet diplomats feared an uneven arrangement whereby the USSR would carry the brunt or all of the duties of conflict, while the west bore none. As they requested on numerous occasions, the Soviets wanted clarity of language and mutuality of obligations.

Again, the western proposals made no provisions for equal responsibilities. The Foreign Commissariat replied on June 22:

the Soviet government has attentively examined the proposals of England and France handed to M. Molotov on June 21. In view of the fact that these proposals constitute a repetition of previous proposals made by England and France, which, as already stated, have met with serious objections on the part of the Soviet Government, the latter have come to the conclusion that these proposals must be rejected as unacceptable.⁶⁵

Molotov underscored his position in a cable to Maiskii and Surtis on June 25. Attempts on the part of Britain and France to “create the impression that the latest Anglo-French proposals meet the USSR’s demand on the Baltic states are clearly not serious.”⁶⁶ What could the Soviets do to illustrate their integrity and impress on Britain and France the prospect of a catastrophe? While the negotiations continued, frustrations were building in the Soviet foreign office.

Andrei Zhdanov, Bolshevik intellectual, close associate of Joseph Stalin, and Party boss of Leningrad after Sergi Kirov’s murder, contributed a long, detailed and critical article to *Pravda* on June 29. The title illustrated his contention: “The British and the French Governments Do Not Want an Equal Treaty with the USSR.” He began with an illustration of the danger of the western position. According to Zhdanov, “despite the utmost clarity in the position of the Soviet Government, despite all efforts of the Soviet Government aimed at the earliest conclusion of a pact of mutual assistance,” no substantial progress in the talks was discernable. He asserted that this fact “encourages the hopes of the aggressors and of all enemies to peace in the possibility of the breakdown of the agreement among the democratic States against aggression, and it impels aggressors to the further unleashing of aggression.” Zhdanov probed Anglo-French intentions: “What is the reason for the delay in the negotiations whose favorable termination is impatiently and hopefully awaited by all pacific nations and all friends of peace?” He concluded, based on Anglo-French behavior, that “the English and French Governments have no wish for a treaty on terms of equality with the USSR, that is, for the only kind of treaty to which a self-respecting State can agree.” Zhdanov provided concrete examples of western delay and contradictions:

What are these facts?

Anglo-Soviet negotiations in the direct sense of this word, that is, since we were presented on 15 April with the first British proposals, have been going on for seventy-five days. Of these, the Soviet Government took sixteen days in preparing answers to the various English projects and proposals, while the remaining fifty-nine have been consumed by delays and procrastination on the part of the English and French. The question is: Who, in such a case, if not the English and French, bears responsibility for such slow progress in the negotiations?

He then cited another illustration of the contradictory western policy. When England wanted to conclude mutual assistance pacts with Turkey and Poland, it acted in haste. Therefore, “the intolerable delays and endless procrastination in negotiations with the USSR”

permit doubts of the sincerity of the real intentions of England and France, and compel us to put the question as to what exactly forms the basis of such policy: Is it a serious endeavor to ensure a peace front or a desire to utilize the negotiations as well as the delay in the negotiations for some different purposes having nothing in common with the creation of a front of pacific Powers?

Zhdanov gave further evidence of western bad faith when he asserted that, “The English and French Governments pile up artificial difficulties, make it appear that serious differences exist between England and France...and the USSR, which given goodwill and sincere intention by England and France, could be solved without delay or hinderance.” Based on the facts, Zhdanov concluded that:

It seems to me that the English and French desire not a real treaty acceptable to the USSR, but only *talks* about a treaty in order to speculate before public opinion in their countries on the allegedly unyielding attitude of the USSR, and thus make easier for themselves the road to a deal with the aggressors.
The next few days must show whether this is so or not.⁶⁷

Zhdanov correctly assessed the motives of the western powers and now publicly challenged them to illustrate their good faith. He left the ball in their court and awaited a response. Stalin wanted to move the talks along toward an agreement.

On July 1, England and France delivered still another draft of Article 1 of the proposed pact and a supplementary draft agreement, this time requiring secrecy. England and France always wanted more from each Soviet submission, as Zhdanov described. The draft of Article 1 stated:

The United Kingdom, France and the USSR undertake to give to each other immediately all effective assistance should one of these countries become involved in hostilities with a European Power as a result of aggression by that Power against any one of these three countries or aggression by that Power against another European State whose independence or neutrality the contracting country concerned felt obligated to defend against such aggression.

Such assistance will be given in conformity with the principles of the League of Nations but without its being necessary to follow the procedure of, or to await action by the League.

England and France added a supplementary draft:

It is understood between the three contracting Governments that Article 1 of the treaty signed today will apply to the following European States:

Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Rumania, Turkey, Greece, Belgium, Luxemburg, Netherlands and Switzerland

The foregoing list of countries is subject to revision by agreement between the three contracting Governments.

The present understanding between the three Governments will not be made public.⁶⁸

On the same evening, July 1, Naggiar handed Potemkin, the Deputy People's commissar the

Anglo-French draft of Article 3 concerning consultations. The proposal stated:

Without prejudice to the immediate rendering of assistance upon commencement of hostilities in accordance with Article 1, in the event of circumstances arising which threaten to call into operation the undertakings of mutual assistance contained in Article 1, the three contracting Governments will, at the request of any one of them, immediately consult together to examine the situation and to decide by common agreement the moment at which the mechanism of mutual assistance shall be put into immediate operation and the manner of its application, independently of any procedure of the League of Nations.⁶⁹

Naggiar further admitted that the revisions covered only indirect, not direct aggression. He gave the example of Switzerland. It was possible, the Ambassador continued, that power might be seized "by fascist parties, which would enter into close contact with Nazi Germany and, under her direction, begin preparations for carrying out Germany's offensive plans against France.

There would be no direct aggression, yet France could call on the USSR and Great Britain to join her in consultation with the aim of averting a German attack."⁷⁰ The Soviets wanted protection (guarantees) against any form of aggression, direct or indirect. Again, Britain and France were playing dangerous word games. The Soviets argued that the Anglo-French proposals, as Naggiar

illustrated, were one-sided and did not address Soviet concerns. This latest Anglo-French proposal did spell out the eastern European states which were possible targets of aggression; however, the USSR was in no position to accept what it considered a fractured agreement concerning the specifics of the trigger mechanism of intervention.

On July 3, the Soviet government handed the British and French representatives its counter-proposals, which sought to clarify the dichotomy between direct and indirect aggression and removed the language concerning “invitation” or “wishes” of the threatened nation. Further, the Soviets defined “indirect aggression” and called for the exchange of information and mutual diplomatic support:

The United Kingdom, France and the USSR undertake to give to each other immediately all effective assistance should one of these countries become involved in hostilities with a European Power as a result either of aggression by that Power against any one of these three countries, or of aggression, direct or indirect, by that Power against another European State whose independence or neutrality the contracting countries concerned felt obligated to defend against such aggression.

The assistance provided for in the present article will be given in conformity with the principles of the League of Nations, but without its being necessary to follow the procedure of, or to await action by, the League.⁷¹

Soviet diplomats re-worded the Anglo-French supplementary agreement as well:

The three contracting Governments have agreed that Article 1 of the Agreement signed by them today will apply-either in the event of direct aggression or in the event of indirect aggression, understood to mean an internal coup or a change in policy in favor of the aggressor-to the following States:

Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Rumania, Turkey, Greece, Belgium.

The foregoing list of countries is subject to revision by agreement between the three contracting Governments.⁷²

Soviet revisions to Article 3 stated:

Without prejudice to the immediate rendering of assistance in accordance with Article 1, *and with a view to securing its more effective organization, the three contracting Governments will exchange information periodically about the international situation and will lay down the lines of mutual diplomatic support in the interests of peace*, and in the event of circumstances arising which threaten to call into operation the undertakings of mutual assistance contained in Article 1, they will, at the request of any one of them,

immediately consult together to examine the situation and to decide by common agreement the moment at which the mechanism of mutual assistance shall be put into immediate operation and the manner of its application, independently of any procedure of the League of Nations.⁷³

On July 3, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs advised Maiskii and Surtis that:

We have rejected the Anglo-French proposal to the guarantees to three additional countries—Switzerland, Netherlands and Luxemburg—since only eight and not eleven countries were discussed during the negotiations and endorsed by the Supreme Soviet. We could agree to include two more countries (Switzerland and Netherlands) but not three and these two only on condition that Poland and Turkey conclude mutual-assistance treaties with the USSR similar to those they have with Britain and France.⁷⁴

Interestingly, both Halifax and Georges Mandel, the French Minister of Colonies, agreed that the USSR should be protected in cases of both indirect and direct aggression citing the Czech example of March 15.⁷⁵ The give and take slogged on. Britain and France could not understand that a collective front with the USSR against Hitler was in their interests.

On July 8, Seeds and Naggiar submitted their draft of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet treaty.

While the draft included new articles 2-7, the supplementary protocol presented more problems.

Anglo-French diplomats also altered the first paragraph of the supplementary protocol:

It is understood between the three contracting Governments that Article 1 of the agreement between them signed today will apply to the following European States, and that the word 'aggression' is to be understood as covering action accepted by the State in question under threat of force by another Power and involving the abandonment by it of its independence or neutrality.⁷⁶

While this July 8 proposal contained lofty goals and broad language, it failed to address important Soviet concerns. For example, Britain and France agreed only to conclude an armistice or peace by common agreement among the three contracting parties, but made no provision for simultaneously concluding a military and political agreement as the Soviets had demanded from the outset of negotiations in April. The supplementary protocol provided protection in cases of direct or indirect aggression, but included the term "threat of force". This language ignored the

problem of the Czech crisis of March, 1939, when Czech President Emil Hacha “voluntarily” allowed the German invasion. If the Baltic States extended Germany the same privileges, the consequences for the Soviet Union were obvious.

On July 9, the Soviets delivered a new draft to Seeds and Masikii with a more detailed definition of “indirect aggression” while removing the requirement of “threat of force”:

The three contracting Governments have agreed that

1) Article 1 of the treaty signed today will apply to the following European States: Turkey, Greece, Rumania, Poland, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, Switzerland and Holland:

2) with respect to the last two of the above named countries (Switzerland, Holland), the agreement shall take effect only if and when Poland and Turkey conclude a mutual assistance pact with the USSR:

3) the term ‘indirect aggression’ applies to any act which any of the above listed States agrees to under threat of force by another Power, or without such threat, which act involves the use of the given State’s territory and forces for aggression against it or against one of the contracting parties, consequently involving the abandonment by that State of its independence or neutrality.

The foregoing list is subject to revision by agreement between the contracting Governments.

The present supplementary agreement will not be made public.⁷⁷

This draft clarified Soviet requests for definite language regarding reciprocal obligations. The Czech crisis made clear the danger of “indirect aggression” and the consequent abandonment by a State of its independence or neutrality.

It is curious to note the absence of Lithuania in any of the proposed guarantees in the Soviet drafts. Hitler had occupied Memel in March 1939 and perhaps Stalin already had turned his interests to the eventual partition of this bothersome Baltic state. In the original secret protocol of August 23, 1939, Latvia and Estonia were in the Soviet sphere of interest and subsequently occupied in June, 1940. Germany received Lithuania, including the Vilnius region. Soviet troops entered Vilnius on September 19, 1940. According to the German-Soviet Boundary

and Friendship Treaty of September 28, 1940 and its secret protocol, the USSR acquired Lithuania with the exception of a strip of territory in the southwest.⁷⁸

Britain remained obstinate. On July 12, Halifax cabled Seeds and informed him that the British could not accept the Soviet definition of indirect aggression. Britain was attempting to avoid any possibility of defending the USSR against subversive Nazi actions directed against East European States as had occurred in Czechoslovakia. Britain still wanted Soviet support in case of a direct German attack against it, which English political leaders considered remote. Halifax warned Seeds that if the Soviet Union persisted in its demands concerning indirect aggression, "His Majesty's Government may have to reconsider their whole position." Seeds understood from this language that the negotiations were likely to be broken off.⁷⁹

British policy was fragmenting. On July 14, Maiskii met with David Lloyd George, the fiery Welshman and former Prime Minister, who made sport out of criticizing the present English government. Maiskii reported to Moscow that Lloyd George "expressed grave concern over the course and future prospects of the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. He said that the Chamberlain clique, still unable to resign themselves to the idea of a pact with the USSR against Germany, was now attempting a maneuver roughly along these lines." Lloyd George explained that,

On the one hand the British government was pressuring Poland through political, military and economic channels, recommending moderation over Danzig. On the other hand, by mobilizing the navy, putting on a show of air-power in France (and probably in Poland), emphasizing the strength of the Anglo-French alliance, publicizing the 'firm' speeches made by British ministers, etc., the British government hoped to 'frighten' Germany and thus to restrain her from expanding the conflict over Danzig into all-out war.⁸⁰

On July 17, Seeds, Naggiar and Strang handed Molotov new drafts of Article 1 and the supplementary protocol. The definition of aggression in the July 8 draft, requiring “threat of force”, unacceptable to the USSR, was now placed verbatim in Article 1:

...It is agreed between the three contracting Governments that the words ‘aggression’ in paragraph 2 above is to be understood as covering action accepted by the State in question under threat of force by another Power and involving the abandonment by it of its independence or neutrality.⁸¹

Britain and France continued to ignore Soviet demands for clarification of obligations. The western powers did not want to get involved over in new Czech crisis involving the Soviet definition of “indirect aggression” and “threat of force” although Nazi agitation in Eastern Europe was clear. Britain and France wanted Soviet protection but tried to avoid involvement on behalf of the USSR.

Molotov contacted his ambassadors in London and Paris and provided his view of the latest “new” revisions:

There is still disagreement on how the definition of ‘indirect aggression’ should be worded; our partners resort to all kinds of skullduggery on this question. Also, we have insisted all along that the military part is an inseparable component of a military-political agreement, and categorically reject the Anglo-French proposal that we should first agree on the ‘political’ part of the treaty and only then turn to the question of a military agreement.

Molotov called the latest proposal “unscrupulous” and argued that it “splits up what should be a single treaty into two separate treaties and contradicts our fundamental proposal to conclude the whole treaty all at once...” He reminded his ambassadors that “if an absolutely concrete military agreement is not included as an integral part of the overall agreement,” then the treaty “will amount to nothing but an empty declaration, and this is something we cannot accept.”⁸²

Surtis responded on July 19. The ambassador asserted that “while the negotiators are double-dealing with you, they are at the same time deceiving the public in their own countries,

where the vast majority (at least here in France) are waiting impatiently for an early conclusion of an effective agreement with us.” According to Surtis, “The deception is primarily one of distorting our position—which they describe as one of constantly coming up with new demands—and of deliberately misinforming the public about the substance of our demands and the real points over which there is disagreement.” He reported that the Soviet proposal regarding a military agreement was presented to the public and the press “as a demand for prior conclusion of a military pact, ‘entailing the disclosure of military secrets’ and without sufficient guarantee or certainty that a political agreement will, in fact, be reached.” He further informed Molotov that “as much effort has been made to distort our formulation of indirect aggression.” He then explained the reasons for the Anglo-French delay:

Their three months’ temporizing has made it perfectly clear that our partners do not want to reach a real agreement with us, but, being wary of their own public opinion, will conceal this fact and continue to hide behind the ‘secrecy of negotiations.’⁸³

Surtis and Molotov correctly gauged western motives.

Meanwhile, Britain continued its dangerous game of double dealing. On July 18 and 21, Chamberlain’s confidential agent, Horatio Wilson, chief economic advisor to the British government, met with Helmuth Wohltat, Nazi emissary and special assignments officer in Göring’s department to discuss the conclusion of a pact between the two nations. Wilson explained to Wohltat that the conclusion of a non-aggression pact “would allow problems like Danzig and Poland to recede into the background and lose their significance and that a non-aggression pact would enable Britain to disengage herself from her obligations to Poland.”⁸⁴ On July 20, Wilson set up a meeting between Wohltat and Sir. Robert Hudson, the British minister of Overseas Trade. Dirksen, now German ambassador in London, summarized the content of the meeting:

Hudson outlined some far-reaching plans for Anglo-German cooperation in opening up new, and exploiting existing, world markets. He expressed the opinion, incidentally, that there were still three large areas in which Germany and Britain could find abundant opportunity for profitably applying their efforts: namely, the British Empire, China and Russia.⁸⁵

It certainly seemed that Britain, at least, wanted to have the diplomatic advantage in all directions.

On July 24, Maiskii replied to the British press reports of the Hudson-Wohltat conversations. England was not keeping its intentions secret. He cabled Molotov that:

The Prime Minister is now making a desperate effort to back out of the commitments made in the spring regarding guarantees to Poland and at the same time to revise his former policy of appeasement. To this end, the British government continues to put strong pressure on the Polish government advising 'moderation' over Danzig.⁸⁶

Maiskii argued that Britain's policy was two-faced: mobilization of the British navy and RAF flights to France and the Hudson-Wohltat talks in London concerning the possibility "of granting Germany huge international loans of up to one million pounds, if Hitler really abandoned his 'aggressive intentions' (read: leave the West alone and face Eastwards)." Maiskii had no doubt that Hudson was "expressing the feelings of the Prime Minister."⁸⁷ The Soviet Union now saw what it was up against in the negotiations with Britain and France. If Soviet policy was really pro-German from the start as Tucker, Weinberg and Haslam, among others assert, why not use the intransience and hypocrisy of the west as an excuse for concluding a pact with Germany at this point? By continuing the talks with England and France, Molotov would not abandon collective security. He understood that the German option was a minefield as well.

England, not the USSR pursued Germany. On July 29, discussions took place between British Labor Party official Roden Buckston and Counsellor of the German Embassy in London Theodor Kordt. Buckston introduced a proposal designed for Anglo-German "agreement on establishing spheres of influence":

1. Germany agrees not to interfere in the affairs of the British Empire.
2. Great Britain agrees to fully respect the German spheres of influence in Eastern and Southwestern Europe. As a consequence, Great Britain would revoke the guarantees extended by her to certain States in the German sphere of influence. Further, Great Britain agrees to take action to induce France to dissolve her alliance with the Soviet Union and sever all her ties in Southeastern Europe.
3. Great Britain agrees to discontinue the present negotiations with the Soviet Union.⁸⁸

It seemed that Germany and Britain were the imperialist threats, not Russia. Notice the classic colonial language “spheres of influence.” England had to protect the empire at all costs. Britain still had its public image as a defender of peace to uphold even as it deceived the Soviet Union by continuing the discussions for a mutual assistance pact. Strang revealed the British position in a report to the Foreign Office on July 20:

We may find ourselves for months in negotiation with Moscow without any concrete agreement being reached. ..Whether the continuance of this indeterminate situation would be better for us than a final breakdown of negotiations remains a matter of high policy, but I think myself that it would. A break would create bad feeling. It would encourage the Germans to act. It might drive the Soviet Union into isolation or into composition with Germany. On the other hand, the fact that military conversations were in progress, although producing no immediate concrete results, would still probably worry Hitler. Russia would also be less likely to remain neutral.⁸⁹

Because a break in the talks would “create bad feeling,” the negotiations continued and England maintained the ruse of good faith.

NAZI SHIFTS

German representatives played a dual game as well. While discussing common interests with England, the Nazi state moved closer to a possible understanding with the USSR. Who initiated what depends on the source of the documentation, but high level contacts persisted in late July. Hitler was anxious to unleash the Wehrmacht against Poland, and he needed the assurance of Soviet compliance, or, at least neutrality. He was convinced, that based on Munich, England and France would not fight.

Trade representative Schnurre reported to the Foreign Office on conversations with

Soviet representatives in a memorandum dated July 27. He was quite detailed. He reported that the “Russians started the talk about the political and economic problems which interest us in a very lively and interested manner...” Schnurre declared that improved relations were desirable and could begin with the re-establishment of collaboration in economic affairs through the credit and commercial treaty. Economic interaction could then form the basis of improvement in political relations. Schnurre reminded his guests that despite “all the differences in *Weltanschauung*, there was *one* thing in common in the ideology of Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union: opposition to the capitalist democracies.” Schnurre asserted that “on our part there could be no question of menacing the Soviet Union; our aims were in an entirely different direction.” According to Schnurre, Nazi actions were directed solely against the KPD. After the meeting, Schnurre reported that he had the impression that “there is the excessive distrust[in Moscow], not only toward us but toward Britain as well.” However he concluded that “from our point of view it may be considered a noteworthy success that Moscow, after months of negotiation with Britain, still remains uncertain as to what she ought to do eventually.”⁹⁰ Schnurre felt that relations with Russia could improve, especially since the Russians broached the subject of political arrangements and had not concluded pacts with Britain and France.

Astakhov painted a somewhat different picture in his telegram to Molotov of July 27. He reported that Germany was “prepared to discuss and come to an understanding with us on all the questions that both sides are interested in, and to give all the security guarantees which we would require from them.” When Astakhov inquired as to the source of his authority, “Schnurre said that he spoke on the direct instructions of Ribbentrop ... Germany was prepared to give us a choice of everything from friendship to enmity. Naturally, we didn't give Schnurre any hopes, limiting ourselves to general noises and promising to bring the talks to your attention.”⁹¹

Astakhov, seeking direction in his relations with Germany, sent a letter to Potemkin, Deputy People's Commissar for foreign Affairs, on July 27. Astakhov had "no doubt that if we wanted to we could involve the Germans in far-reaching negotiations and get from them assurances about the questions that interest us. Of course, what the value of these assurances would be is another question." He then recommended that the USSR "ought to give them some encouragement, in order to retain in our hands a trump card which we could use in the event of necessity."⁹² Molotov cabled on July 28 that, "In restricting yourself to hearing out Schnurre's statements and promising to pass them on to Moscow you did the right thing."⁹³ Molotov was in no hurry to accommodate the Nazis. On July 29, Molotov telegraphed a more detailed statement of Soviet intentions to Astakhov wherein the Foreign Commissar urged caution. "Political relations between the USSR and Germany may improve of course..." began Molotov, "But only the Germans can say concretely how political relations should improve." Molotov continued that German intentions must take on "concrete terms." He concluded in reminding Astakhov that the USSR would "welcome any improvement in political relations between the two countries."⁹⁴

BRITAIN AND FRANCE ACT

On July 25, Britain accepted the Soviet proposal on a three-power military agreement and Halifax informed Maiskii that an British delegation would leave for Moscow in about 7 to 10 days. Bonnet informed Surtis in Paris on July 26 that the French representatives would leave for Moscow "in the next few days." The delegations did not arrive until August 11 because they took a circuitous route by train and boat.⁹⁵ Direct air travel and speed were not important to England and France. Clearly, England and France did not support word with actions because they had no intention of concluding an agreement. They had to seem interested in order to push Hitler eastward and away from them.

Still pursuing the policy of delay, English and French diplomats presented the Foreign commissariat with a new definition of “indirect aggression” on August 2:

It is agreed between the three contracting Governments that the words ‘indirect aggression’ in paragraph 2 above are to be understood as not excluding (or as including) action accepted by the State in question under threat of force by another power and involving the abandonment by it of its independence or neutrality.

In the event of circumstances arising which are not covered in the above definition, but which, in the judgment of one of the contracting Governments, threaten the independence or neutrality of a State in question, the contracting governments will, on the request of any one of them, immediately consult together for the purposes of taking any action on which a decision is taken by common consent.⁹⁶

This “new” definition differed little, if any, from previous proposals and the intent of purposeful vagueness in language and policy seems clear. “Consultations” became the fallback position in order to delay action and responsibility.

On the same day, *Izvestia* published a report entitled “On One of the Reasons for the Delay in the negotiations with Britain.” British hypocrisy was at the heart of the article:

In a speech before the House of Commons on July 26 of this year, Parliamentary Vice Secretary of foreign Affairs Mr. Butler said, according to the press, that the British government was doing everything possible to speed the resolution of disagreements between the USSR and Britain, the chief disagreement having to do with the question of whether or not we should encroach upon the independence of the Baltic States. I contend, said Mr. Butler, that we should not, and in this disagreement lie the main reasons for the delay in the negotiations.

Izvestia then set the record straight:

TASS has been authorized to announce that if Mr. Butler did indeed say the above, he has allowed himself a distortion of the Soviet Government’s position. In actual fact, the disagreements do not consist in whether or not to encroach upon the independence of the Baltic countries, for both sides want this independence guaranteed; they have rather to do with not leaving for the aggressor encroaching upon the independence of the Baltic States any kind of loophole in the definition of ‘indirect aggression.’ One of the reasons for the delay in the negotiations is that the British formula leaves such a loophole for the aggressor.⁹⁷

French ambassador Naggiar could only comment to Potemkin on August 5 that, “a precise definition of [indirect aggression] is exceedingly difficult.”⁹⁸ The definition was indeed difficult because England and France made it difficult.

On August 3 the Foreign Commissariat informed the British and French embassies that the Soviet Government has formed a delegation headed by People’s Commissar for Defense Kliment Voroshilov to conduct military negotiations. Although French General Valin commented that, “such an authoritative delegation, headed by Voroshilov himself made a big impression in France”⁹⁹, Maiskii in London and Surtis in Paris were not so impressed with the Anglo-French group. Maiskii commented to Molotov on August 1 that:

one of the positions was honorary and not active, I think that judging from the posts they hold officially, the delegates will not be able to make any decisions on the spot and will have to refer everything to London. It is also suspicious that, again because of the kinds of posts they hold, the members of the delegation will be able to stay in Moscow indefinitely. This does not promise any particular speed in the conduct of the military negotiations; particularly after the Prime minister’s reference yesterday in Parliament to precedent (negotiations for the Anglo-Japanese alliance lasted 6 months, for the Anglo-French entente-9 months, for the Anglo-Russian entente-15 months, and so forth).¹⁰⁰

Surtis wrote to Molotov that the selection of the French delegation of “predominately narrow specialists is also witness to the inspection aims of the delegation—to their intention to find out, above all else, the condition of our army.”¹⁰¹ The Anglo-French delegates wanted to do anything and everything short of reaching an agreement.

British documents, unknown to the Soviet negotiators, reveal the true intentions of the Moscow mission. A British directive to the delegation stated:

The British government is unwilling to enter into any detailed commitments which are likely to tie our hands in all circumstances. Endeavors should therefore be made to confine the military agreement to the broadest possible terms. Something along the lines of an agreed statement of policy may meet the case...If the Russians propose that the British and French governments should communicate to the Polish, Rumanian or Baltic States proposals involving cooperation with the Soviet government or General Staff, the

Delegation should not commit themselves but refer home. The Delegation should not discuss the defense of the Baltic states, since neither Great Britain nor France have guaranteed these states.¹⁰²

Soviet concerns were indeed well founded. The mission to Moscow was a cruel façade.

On August 2, Surtis cabled Molotov more upsetting news. In a meeting with Georges Mandel, French minister of Colonies, Surtis reported that:

Mandel has received information that the mission is leaving for Moscow without a worked out plan. This is disturbing and casts doubt on the seriousness of their approach to the negotiations. The reason for all this, according to Mandel, is that here and in London hopes of reaching an accommodation with Berlin are far from having been dismissed.¹⁰³

Britain and France were engaged in a dual diplomacy, with the USSR as a secondary participant.

As Surtis reported, their very “seriousness” was questionable.

On August 12, the talks began. The Soviet Union introduced concrete proposals for action and the circumstances requiring the providing of defense against aggression. Not surprisingly, Britain and France remained vague and delayed any hope for a conclusion. According to Voroshilov, “the cardinal question” was the USSR’s assistance to Poland and Rumania. He commented at the session on August 14 that, “the military missions of Great Britain and France had not raised this question themselves and had not brought a precise answer to it.”¹⁰⁴ He continued with a clear outline of Soviet objectives in the negotiations:

The admission of Soviet troops to Polish territory through the Vilna corridor and Galicia and through Rumanian territory comprises the prerequisite condition for our negotiations and a joint agreement between the three states. If this is not resolved positively, then I have my doubts about the usefulness of our negotiations in general. I do not think it quite right to say as General Doumenec and other representatives of the French and British military missions have said, that Poland and Rumania will ask for assistance themselves.¹⁰⁵

At the August 15 meeting, Admiral Drax informed the delegates that the Anglo-French missions had transmitted the Soviet statement to their respective governments and were awaiting a

response. The Anglo-French delegates were closely following their instructions and creating more delay. While playing Russia for the patsy, England continued detailed discussions with Germany regarding an accommodation, which would move Hitler toward his goal of eastward expansion. We must ask at this crucial moment, which nation(s) really sought peace?

By August 21, the Anglo-French representatives in Moscow still had received no word concerning the “cardinal Question” regarding Soviet troop passage through Poland and Rumania. Voroshilov then concluded that further negotiations would be fruitless.¹⁰⁶ Despite Hitler’s actions, Britain and France wanted to avoid war and could not understand the value of an alliance with the USSR. The war London and Paris wanted to avoid was a war in the west, not in the east.

NAZI DIPLOMATS UNDER PRESSURE TO CONCLUDE A PACT WITH THE USSR

Meanwhile, Ribbentrop and the Nazi foreign office sought to take advantage of the conflicting Anglo-Franco-Soviet talks. On August 14, Ribbentrop telegraphed Schulenburg in Moscow with instructions to “call upon Herr Molotov personally” and relate to him that “there exist no real conflicts of interest between Germany and the U.S.S.R. The living spaces of Germany and the U.S.S.R. touch each other, but in their natural requirements they do not conflict.” The German Ambassador should inform Molotov “that the capitalistic Western democracies are the unforgiving enemies of both National Socialist Germany and of the U.S.S.R.” In order to clarify German intentions Schulenburg informed his host that “Reich Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop is prepared to make a short visit to Moscow in order, in the name of the Führer, to set forth the Führer’s views to Herr Stalin.” Finally in an attached annex, Ribbentrop requested that Schulenburg “do not give Herr Molotov these instructions in writing, but that you read them to him.”¹⁰⁷ Germany approached the USSR, not vice versa. Ribbentrop

was in a hurry to conclude a pact before the planned attack on Poland. As he informed Schulenburg, he was willing to go to Moscow personally to meet Molotov and Stalin. The Germans were quite serious. Even with this direct overture, Molotov held fast. He requested certain “adequate preparations” in order “that the exchange of opinions might lead to results” as Schulenburg reported to Ribbentrop on August 15. Molotov was not interested in protracted discussions, but sought specific outcomes.¹⁰⁸

On August 16 the pace of German negotiations continued to intensify. Schulenburg reported to Weizsacker, the State Secretary that:

Herr Molotov was quite unusually compliant and candid. I received the impression that the proposal of the visit of the Reich Minister was very flattering personally to Herr Molotov and that he considers it an actual proof of our good intentions. In Herr Molotov's statements yesterday, the surprising moderation in his demands on us also seems to be worthy of note. He did not once use the words "Anti-Comintern Pact..." More significant is his quite clearly expressed wish to conclude a non-aggression pact with us. Despite all efforts, we did not succeed in ascertaining entirely clearly what Herr Molotov desired in the matter of the Baltic States. It actually looks at the moment as if we would achieve the desired results in the negotiations here.¹⁰⁹

At this crucial juncture, with the Anglo-Franco-Soviet discussions deadlocked over language, Molotov had to entertain other options.

With a break in the Soviet wall, Ribbentrop did not want the moment to pass. On August 16, He instructed Schulenburg to increase the pace of the talks and to arrange a quick trip for the Foreign Minister to Moscow. The Foreign Minister informed the Ambassador that:

- 1) the points brought up by Herr Molotov are in accordance with German desires. That is, Germany is ready to conclude a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and, if the Soviet Government so desires, one which would be irrevocable for a term of twenty-five years.
- 2) The Führer is of the opinion that, in view of the present situation, and of the possibility of the occurrence any day of serious incidents (please at this point explain to Herr Molotov that Germany is determined not to endure Polish provocation indefinitely), a

basic and rapid clarification of German-Russian relations and the mutual adjustment of the pressing questions are desirable.

Additionally, Ribbentrop wanted to arrive in Moscow at the end of the present week or early the next in order to conclude the particulars. Finally, he requested that Schulenburg read the instructions to Molotov and ask for the reaction of the Soviet government.¹¹⁰

Schulenburg quickly reported Molotov's reply on August 18. Molotov remained cautious, hoping for a break in the Anglo-Franco-Soviet discussions. He suggested that Germany and the USSR fortify their trade relations before the conclusion of a diplomatic pact. Thereafter, Molotov suggested that the two nations could "conclude a non-aggression pact or the reaffirmation of the neutrality pact of 1926, with the simultaneous conclusion of a special protocol which would define the interests of the signatory parties in this or that question of foreign policy and which would form an integral part of the pact." He concluded that the Soviet Government "was very gratified" by Germany's proposed visit of the Reich Foreign Minister "since the dispatch of such a distinguished public figure and statesman emphasized the earnestness of the intentions of the German Government. This stood in noteworthy contrast to England, who, in the person of Strang, had sent only an official of the second class to Moscow." Molotov added that, "A journey by the Reich Foreign Minister, however, required thorough preparation..."¹¹¹

Molotov, still trying to buy time, eventually agreed that Ribbentrop could visit on August 26 or 27, after the signing of a commercial agreement. The Soviets were in no hurry to conclude a pact while talks with England and France continued. Ribbentrop continued to press for an earlier date and instructed Schulenburg to press Molotov. Schulenburg reported to the Reich Foreign Minister on August 19 that Molotov remained suspicious. While the Soviet Government understood the importance of Ribbentrop's visit, Molotov explained "that for the present it was

not possible even approximately to fix the time of the journey since it required thorough preparation.” Schulenburg, fulfilling the instructions of Ribbentrop, “repeatedly and very emphatically advanced for the need for haste...” Molotov quickly responded that the economic agreements had not been finalized, much less the text of a non-aggression pact. Molotov concluded the meeting explaining that “Herr von Ribbentrop might arrive in Moscow on August 26 or 27” if the economic agreement was signed. On August 19, Molotov delivered to Schulenburg the Soviet draft of a non-aggression pact.¹¹²

Hitler, frustrated with the delays and anxious to attack Poland, sent a letter to Joseph Stalin requesting an expedited visit by Ribbentrop. The Führer was ready for war. He related to Stalin that “the tension between Germany and Poland has become intolerable. Polish demeanor toward a great power is such that a crisis may arise any day.” He informed Stalin that He accepted the draft non-aggression pact but that some clarification was needed. Therefore, Hitler requested that “you receive my Foreign Minister on Tuesday, August 22, but at the latest on Wednesday, August 23. The Reich Foreign Minister has full powers to draw up and sign the non-aggression pact as well as the protocol.”¹¹³ Stalin agreed to the visit and informed Molotov. The Foreign Commissar in turn informed the German Foreign Office. Stalin told Hitler that “the people of our countries need peaceful relations with each other. The assent of the German Government to the conclusion of a non-aggression pact provides the foundation for eliminating the political tension and for the establishment of peace and collaboration between our countries.”¹¹⁴

TOO LATE FOR BRITAIN AND FRANCE

On August 22, France responded positively to the Soviet proposal of troop passage. Voroshilov, quite pessimistic of this sudden turnabout asked, “What position in this whole matter

do the Polish and Rumanian governments take? Are they abreast of the situation or was the French government's answer given without the knowledge of Poland and Rumania? General Doumenc replied, "je ne sais pas."¹¹⁵ Voroshilov, naturally upset, replied that, "it is impossible for me to agree to take part in further meetings until such time as all official answers are received."¹¹⁶ Molotov then commented that, "when the matter is fully clarified and all the replies have been received, then we will go to work."¹¹⁷ After at least 5 years of intense effort to create an anti-fascist front, collective security finally died. Ribbentrop's plane arrived in Moscow on August 23.

Hitler was ecstatic, not only with the diplomatic aspects of the pact, but also with the continued connection to Soviet exchange. The German economy needed to avoid the devastating effects of an allied blockade. The Germans and Soviets quickly opened talks for a huge trade deal, finalized in February, 1940. Trade volume was set at between 600-700 million Reichsmarks. The Soviet Union became Germany's leading supplier of animal feed while supplying the Third Reich with 74 per cent of its phosphate needs, 67 per cent of its asbestos imports, 65 per cent of chrome ore, 55 per cent of manganese, 40 per cent of nickel imports and 34 percent of imported oil. Colonel Eduard Wagner, Quartermaster General of the German Army asserted that "the conclusion of this treaty saved us."¹¹⁸ Hitler now had a free hand to fulfill his dreams of conquest.

END NOTES

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⁴ Tucker, *Stalin in Power, The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton& Company,1990), 92.

⁵ Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, vol. 4, 416. Hereafter DBFP.

⁶ Schulenburg would later participate in the July 20, 1944 plot against Hitler, for which he lost his life.

⁷ Zachary Shore, *What Hitler Knew: The Battle for Information in Nazi Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 110-111.

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¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 590.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

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¹⁴ Memorandum by Harold Caccia, 3 January 1939, and attached minutes, N57/57/38, PRO FO 371 23677, as cited in Carley, 313.

¹⁵ "Memorandum of a conversation...", by Litvinov, 19 February 1939, *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War Two (September 1938-August 1939)* 2 vols (Moscow, 1973), I, 214-216 and Seeds, no 24, 19 February 1939, N902/57/38, PRO FO 371 23677, as cited in Carley, 314.

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¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ DBFP, vol. 4, 369-370.

¹⁹ Soviet-British-French Talks, no. 7 (July, 1969):81.

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²¹ *Ibid.*

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²³ Soviet-British-French Talks,, no 7 (July, 1969): 83. The Soviet Embassy in France informed the French Foreign Ministry on April 18. *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

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- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 87-88.
- ²⁸ DBFP, vol. 5, 64.
- ²⁹ Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, hereafter FRUS, 1939, vol. 1, 244.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 250.
- ³² Note by Cadogan, 19 April 1939, C5460/15/18, PRO FO 371 22969, as cited in Carley, 318.
- ³³ Carley, 318.
- ³⁴ Maisky to Narkomindel, 29 April 1939, *God krizisa, 1938-1939: Dokumenty i Materialy*, 2 vols (Moscow, 1990) I, 410-412, as cited in Carley, 319. Hereafter *God krizisa*.
- ³⁵ Stalin to Polpredy, 3 May, DVP, XXII, kn. 1, no. 269.
- ³⁶ Roberts, *Origins*, 72.
- ³⁷ *God krizisa*, vol. 1, doc. 329.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, doc. 341.
- ³⁹ DBFP, 5, 487.
- ⁴⁰ *Izvestia*, May 11, 1939.
- ⁴¹ DBFP, vol. 5, 598.
- ⁴² DBFP, vol. 9, 77.
- ⁴³ Anglo-Franco-Soviet Talks, no. 8, (August, 1969): 90.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.
- ⁴⁶ FRUS, 1939, Vol. I, 256.
- ⁴⁷ *God krizisa*, vol. 1, doc. 362.
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- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

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- ⁵⁴ Anglo-Franco-Soviet Talks, no. 8 (August, 1969): 93.
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- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.
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- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 85.
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- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.
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- ⁶⁷ *Pravda*, June 29, 1939 (emphasis in original).
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- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 61-62.
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- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*
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⁸¹ *Ibid.*

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⁹⁰ Sontag and Beddie (eds.), *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941* (New York, 1948), 32-36. Hereafter NSR.

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⁹² *God Krizisa*, vol. 2, doc. 504.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, doc. 510.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, doc. 511.

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⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 10, 68.

⁹⁷ *Izvestia*, August 2, 1939.

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¹¹² *Ibid.*, 61-67.

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¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹⁸ Adam Tooze *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 321.

CONCLUSION

From the foundation of the Bolshevik state in November, 1917, Lenin understood that domestic stability required international peace, at least in the short run. The weak and unorganized worker's paradise suffered massive internal and external problems that demanded immediate attention lest the grand socialist experiment would simply disappear. On the day after the storming of the Winter Palace, Lenin issued the decree on peace and established the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. Peace became the first priority of Lenin's policy; a peace policy that threatened to split the Bolshevik movement itself. Lenin was the founder of "collective security." To be clear, the peace described in this dissertation was a peace of convenience; a peace of preparation for the coming conflict, hence perhaps "peace for the wrong reasons" but peace nevertheless. With peace, resolution of differences remains possible while war creates a different dynamic. I am not arguing that the Soviets were saints nor did they deserve medals. They did recognize the danger of Hitler and sought to do something about him. Britain and France were not so supportive of Soviet overtures.

After the harsh Treaty of Brest Litovsk and the replacement of Trotsky, Lenin further reformed domestic politics when he introduced the New Economic Policy in 1921. Economic success and international peace would secure the gains of the revolution, especially as it became clear that Marx's worldwide upheaval would not occur in the foreseeable future. War and conflict held no fascination for Lenin. For socialism to spread, it must first establish itself in Russia; no small task.

As World War I dragged on into 1917, the Bolshevik revolution forever altered the world's landscape. Western diplomats and politicians feared the hoards of workers and peasants

streaming into Paris, London, and Washington. Few understood or appreciated the uniquely Russian roots of the conflict. True, Marx had predicted a worker's revolt across Europe (he thought that Germany would lead the way; he never imagined Russia, with its economic backwardness and peasant base), but the end of the Great War brought no such unified reaction. The Comintern, the international voice of Communism, did spread the Marxian rhetoric of violent revolution, but the reality did not match the verbiage. Under Stalin, the Soviet leadership did not object to the Nazi anti-communist policies in Germany and regarded the SPD and other European socialist parties as "social fascists." As Litvinov commented, the pronouncements of the Comintern were a hindrance to his "collective security" policy.

However, the fear of Bolshevism dominated western diplomacy throughout the inter-war period. The USSR appeared menacing, particularly the revolutionary rhetoric of the Comintern. Stalin's actions, both within the Soviet Union and abroad, served to deepen the concern. Britain and France did not seriously consider the possibility of substantive relations with the Soviet state. Hitler seemed the least offensive of the two choices; at least he was moving eastward. This anti-Bolshevik outlook even shaped the foreign policy of the Holy See in its relations with Hitler. Pope Pius XI and the future Pope Pius XII, then Vatican Secretary of State, believed that the Communist threat was the greater evil in Europe in the 1930s. Hence, Vatican relations with Nazi Germany took on a more conciliatory tone. A Catholic Cardinal, in a report to the future Pope regarding the position of Nazis in the Church, recommended:

If the new [Nazi] government demonstrates in fact that the fears of the bishops were unfounded—if in addition the new government continues to remain strong in the battle against advancing Bolshevism and public immorality, the bishops will gladly give up their distrust of the party and, for example, permit churchgoing in closed ranks, which up to now was viewed as a demonstration and therefore forbidden, and permit the swastika flag at Church burials.¹

As the USSR faced these widely-held misperceptions, it continued to promote substantive peace initiatives. The challenge it faced was the incongruence between rhetoric and action.

Unfortunately for the Soviet Union, “perception” was reality in western foreign offices.

Justice Louis Brandeis summed up the paralyzing power of fear in his concurring opinion in the case of *Whitney v. California* in 1927 “... it is hazardous to discourage thought, hope and imagination; that fear breeds repression; that repression breeds hate; that hate menaces stable government...men feared witches and burnt women.”² When fear dominates, a distorted perception becomes reality, no matter the facts. Truth becomes a victim. As during the cold war after World War II, Communism became the bogey man for everything. Nothing valuable or worthwhile could come from Russia and the Communists were always lying. These attitudes made for limited diplomatic or political options, especially when the record seemed to make no difference. Importantly, during the 1920s and 1930s, anti-Soviet policy and rhetoric had substantive political benefits for those aspiring to higher offices in the western democracies. A good candidate could not seem “soft on communism.”

Despite these obstacles to international stability, the newly formed USSR persisted. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union concluded trade agreements with England and received diplomatic recognition from France and Germany. The USSR had products of interest to the west but it still remained a political and cultural enemy. As the documents illustrate, no-one could trust the Soviet Union. The important issue for the west was to keep the USSR in check militarily and prevent its expansion. Somehow, the western politicians overlooked Russia’s value as a substantive player in world affairs. In many capitals in the 1920s, hope remained that this new

political and social experiment shortly would simply fade away. In no case should the west aid the viability of the USSR.

With the west mired in the depths of the Depression, new Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov sought substantive diplomatic relations with all interested nations in the form of non-aggression pacts. He was especially interested in settling the disputed eastern borders of Germany in an attempt to prevent future conflict and German movement eastward. His “Eastern Locarno” proposal failed mainly because of western disinterest. Britain and France wanted to tie up the Soviet Union in endless talks without the possibility of success. Paris and London clearly feared Russia more than Hitler and began a long and dangerous diplomatic game of playing Russia against Germany. As we analyze the existing documentary record, admittedly incomplete from the Soviet side, we clearly see a fearful Britain and a France playing Russia for a diplomatic fool. Anglo-French diplomats received direct instructions to delay and elongate the talks to the points of futility. A.J.P. Taylor describes the British position:

If dates mean anything, the British were spinning things out, the Russians were anxious to conclude. There is other evidence that the British treated the negotiations in a casual way, more to placate public opinion than to achieve anything. Anthony Eden offered to go to Moscow on a special mission; Chamberlain turned down his offer. A member of the foreign office who was sent to Moscow for some obscure purpose (certainly not to conclude an alliance) wrote home light-heartedly on 21 June: ‘I daresay we shall arrive at something in the end. When I say “in the end” I recall a remark of Naggiar’s [the French ambassador] this afternoon that he will probably have reached the age limit and gone into retirement before I get away from Moscow.’³

Taylor concluded in his own biting manner that, “If British diplomacy seriously aspired to alliance with Soviet Russia in 1939, then the negotiations toward this end were the most incompetent transactions since Lord North lost the American colonies.”⁴ Anglo-French diplomats hoped that if Hitler believed that an Anglo-Franco-Soviet agreement was immanent,

perhaps he would re-consider his bellic position or at least move eastward as he promised in *Mein Kampf*. In other words, Britain and France wanted an eastern war in the hopes of destroying both the Soviet Union and Germany and wanted to be left alone; not a realistic position. They did not dream that Hitler and Stalin would align at the last minute, thereby guaranteeing a Nazi victory in the east and that the Nazi Führer would turn westward and attack Britain and France. Anglo-French diplomats and politicians, with few exceptions, missed the forest for the trees.

If, as Nekrich, Tucker, Haslam and others of the “German School” argue, that it was the avowed aim of Soviet foreign policy to align with Hitler from the early 1930s, why all the Soviet time, resources, and effort to conclude alliances with the exact opposite as the goal? As the released Soviet documents illustrate, Litvinov and Molotov directed proposal after proposal in an attempt to conclude an anti-Nazi pact with Britain and France. The Soviet diplomats responded to the most inane requests for clarification of clear principles. Finally, after Britain and France sent second-rate delegations to Moscow to buy even more time, Hitler sent an aggressive Ribbentrop to Moscow by plane to conclude the pact. Alliance with the Nazis was hardly the central tenant of Soviet foreign policy, but the last alternative in what the Soviets feared was an emerging western alliance against the Soviet Union.

With the long shadow of the cold war dominating the diplomatic history of this crucial period, the Nazi-Soviet pact remains, in the eyes of many, as the central cause of the European war. E.H. Carr explained the difficulties of writing impersonal, detached history centered only on facts and interpretations. He argued for the historian’s need for “imaginative understanding” of the minds of the people with whom he is dealing. He clarified his position:

I say 'imaginative understanding,' not 'sympathy,' lest sympathy should be supposed to imply agreement. The nineteenth century was weak in mediaeval history, because it was too much repelled by the superstitious beliefs of the middle Ages and by the barbarities which they inspired, to have any imaginative understanding of mediaeval people. Or take Burkhart's censorious remark about the Thirty Years' War: 'It is scandalous for a creed, no matter whether it is Catholic or Protestant, to place its salvation above the integrity of the nation.'...Much of what has been written in English-speaking countries in the last ten years about the Soviet Union, and in the Soviet Union about English-speaking countries, has been vitiated by this inability to achieve even the most elementary measure of imaginative understanding of what goes on in the mind of the other party, so that the words and actions of the other are always made to appear malign, senseless, or hypocritical. History cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing.⁵

When Professor Carr wrote these profound words, access to even the most basic Soviet documents did not exist. Now, with the release of some, not all, and important material still hidden, we can carefully begin our "imaginative understanding" of this crucial period in diplomatic history freed from the shadow of the Cold War. While the leaders of the Soviet Union perpetrated some of the most heinous crimes in the history of the world, during the interwar period the USSR sought peace and a united front against Hitler. After years of effort, and when the alliance became impossible because of western intransigence, the Soviet Union turned to other options.

A sober assessment of the record, such that it is, indicates that this alliance was a distasteful last resort of Soviet policy in the face of a less than honest Britain and France. The Soviets sought to avoid war at all costs, not to cause one.

Based on the existing evidence, the Soviet Union genuinely sought collective security from its founding to the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. As we re-assess the origins of World War II, England and France must come in as principal actors in the outbreak of this terrible conflict. Their diplomatic stance proved tragic.

END NOTES

¹ Hubert Wulf, *Pope and Devil: The Vatican's Archives and The Third Reich*. Kenneth Kronenberg (tran), (Cambridge: Belnap Press, 2010), 164. Pius XI felt that Hitler was the only anti-Communist statesman. See *Ibid.*, 161.

² *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357, 47 S. CT. 641, 71 L.ED. 1095(1927).

³ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 231.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁵ E. H. Carr, *What is History* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 27.

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