

T H E U N H O L Y A L L I A N C E



**STALIN'S
PACT
WITH
HITLER**

**Geoffrey
Roberts**

T H E UNHOLY ALLIANCE

In August 1939 the USSR executed the most stunning volte-face in diplomatic history. On the very eve of Hitler's attack on Poland, it signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany.

The Unholy Alliance is an original new analysis of that pact, which half a century later remains the most controversial episode in the history of Soviet foreign policy.

Drawing on thousands of documents from the Soviet archives – until now largely ignored by Western historians – Geoffrey Roberts presents a new view of Moscow's perceptions of the international situation in 1939. He argues that Stalin's decision to temporarily ally himself with Hitler can only be understood in the context of the Soviet Union's failure to forge an anti-fascist alliance with the Western democracies. He explores the extraordinary events which led up to the pact, as well as analysing Soviet diplomacy during the 1920s and 1930s. He also makes a detailed assessment of how Soviet historians view the Stalin-Hitler pact, including the recent debates of the *glasnost* era.

The Unholy Alliance is the definitive Western history of the Soviet pact with Nazi Germany. Written in a highly accessible style, it makes an important contribution to the study of Soviet foreign relations between the two world wars.

GEOFFREY ROBERTS is a Soviet Studies specialist, who spent ten years researching and writing this book.

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Stalin's Pact with Hitler

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Geoffrey Roberts

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In Memory of Tom

Preface and Acknowledgments

My interest in the Nazi-Soviet pact began in the early 1970s when I was an undergraduate at North Staffordshire Polytechnic. So my first acknowledgment is to the students and staff of the International Relations section of the polytechnic, who provided the initial inspiration for this book. I am not sure that they would wholly approve of the result since we believed then that diplomatic history was rapidly being outmoded by exciting developments in international relations theory. Things didn't quite turn out as we expected, but the impact of those early IR influences are evident in parts of this book.

After leaving the polytechnic I went to the London School of Economics to do research on Soviet foreign policy and the origins of the cold war. About halfway through my time at LSE I decided it would be useful to do some work on the prehistory of the cold war. That background research coincided with the release of thousands of hitherto inaccessible documents from the Soviet diplomatic archives. What was intended as an introductory chapter to a thesis on Soviet foreign policy 1945–7 eventually grew into this book.

While at the LSE, and more importantly during the years that followed, I was fortunate to have Geoffrey Stern as my supervisor. His critical interrogations of my work sent me scurrying back to the drawing-board more times than I care to remember. Without Geoff the results of my labours would have been much poorer.

Dennis Ogden was another source of support, advice and practical aid over the years. His encouragement of my research was all the more laudable because he disagreed with some of its central conclusions. But I live in hope that one day I will change his mind about the pact.

During the latter stages of the research I had the benefit of very valuable comments from Margot Light who read the whole of a provisional draft. Neal Ascherson read the same draft and made me think again about some important points, as well as saying some nice things about it in his *Observer* column. Iradj Bagherzade, my publisher, convinced me that it was possible to write a serious,

detailed academic study which at the same time was accessible to anyone interested in the history of Soviet foreign policy and twentieth-century international relations. Thanks are also owed to the editorial and production staff of I.B.Tauris, particularly Margaret Cornell and Elspeth Hyams.

The research for this book was carried out mainly in the libraries of the LSE, the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, the University of London's Senate House, the Institute of Historical Research, Marx Memorial House, and the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, Birmingham University. I would like to thank the staff of those libraries for all their assistance. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity of studying in the USSR itself, but I was able to spend many happy hours rummaging through the secondhand bookshops of Moscow and Leningrad.

A substantial part of this book was written while I was working for the Education Department of the National and Local Government Officers Association. I would like to acknowledge the many facilities afforded to me by NALGO and the fortitude of my colleagues in the Education Department in the face of my obsession with far-away countries of which they knew very little.

This is primarily a work of original research but it follows in the footsteps of successive generations of historians who have sought to advance our understanding of Soviet foreign policy. The full extent of my debt to them will be apparent in the chapter notes and bibliography. Needless to say, none of those referred to bears any blame for this book's defects nor for the many controversial opinions expressed in it.

Credit is also due to my friends. Over twenty years in the course of hundreds of conversations, totalling thousands of hours, I have mercilessly plundered their intellects. Most of those discussions had nothing whatsoever to do with the Nazi-Soviet pact but all contributed in some way to the making of this book. I would like to name them all individually, but the list is too long and the risk of missing someone out too great. An historian's memory is as fallible as that of anyone else.

Two final acknowledgments. First, to my family – brothers Ronnie, Brian and Steven, sisters Janice and Frances, my mother Clara and my late father (to whom this book is dedicated). They kept faith with me and provided vital moral support. Last, but far from least, to my friend and companion Celia Weston, who discussed,

criticized and edited all the work that went into this book. I did the research and wrote the drafts, but she is as much the author of this book as I am.

Geoffrey Roberts

London

April 1989

Author's Note: Glasnost and the Pact

This book was completed in spring 1989, just in time for the 50th anniversary of the Nazi-Soviet pact in August. But such is the pace of events in the glasnost era, that within a few weeks some additional commentary became necessary.

On the political front the main development was the decision of the newly-elected Soviet Congress of People's Deputies on 1 June 1989 to establish a special commission on the Stalin-Hitler pact. This decision followed further public debate about the secret spheres of influence protocol attached to the Soviet-German non-aggression treaty of 23 August 1939, including a reading of its text on Soviet television by a Baltic deputy in the Soviet parliament.

The official position that the secret protocol may not be genuine was also coming under increasing pressure. For example, on 25 May 1989 *Pravda* published a report from the Soviet-Polish historical commission, which concluded that there must have been some kind of secret spheres of interest agreement signed in 1939. This report also contained the interesting detail that Moscow finally decided to sign a pact with the Nazis on 19 August 1939.

On the historical front revelations from the Soviet archives continued to come thick and fast. For this book the most important event was the publication of an article on Soviet-German relations in 1939 in the May 1989 issue of *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn* (International Affairs). This article by historian Vilnis Sipols documents Moscow's negotiations with Berlin in May–August 1939, using hitherto secret sources from the Soviet archives. These new sources provide further evidence for the interpretation of the origins of the Nazi-Soviet pact given in this book.

The documents presented by Sipols detail Moscow's correspondence with its Berlin embassy and Soviet reports of meetings with the Germans. These latter reports are interesting but they do not differ in any essential from their German counterparts, referred to extensively in this book. Much more important is the diplomatic correspondence. It enables us to identify more clearly the beginning of the Soviet turn to rapprochement with Germany.

The turning-point came at the end of July 1939 following a letter to Moscow from Georgi Astakhov, the Soviet diplomatic representative in Berlin. 'I have no doubt that if we wanted to, we could involve the Germans in far-reaching negotiations and get from them assurances about the problems that interest us', he wrote. 'Of course, what the value of these assurances would be is another question. In any case, this willingness of the Germans to talk to us should be taken into account . . . in order to retain in our hands a trump card which we could use in the event of necessity.' Two days later, on 29 July, Molotov telegraphed Astakhov with instructions on Moscow's response to the German overtures: 'If the Germans are sincerely changing course and really want to improve political relations with the USSR, they are obliged to state what this improvement represents in concrete terms . . . We would, of course, welcome any improvement in political relations between the two countries.'

Molotov's telegram signalled the beginning of a rapid shift in Soviet policy towards political detente with Germany. By 12 August 1939 negotiations with Berlin had progressed to the point where Astakhov could report home that 'the Baltic, Bessarabia, Eastern Poland (not to speak of the Ukraine) – at the present time this is the minimum the Germans would give up in order to secure a promise from us not to intervene in their conflict with Poland.'

On 17 August Molotov called in Schulenburg, the German Ambassador in Moscow, and proposed a non-aggression pact together with 'a special protocol' demarcating the foreign policy interests of Germany and the USSR. The Nazi-Soviet pact was signed a week later.

Geoffrey Roberts

June 1989

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Chronology of Soviet Foreign Policy 1933–41

1933

- 30 January Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany.
12 December Soviet Communist Party Central Committee passes resolution on collective security in Europe.

1934

- 18 September USSR admitted to League of Nations.

1935

- 2 May Franco-Soviet Pact of Mutual Assistance signed.
16 May Soviet-Czechoslovakian Pact of Mutual Assistance signed.
25 July 7th World Congress of the Comintern opens in Moscow.
2 October Italy invades Abyssinia.

1936

- 7 March Germany occupies the Rhineland.
18 July Revolt by Franco in Spain starts civil war.
25 November Anti-Comintern Pact between Japan and Germany signed.

1937

- 11 June Marshal Tukhachevsky and 7 other Soviet Generals sentenced to death for treason.
21 August Soviet-Chinese Non-Aggression Treaty signed.

1938

- 13 March Anschluss – Austria becomes part of Germany.
29 September Munich Conference begins.

1939

- 15 March German troops occupy Prague.
31 March Britain unilaterally guarantees the independence of Poland.
17 April USSR proposes triple alliance to Britain and France.
Merekalov-Weizsäcker meeting in Berlin.
3 May Litvinov dismissed as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs and replaced by Molotov.
12 August Military negotiations between Britain, France and USSR begin in Moscow.
23 August Nazi-Soviet pact signed in Moscow.
1 September Germany invades Poland.
17 September USSR invades Eastern Poland.
Soviet Union declares its neutrality.
28 September Soviet-German Boundary and Friendship Treaty signed.
30 November Soviet-Finnish War begins.

1940

- 12 March Soviet-Finnish Peace Treaty signed.
9 April Germany invades Denmark and Norway.
10 June Italy enters the war.
22 June France surrenders to Germany.
25 June USSR proposes to Italy spheres of influence agreement in the Balkans.
28 June Bessarabia and North Bukovina annexed by USSR.
21 July Baltic States agree to incorporation in USSR.
27 September Germany, Italy and Japan conclude Tripartite Pact.
12 November Molotov-Hitler-Ribbentrop conversations open in Berlin.

1941

- 25 March Soviet-Turkish statement on neutrality issued.
5 April Soviet-Yugoslavian Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression signed.
6 April Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece.
13 April Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact signed.
14 June *Tass* issues statement denying rumours of Soviet-German differences.
22 June Germany invades USSR.

CHAPTER

1 *Introduction*

‘Russian policy is a riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma.’
Winston S. Churchill

‘Our policy is simple and clear.’ *Joseph V. Stalin*

Half a century has passed since the world was shocked by the announcement of a political agreement between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. In a Non-Aggression Treaty signed on 23 August 1939 the two states pledged neutrality should either power become involved in a war with a third party. The USSR had executed the most stunning *volte-face* in diplomatic history. Only a few days earlier the Russians were negotiating with Britain and France for an alliance directed against Germany. Suddenly, on the eve of war, the bulwark of anti-fascism and the champion of collective security had signalled its intention of standing on the sidelines. ‘The sinister news broke upon the world like an explosion’, wrote Churchill¹.

The political shock-waves generated by the Nazi-Soviet pact were immediate and far-reaching. Diplomats were stupefied. ‘There is no doubt that the Germans have struck a master blow’, noted Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, in his diary. ‘The European situation is upset. . . . In diplomatic circles there is a great deal of confusion about the Russian action’². On the other side of the world, in Tokyo, Japanese hopes for an anti-Soviet alliance with Germany were so dashed that the Cabinet felt duty-bound to resign.³ The Communist International was thrown into confusion, not least those communists active in the anti-Nazi resistance in Germany⁴. At a more personal level, American journalist William Shirer’s response spoke for that of millions: ‘At first I could scarcely believe it. There had been no inkling that such an amazing deal was in the works. . . . we had the feeling that war was now inevitable’⁵.

War did indeed break out a week later on 1 September when Germany invaded Poland. Any lingering doubts about the meaning of the pact were now dispelled. In return for a promise of peace, Stalin had freed Hitler from the threat of a war on two fronts – against

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Britain and France in the west and the USSR in the east. This Soviet action was extraordinary enough, but more shocks were to follow.

On 17 September the Red Army joined in the German attack on Poland with the aim of occupying large areas of what was then Eastern Poland. This move foreshadowed Soviet expansion into a vast swathe of East European territories stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Ten days later, the conquest of Poland complete, Stalin joined Hitler in a so-called 'peace offensive' against Britain and France. The two blamed the Western powers for the continuation of the war. At the same time the Soviet Union began to move politically and economically closer to Germany than at any time since the early 1920s. Just weeks later, at the end of November, Soviet forces embarked on the Winter War against Finland, following the latter's refusal to cede territories that Moscow considered essential to the defence of Leningrad, and Soviet relations with Britain and France hovered on the brink of war. The following summer Hitler struck west. Within a few weeks he had conquered Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and France. Soviet Russia did nothing to deter the German Blitzkrieg in the west nor did it actively oppose the subsequent takeover of Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece. The climax of this breathtaking chain of events came a year later in June 1941 when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union. Unprepared for the Nazi attack, the Red Army was pushed back before the advancing German forces to the gates of Leningrad and Moscow. At the end of 1941 the very existence of the Soviet regime was in the balance.

With the German onslaught on the USSR the most controversial period in the history of Soviet foreign relations came to an end. But the political and historical debate around the Soviet pact with Nazi Germany continues to this day. Why did the USSR sign such an agreement with Nazi Germany? Why did the Russians abandon the triple alliance negotiations with Britain and France? Was it the Nazi-Soviet pact that triggered the Second World War? What were the objectives of Soviet policy-makers in the period after the pact was signed? How could the USSR have been so unprepared for the German attack on 22 June 1941? Both in the West and in the USSR questions such as these have been debated for half a century, albeit in rather different terms.

After the war the controversy in the West was fired by the publication in 1948 of a selection of documents captured from the

German Foreign Ministry's archives. Published by the US Department of State, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*⁶ revealed the extent of contacts between German and Russian diplomats prior to the pact, of Soviet-German co-operation after the pact and, crucially, the text of a secret 'spheres of influence' agreement concluded at the same time as the non-aggression treaty.

Nazi-Soviet Relations has been described as 'cold war propaganda by documentation'⁷. Implicit in the selection and arrangement of the documents was a particular interpretation of the origins and purposes of the Nazi-Soviet pact. According to this version of events the Soviet negotiations with Britain and France were at worst a sham and at best an insurance against failure to conclude a suitable deal with Hitler. The pact had not been the desperate last-minute gamble the Russians subsequently claimed it to be, but a calculated manoeuvre whose origins lay in a secret rapprochement with Berlin initiated by Moscow months earlier. Moreover, Moscow's foreign policy initiatives in the immediate aftermath of the pact were neither temporary nor defensive in character. They were an expression of the expansionist tendencies inherent in the very nature of the Soviet state.

Nazi-Soviet Relations set the tone for much of the subsequent Western debate about the pact. It set in motion not so much a historical discussion as a political debate about the contemporary Soviet threat to the West⁸. Ranged on one side were those who argued that the Nazi-Soviet pact revealed the USSR as an aggressive and expansionist power, much like its erstwhile fascist ally. According to this view the Soviet Union could not be trusted to keep its agreements, nor could its tendency toward treachery and double-dealing be lightly dismissed. On the other side were those who maintained that the Soviet Union was like any other state; its highest priority was national security, which it pursued with much vigour. It was, some admitted, partly motivated by a peculiar messianic ideology but its proselytizing aims were moderated by internal and external constraints and by its leadership's highly developed sense of *realpolitik*. The proponents of this view challenged the cold war interpretation of the Nazi-Soviet pact and largely accepted the Soviet version of events: that, fearful of war with Germany and mistrusting British and French motives, Stalin opted for the pact with Hitler when he realized that the triple alliance negotiations had irretrievably broken down. After the pact, the main aim of Soviet policy was to

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strengthen the USSR's strategic defences in anticipation of a future German attack.

This résumé of the political debate underlying interpretations of the pact is not meant to imply that the historical controversies were merely a facade for a series of cold war polemics and counter-polemics. The weight of historical writings on the pact testifies to the reality of those debates. Soviet foreign policy in the pact period is one of the most discussed episodes in diplomatic history⁹. But the political battle lines drawn up in the 1940s do not on their own explain the interest of successive generations of scholars in the Nazi-Soviet pact. Equally important has been the sensational nature of the events in question, the fascination of the political processes which led to them and, not least, the increasing quantities of materials which became available from Western diplomatic archives.

Throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s Western diplomatic archives disgorged their contents¹⁰. Memoirs, diaries and other documents added further fuel to the historical debate¹¹. But more sources do not necessarily result in a more definitive history. Such was the case with the Nazi-Soviet pact. Rather than advancing the subject, discussion became increasingly bogged down in conflicting interpretations of alternative sources. While some historians utilized British Foreign Office records to demonstrate the sincerity of Soviet participation in the triple alliance negotiations, others disputed their interpretation and emphasized evidence gleaned from German documents of Moscow's approaches to Berlin.

The problem in both cases was that the evidence used was fatally flawed. Western sources provided many vital clues but little hard evidence of the what, why, how and who of Soviet foreign policy. Only when the Soviet archives were opened to Western scholars would it be possible to answer these questions satisfactorily, became the increasing refrain of historians. The Soviet archives, however, remained firmly closed and so it was that towards the end of the 1960s interest in the pact dwindled. Commentaries on it continued to appear in general histories of Soviet foreign policy, in case-studies of particular episodes, and in contributions to the debate on the origins of the Second World War¹². But more often than not these additions to the historiography merely echoed earlier debates. Not until the early 1980s was there a significant revival of Western interest in the pact¹³, prompted perhaps by the return for a time of the cold war tensions of the 1950s and 1960s.

While in the West historians had been losing interest, in the USSR a Soviet historiography of the pact was blossoming. The detailed reasons for this are examined in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to mention just one: the publication of thousands of relevant documents from Soviet diplomatic and other archives. Direct access to the archives was still prohibited, except to a select few Soviet scholars, but the documents that were published did present an opportunity to begin to describe, analyse and evaluate Soviet foreign policy in new terms. Some of the blank pages in the history of Soviet foreign relations could now be filled in. Despite the fact that most of this documentation, much of it in English, has now been available for a decade or more, Western historians (with a few notable exceptions¹⁴) have not used it. Indeed, books and articles which ignore this crucial evidence continue to appear¹⁵.

This study of the Soviet pact with Germany uses the documentary evidence made available from Soviet archives and that contained in the writings of Soviet historians, including the more recent contributions of the *glasnost* era. It aims to explain why Soviet Russia concluded a non-aggression treaty with Nazi Germany in 1939, to describe the circumstances in which that decision was taken and to analyse the consequences of that action for Soviet foreign policy in the period before 22 June 1941. Based on the extensive evidence now available, Western and Soviet, the main conclusions of the study are:

- The *root* cause of the pact with Nazi Germany was the failure of the collective security programme embarked upon by the USSR in 1933–4.
- The *proximate* cause of the pact was the collapse of the triple alliance negotiations between the USSR, Britain and France.
- The *final* decision of the Soviet Government to opt for rapprochement with Germany was not made until mid-August 1939.
- The *basis* of that decision was a calculation that Britain and France might abandon the USSR in the face of the coming German invasion of Poland.
- The *substance* of the Soviet decision was a retreat into isolation with a view to securing Soviet interests through independent action.
- The *subsequent strategy* of the USSR was to strengthen security

through a combination of territorial expansion and political co-operation with Germany.

- The *overriding* aim of Soviet foreign policy from September 1939 to June 1941 was to stay out of the war as long as possible.
- The *main problem* of Soviet foreign policy in this period was to reconcile the maintenance of co-operation with Germany with the need to forestall the expansion of Nazi power.
- The *failure* to anticipate the German attack of June 1941 was primarily the result of a misestimation of intelligence, underpinned by a belief that Britain was attempting to provoke conflict between the USSR and Germany.

The book begins with a review of the treatment of the Nazi-Soviet pact in the USSR itself. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, to emphasize the legitimacy and importance of the contribution of Soviet historians to the historiography of the pact. Secondly, to establish a framework within which to judge the importance of the Soviet documents referred to in the book.

The next section outlines the historical background in the period 1917–33 during which the political and ideological foundations of Soviet foreign policy were laid. This is followed by a more detailed examination of the critical collective security period of 1933–8. Next to be examined in detail is the prewar political crisis of 1939. It is in this period that the immediate diplomatic and political origins of the Soviet decision to sign a non-aggression treaty with Germany are to be found.

The final chapters deal with the controversial events of September 1939-June 1941 – the period of the pact itself. The book concludes with an assessment of the significance and impact of Stalin's pact with Hitler – the unholy alliance of modern times.

CHAPTER

2 *History and Politics in the USSR: The Case of the Nazi-Soviet Pact*

'It is said the the decision taken by the Soviet Union in concluding a non-aggression pact with Germany was not the best one. This may be so, if one is guided not by harsh reality, but by abstract conjectures torn out of their time frame.' *M.S. Gorbachev, November 1987*

From Gorbachev to Molotov – the official line on the pact

In the Soviet Union historical anniversaries are taken very seriously indeed, and none more so than the ten-yearly celebrations of the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. By tradition it is an occasion on which the General-Secretary of the Communist Party delivers a definitive verdict on the historical experience of the world's first socialist state.

In 1987 – the 70th anniversary of the Revolution – this honour fell to Mikhail Gorbachev, General-Secretary since March 1985. The months preceding Gorbachev's speech were marked by widespread media speculation that he would use the occasion to promote '*glasnost*', to fill in some of the 'blank spots' of Soviet history. Neither his audience nor the world's media were disappointed. In contrast to Brezhnev's lacklustre performances and Khrushchev's empty rhetoric on previous occasions¹, his was a breathtakingly critical review of the Soviet regime's troubled history. In one respect, however, Gorbachev's pronouncements were a model of Soviet historical orthodoxy. When it came to the USSR's pact with Nazi Germany in 1939, Gorbachev launched into a lengthy and robust defence of Soviet actions:

In the West there is now much talk about the situation on the eve of the war. Truths are being laced with half-truths . . . they are resorting to any lies in order to saddle the Soviet Union with the blame for the Second

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World War, the road to which was supposedly opened by the Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression pact . . .

The road to war, Gorbachev argued, was in truth opened up by the Western powers who resisted Soviet efforts to build a system of collective security and whose appeasement policies led to the defeat of the Spanish Republic, to the subjugation of Austria and to the betrayal of Czechoslovakia at Munich. Far from being a mistake, the non-aggression treaty had, in fact, thwarted Western plans to involve the USSR in a war with Nazi Germany by the tactic of holding out the promise of an anti-fascist alliance².

Gorbachev's speech in November 1987 summed up fifty years of official justifications for the Soviet pact with Nazi Germany. The lineage of Gorbachev's defence of Soviet actions can be traced back to the very morrow of the pact. Even before the Treaty of Non-Aggression had been formally ratified, Moscow was beginning to elaborate its version of the controversial events leading to the pact. In an interview with *Izvestiya*, published on 27 August 1939, People's Commissar for Defence Voroshilov explained why the military negotiations with Britain and France had broken down and rejected the allegation that the breakdown had been caused by the Soviet pact with Germany³:

Military negotiations with England and France were not broken off because the USSR concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany; on the contrary, the USSR concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany as a result . . . of the fact that the military negotiations with France and England had reached deadlock because of insuperable difficulties.

Four days later Molotov, in a speech to the Supreme Soviet proposing ratification of the non-aggression treaty, took up the defence. He repeated Voroshilov's assertions about the failure of the military negotiations and launched a broader attack on Anglo-French foreign policy. London and Paris's dilatory attitude to the negotiations for a triple alliance against Germany, he argued, revealed that the British and French did not want an equitable treaty of mutual assistance but were merely using the negotiations as part of their diplomatic game. Molotov also gave a brief account of the German-Soviet negotiations leading to the non-aggression pact, which were, he said, the result of political initiatives by Berlin⁴.

Only hours after Molotov's speech the German attack on Poland

was launched. Thereafter, Soviet pronouncements on the pact with Germany began to take on a different character. Gone were the references to the Soviet attempt to form a military alliance with Britain and France. Gone too was any suggestion that the non-aggression treaty was an eleventh-hour substitute for such an alliance. In their stead came a rhetoric designed to service the new orientation of the USSR as a 'neutral', independently pursuing its own interests but retaining a close political and economic relationship with Nazi Germany. At the heart of this rhetoric was the characterization of the war as an inter-imperialist conflict in which Britain and France were the main culprits⁵.

Such rhetoric lasted only as long as the peace with Hitler. After the German attack the Soviet Government rapidly reverted to, and this time held to, the position previously outlined by Voroshilov and Molotov: first, that it was the failure of the Anglo-Soviet-French military negotiations which led to the pact with Germany; second, that the blame for the failure of the military, and also the political, negotiations lay squarely with Britain and France; and, third, that the political initiative for a non-aggression treaty had come from the Germans.

In spite of this adamant defence of the pact, Soviet leaders did not readily discuss the subject, at least not in public. Stalin, for example, in his important election address of February 1946 in which he summed up the origins, character and outcome of the Second World War, omitted all reference to the non-aggression treaty with Germany⁶. Given the controversy surrounding the pact and the traumas of the early successes of the German attack on the USSR in June 1941, this is not surprising.

The publication in 1948 of *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, however, could not be ignored. In response to the American publication, the Soviets published their own selection of documents from the captured German archives – *Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War*⁷. They also issued an official booklet – *Falsifiers of History* – which purported to refute the 'distorted picture of events' and the 'lies and slanders' in *Nazi-Soviet Relations*⁸.

The contrast between the Soviet and US documentary selections could hardly be greater. While *Nazi-Soviet Relations* dealt exclusively with Soviet-German relations between 1939 and 1941, the Soviet volumes evaded that subject entirely and concentrated on pre-war German relations with Britain and France and on events leading to the Munich Conference in September 1938.

The Soviet purpose in publishing their documentary volumes was not to counter *Nazi-Soviet Relations* directly but to support the defence of Soviet policy elaborated in *Falsifiers of History*. This booklet set out the official line on the Soviet decision to sign the pact with Germany (expounded again by Gorbachev 40 years later) and defended the Soviet strategy in 1939–41 of constructing an 'Eastern Front' against German aggression. The relatively frank discussion of Soviet territorial expansion after the pact was perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Falsifiers of History*⁹:

It was not a question of infringing or not infringing the national rights of Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia or Poland, but of preventing the conversion of these countries into downtrodden colonies of Hitler Germany. . . the point was to build up a barrier against the advance of the German troops in all areas where that was possible, to organize a strong defence and then to launch a counter-offensive, smash Hitler's armies and thereby create the conditions for the free development of those countries. . .

In terms of Realpolitik arguments such as these had their merit, and as a counterblast to the cold war propaganda of *Nazi-Soviet Relations* both the booklet and the accompanying documents had their political uses. But as an historical account of the Nazi-Soviet pact – even a highly partisan one – they left much to be desired. Firstly, there was no evidence from the Soviet archives to justify the claims made for Soviet policy. Secondly, there was the absence of any comment on the secret agreements delimiting Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. Thirdly, there was no real attempt to confront the fact that the final outcome of the pact was a near-disaster for the Soviet Union – that between June and December 1941 the Nazi invasion of the USSR came to within a hairsbreadth of success. These were just the major omissions. Others became apparent as Western historians probed deeper into Soviet policy during the pact period. Were Soviet dealings with the Nazis in the 1930s as innocent as was claimed? To what extent was Stalin an active suitor of Hitler, rather than a reluctant recipient of Hitler's overtures? What would have happened had Moscow continued to pursue an alliance with the Western powers? How much economic aid did the USSR contribute to the building of the Nazi war machine which was eventually unleashed against it?

For 40 years Soviet historians grappled with these and other issues, constrained by the official line and, more importantly, by their own commitment to defend Soviet policy against its Western detractors. Whatever their own misgivings and criticisms, for the most part they shared the sentiments expressed by Gorbachev: that during the prewar political crisis the USSR acted in good faith, that while the Nazi-Soviet pact may have finally triggered the Second World War it was the Western powers who had loaded and pointed the gun, and that while Stalin did not make the best use of the breathing-space won by the pact he was still right, given the circumstances, to conclude it.

Soviet historians and the pact

Unlike *Nazi-Soviet Relations* in the West, *Falsifiers of History* did not immediately inspire further investigations by Soviet historians. The beginnings of a genuine Soviet historiography of the 1939 non-aggression treaty had to await the death of Stalin and the period of destalinization and liberalization which followed. Before that, the peak of Soviet historical scholarship on the Nazi-Soviet pact was represented by the second volume of the *Diplomaticheskii Slovar* (*Diplomatic Dictionary*), published in 1950 and officially edited by the then Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Vyshinsky, whose other claim to fame was that he had been the chief prosecutor at the great Show Trials of the 1930s. But following the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 a number of Soviet books, articles, symposia, reference works and documentary collections on modern international relations and diplomacy, including the first history of Soviet foreign policy, were published¹⁰.

Perhaps the most promising event was the publication in 1957 of the first volume in the series *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR* (*Foreign Policy Documents of the USSR*) – the Soviet equivalent of series of diplomatic documents such as *Documents on British Foreign Policy*. Between 1957 and 1977 21 volumes in the series were published, covering the 1917–38 period in Soviet foreign policy. No fewer than 10,000 documents, 6,000 previously unpublished, and 4,000 explanatory notes were reproduced¹¹. The appearance of the first volume in 1957 was a sign of the growing accessibility of Soviet archives (to Soviet historians, that is) and the elaborate publishing

projects then being hatched by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Commission for the Publication of Diplomatic Documents¹².

In 1958, on the 20th anniversary of the Munich Conference, the Czechoslovak and Soviet authorities published jointly a selection of documents from their archives covering the March-September 1938 period in Soviet-Czechoslovak relations¹³. The Soviets had long maintained their fidelity to Czechoslovakia's cause in 1938 and these were the documents purporting to prove it – correspondence between Moscow and its Prague embassy; records of Soviet conversations with Czechoslovak and French diplomats; and, from Czechoslovak sources, favourable reports of Soviet policies and initiatives. Although by later Soviet standards the documentation was decidedly thin, it did mean that for the first time it was possible to view the Czechoslovak crisis of 1938 through Soviet eyes. Similarly, the publication in 1959 of the Soviet records of the 1939 military talks with Britain and France enabled observers to compare the Soviet version of those discussions with that from the standard British source¹⁴.

The historiographical turning point for Soviet commentaries on the Nazi-Soviet pact itself came with the publication in 1960 of the first volume of *Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny Sovetskogo Souza* (*History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*) – a multi-volumed, collectively-prepared work, commissioned by the CPSU central committee in September 1957¹⁵. The first volume dealt extensively with the origins and early stages of the Second World War. Economic, political and military aspects of the war's origins were its main focus, but sections were included on the most important aspects of pre-June 1941 diplomatic history – the Soviet struggle for collective security; the Munich crisis; the Anglo-Soviet-French negotiations in 1939; and Soviet foreign policy in 1940-41¹⁶.

Of considerable significance was the account – the first of its kind in the USSR – of Soviet-German contacts in the spring and summer of 1939¹⁷. The representation of these contacts – that the initiative for discussion and, finally, agreement came from the German side – was nothing new. But the *History* set a new standard for Soviet writings on the pact by its use of a wide range of sources, including references to Soviet archives, and in its detailed attention to the events which led to the pact. For the first time an effort had been made to present a serious and professional historical justification for Soviet policy during the pact period.

In the decade following the publication of the *History* a steady consolidation and growth of a new, post-Stalin historiography of the Nazi-Soviet pact took place. The volumes of Soviet foreign policy documents were supplemented by a series on Soviet-Polish relations¹⁸. In 1963 *International Affairs* (Moscow) published a series of documentary essays on the negotiations for an 'Eastern Locarno' in 1933-5 which reproduced extensive extracts from the Soviet Foreign Ministry's archives¹⁹. Further fragments from Soviet diplomatic records came to light in a new official history of Soviet foreign policy, in works by individual Soviet scholars on Soviet-French and Anglo-Soviet relations between the wars, and in several general studies of modern international relations²⁰. Memoirs by Soviet diplomats were also published. Ivan Maisky recalled his experiences as Soviet Ambassador in London, while Valentin Berezhkov wrote a unique Soviet account of the November 1940 Soviet-German meetings in Berlin and of the situation in the Soviet embassy there in the days and weeks before 22 June 1941²¹. Less useful in illuminating Soviet diplomacy, but providing some insights, were the numerous military memoirs published during the 1960s²².

One of the most important books on the Nazi-Soviet pact to appear in the USSR in the 1960s was A.M. Nekrich's *1941, 22 Iunia*, published by the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Nekrich's monograph surfaced in 1965 on the crest of the destalinization wave which followed the 22nd Congress of the CPSU in 1961. Nekrich's analysis of Soviet foreign policy in 1939-41 was orthodox, on the whole. Towards the end of the book, however, Nekrich criticized both the lack of preparation for a sudden German attack and Stalin's refusal to heed the innumerable reports that Hitler was about to make his move against Soviet Russia. Much of Nekrich's argument was based on personal interviews with Soviet officers involved in intelligence work at the time of the German invasion²³.

A critique of Soviet preparedness in June 1941 had been the central, critical theme of the post-Stalin reinterpretation of the Nazi-Soviet pact. Part of Khrushchev's indictment of Stalin in his secret speech to the 20th party congress was devoted to Stalin's responsibility for the manner in which the USSR had been surprised on 22 June 1941²⁴. The 1960 *History* reflected this line, as did the first edition of an official history of Soviet foreign policy²⁵ and, indeed, Nekrich's book. Unfortunately for Nekrich, under the new Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership of the mid-1960s, political conditions

were changing. Within historiography one expression of these changes was the gradual watering down of the Khrushchevite critique of Stalin. As a consequence Nekrich came under increasing attack from official quarters. His book was withdrawn from circulation, he was expelled from the CPSU and stripped of his membership of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and was eventually forced to emigrate in the 1970s²⁶.

The 'Nekrich Affair' serves to remind us of the intimate connection between politics and history in the USSR. The Khrushchevite gloss on the official interpretation of the Nazi-Soviet pact – that Stalin was to blame for the disaster of 22 June 1941 – was not just a matter of putting the record straight. It was a political parable that warned of the dangers of a 'cult of personality', reaffirmed the virtues of collective leadership and, above all, exculpated the Soviet socio-political system from historical blame. Beyond the polemics directed against Stalin's crimes and mistakes was the message that the Soviet leadership and Communist Party, armed with the science of Marxism-Leninism, had followed a correct and wise foreign policy course – much as it was doing in the present day. But the Khrushchevite explanation of the past had its dangers too. It begged some discomfiting questions. Was it just a question of Stalin's mistakes? What about the rest of the Soviet leadership? If the Soviet leadership then was capable of pursuing a mistaken foreign policy, what about now? Was the disaster of 22 June 1941 the only foreign policy error to be explained? Brezhnev and his supporters in the Soviet historical establishment cut off this line of argument by minimizing the past sins of the USSR and emphasizing its virtues. This new line on the pact was reflected in a new official history of the Second World War²⁷ and in the writings of Soviet memoirists and historians²⁸, although works with the pre-Brezhnev emphasis continued to be published²⁹.

Political considerations have always been dominant in Soviet writings on the pact but, since the death of Stalin at least, they have never wholly determined the content. An historiographic dynamic was also at work. Alongside the official retrenchment on the interpretation of the pact in the 1970s there was a trend toward more sophisticated and detailed treatments of the subject. Books and articles on the events preceding the pact multiplied³⁰. This upsurge of Soviet writings on the pact coincided with the publication of key documents on Soviet diplomacy in the 1930s. Between 1970 and

1977 six volumes of documents on Soviet foreign policy, spanning the years 1933-8, were published³¹. During the same period a number of companion volumes on Soviet relations with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria were issued³². In addition, a special collection of documents dealing with Soviet foreign policy in 1938-9 was published in 1971³³. Forming the backbone of this collection was Moscow's correspondence with Soviet embassies in London and Paris. It broke new ground in relation to evidence of Soviet thinking after Munich and on the course of the Anglo-Soviet-French triple alliance negotiations.

Soviet historians devoured these documents, much like their Western colleagues had done with German and British sources in the 1950s and 1960s. They also made increasing use of Western archives to garner further evidence for their interpretations of the Nazi-Soviet pact. It is ironic that books by Soviet historians contain wide-ranging references to Western literature and sources – far more than in most Western writings.

However, the new Soviet source materials and the contributions of Soviet historians to the pact's historiography had their limitations. On the sources side the problem was twofold. First, there was the narrowness of the range of documents published from the Soviet archives. Letters and telegrams exchanged between Moscow and Soviet embassies around the world, reports of meetings with foreign diplomats and politicians, aides-memoires, formal statements, agreements and treaties – almost all the published Soviet documents fall into one or other of these categories. Still secret were the *internal* reports and memoranda of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, the minutes and documents of relevant state and party decision-making bodies and the private papers of Stalin and other Soviet leaders. Without recourse to these sources it is difficult to analyse, except by inference, the processes of policy-formation and decision-making in Soviet foreign relations.

The second problem was the omission of documents with a crucial bearing on some of the most important phases of the history of the Nazi-Soviet pact. There was very little on the 1939-41 period: some documents on German-Soviet relations in 1938-9, but not the crucial ones detailing meetings between Soviet and German diplomats, instructions from Moscow to its Berlin embassy and, most importantly, the record of the negotiations which actually resulted in the non-aggression treaty.

The main limitation of the works of Soviet historians was the straitjacket of having to work within the political and ideological constraints of the official view of the pact. This can be illustrated by reference to two of the most important Soviet contributions to the historiography of the Nazi-Soviet pact: I.F. Maximychev's *Diplomatiya Mira Protiv Diplomatii Voyny* (*Diplomacy of Peace versus Diplomacy of War*) and P.P. Sevostyanov's *Pered Velikim Ispytaniem* (*Before the Great Ordeal*), both published in 1981.

Maximychev's book was the first detailed Soviet study of Soviet-German relations in the 1930s. Unlike previous Soviet historians who had touched upon this difficult area, Maximychev ducked none of the controversial issues surrounding the activities of Soviet diplomats in Berlin. Utilizing both published and archival Soviet sources, he presented a rigorous alternative interpretation of Soviet policy towards Germany to that common in the writings of Western historians. Towards the end of the book, however, his analysis and narrative collapsed into a parroting of the official line on the Nazi-Soviet pact. Nowhere is it possible to find, for example, any discussion of the genesis of the spheres of influence agreement appended to the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression treaty. Indeed, its existence is not even acknowledged.

The same defect mars Sevostyanov's book, a study of Soviet foreign policy 1939-41 – the first major Soviet study of this period since that by Nekrich. Sevostyanov's book was hailed by two Soviet reviewers as 'the first all-round analysis of Soviet foreign policy in the initial period of the Second World War' whose main scientific value lay in 'the author's extensive use of unpublished documents from the USSR's foreign policy archives'³⁴. All this was true enough but, as with Maximychev, the crunch issues were ignored or evaded: no mention or discussion of the secret protocols; omission of the Soviet attempt to secure a spheres of influence agreement with Italy and Germany on the Balkans in the summer of 1940; nothing new on the Molotov-Ribbentrop-Hitler conversations in Berlin in November 1940; and very little consideration of the origins of the Soviet debacle on 22 June 1941.

Maximychev's and Sevostyanov's blind spots were shared by all Soviet historians. Between 1948 and 1988 not a single direct reference to the spheres of influence agreements signed with Germany in 1939 appeared in any officially sanctioned Soviet book or article, although their existence was an open secret in the Soviet

historical community³⁵. It was to take a revolution in Soviet historiography and a rebellion in the Baltic republics to break down this wall of silence.

Glasnost and the pact

With Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power in the USSR, two Russian words entered the international political vocabulary: *Glasnost* (openness) and *Perestroika* (reconstruction). The former refers to Gorbachev's campaign for the democratization of Soviet society, the latter to his project for the reform and reorganization of the Soviet economy. In the field of history the *glasnost* campaign began in earnest following a speech by Gorbachev in April 1987 in which he called for a new history of the Soviet Communist Party. It should 'have no blank pages, no subjective sympathies or antipathies; its merit should not be subject to transient political considerations', he said³⁶.

As we have seen, on the Nazi-Soviet pact Gorbachev did not himself measure up to these high standards. But one of the features of the Gorbachev era has been that the party leader's voice is only one among many, albeit a very powerful one. Hence, while some Soviet historians took their cue from Gorbachev's analysis of the pact in November 1987, others embraced the spirit of his April speech and developed an independent line. Moreover, political events threw up unprecedented challenges to the Soviet historical establishment. Gorbachev's reform programme released an explosion of nationalist feeling in the Baltic republics, which culminated in the summer of 1988 in a direct political challenge to the official line on the Nazi-Soviet pact.

The opening up of the Soviet debate on the pact began quietly in the summer of 1987. A series of press articles by Soviet historians revisited the 1960s debate on Soviet preparedness for war on the eve of 22 June 1941, in particular Stalin's culpability for the disaster that followed³⁷. Around the same time meetings took place of a commission of Polish and Soviet historians, established jointly by Moscow and Warsaw to discuss the history of Soviet-Polish relations. Its first report a few months later repudiated Molotov's September 1939 justification for the Soviet invasion of Poland (that the Polish state had ceased to exist) and openly discussed the mass

deportations and purges of Poles from the subsequently-occupied territories³⁸. Meanwhile, the first public demands for the lifting of restrictions on access to Soviet historical archives were being voiced, particularly to those documents relevant to the pact with Nazi Germany³⁹.

Two further straws in the wind were the announcement that work had begun on a new official history of the Second World War and the publication in December 1987 of extracts from a new biography of Stalin by Dimitrii Volkogonov, a military historian⁴⁰. Even more interesting developments were to follow.

In March 1988 the literary journal *Druzhba Narodov* published a letter from the well-known Soviet writer and journalist Semyon Rostovsky, originally written to Ilya Ehrenburg in 1965. The letter criticized the Nazi-Soviet pact as mistaken because of its deleterious effects on the anti-fascist movement in the West and because it gave Hitler the chance to finish off Britain and France before launching his 'surprise' attack on the USSR. Two months later *Moskovskaya Pravda* published a further article by Rostovsky in which he elaborated on his views of 23 years before⁴¹. For the first time the official line on the pact had been challenged publicly.

Rumblings of dissent also began to be heard in the higher reaches of the Soviet historical profession. In June *International Affairs* (Moscow) published a round-table discussion of a group of prominent Soviet historians⁴². Even by *glasnost* standards the discussion was very frank. Demands for access to key documents in the Soviet archives were strongly endorsed. The need for a deeper study of the many controversies surrounding the Nazi-Soviet pact was generally agreed. Most interesting was the contribution of Alexander Chubaryan who raised the question of 'missed opportunities' in 1939, i.e. whether or not there was an alternative to the pact with Nazi Germany. This was an issue that he was to raise again at a conference held at the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs later that year⁴³.

We must take a new approach to the history of international relations, namely that of the idea of missed opportunities . . . the time has come to ask how active Soviet diplomacy was and whether we did everything possible for the success of the Soviet-British-French talks in the summer of 1939.

Also active in revising the official line on the pact was Dimitrii Volkogonov. In an interview published in *Trud* (newspaper of the Soviet trade unions) on 19 June 1988 and in a major article in *Pravda* a day later, he launched an attack on the Soviet-German Boundary and Friendship Treaty of 28 September 1939, describing it, and the ideological rapprochement that followed, as an inexcusable political error⁴⁴. Volkogonov's critique of Soviet policy stopped short of rejecting the August 1939 non-aggression treaty. Nor did he venture to raise the question of the secret protocols attached to it and the September friendship treaty. However, six months later in an interview published in *Soviet Weekly*, he was more forthright: 'On the eve of the war, Stalin committed a series of major political and strategic errors, in particular his attempt to play for time by signing the non-aggression pact with Germany'⁴⁵. By this time the Soviet historical debate had moved on. Indeed, it was unrecognizable compared to that which had preceded Gorbachev's *glasnost* campaign. In particular, its terms of reference had been completely changed by the fact that, for the first time in fifty years, the secret spheres of influence agreements signed with Germany in 1939 were being openly discussed in the USSR.

It is no accident that the genie of the secret protocols was let out of the political-historical bottle in the Baltic republics. In the USSR the Nazi-Soviet pact is a live and passionate political issue. For Soviet intellectuals it is emotionally one of the most difficult of all their country's acts with which to come to terms. For communist leaders, ideologues and activists it represents a deeply embarrassing series of political events. For millions of ordinary Soviet citizens the pact is intimately connected with personal tragedies. Perhaps their families were among the two million deported from the newly-acquired western territories in 1939-41. Almost certainly they have a personal connection with someone who was killed, wounded, captured or suffered the horrors of Nazi occupation as a result of the disaster of 22 June 1941. In the Baltic republics, however, an additional set of factors come into play. It was under the auspices of the pact that the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania lost their independence and were, in 1940, incorporated as republics of the USSR. The pact also marked the beginning of a long period of the stifling of their national identities. The publication in August 1988 of the secret protocols (which assigned the Baltic countries to a

Soviet sphere of influence) represented an affirmation of Baltic nationhood, a challenge to the legitimacy of the three states' incorporation into the USSR, and a reinforcement of their campaign for greater autonomy from Moscow.

The secret protocols were first published on 5 August 1988 in *Sajudzio Zinios* – the paper of the Lithuanian Restructuring Movement, one of the many unofficial offshoots of Gorbachev's *perestroika* campaign. They were also published (in an abridged form) on 17 August in *Sovetskaya Estoniya* – the daily newspaper of the Estonian Communist Party. On 23 August the Latvian Young Communists' paper *Padomju Jaunatne* also published extracts⁴⁶.

The most significant of these publications was that in Estonia. *Sovetskaya Estoniya* is a Russian-language daily which can be bought in many parts of the Soviet Union, including Moscow and Leningrad. The newspaper's status meant that its publication of the secret protocols was a challenge that could not be lightly dismissed. If Moscow had any hopes of hushing up the whole affair, they must have been dashed by what followed. On 23 August 1988 hundreds of thousands of people attended marches and rallies in the Baltic republics to mark the 49th anniversary of the Nazi-Soviet pact. Speakers at the demonstrations demanded the truth about the pact, challenged the legality of the Baltic States' incorporation into the USSR and demanded independence. The most remarkable address was given by Yuri Afanseyev, head of the Moscow Institute of Historian-Archivists, at a meeting in the Estonian capital Tallinn. 'In no other country has history been falsified to the extent it has been in the Soviet Union', he said. The secret protocols were published in 1948 and 'every schoolchild in the West knows about them (sic!). But we continued to deny their existence'⁴⁷.

The next day two major articles on the pact appeared in the Soviet press. In *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, the mass circulation daily of the Russian Federated Soviet Republic, historian Robert Zhugzhda openly discussed the issue of the secret protocols⁴⁸. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (the Young Communists' paper) took up the critique of Semyon Rostovsky with military historian V.M. Kulish, arguing that during the second half of the 1930s there had been a steady drift in Stalin's foreign policy toward rapprochement with Germany and that the Nazi-Soviet pact had been of inestimable value to Hitler in freeing him from the danger of a two-front war⁴⁹. Needless to say, both these arguments were anathema to the official line.

The official response to these developments was a series of press conferences⁵⁰ and a full-page article in *Pravda* on 1 September which defended the orthodox line on the pact⁵¹. Of particular interest was the novel argument that since the originals of the secret protocols had never been found (only photocopies) their authenticity must be in doubt. A few weeks later one of the authors of the *Pravda* article, Felix Kovalev, Chief Archivist of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, told a press conference that a search of the Soviet archives had failed to uncover the text of the secret protocols. He also revealed that a million archive documents had been declassified and would be made accessible to Soviet scholars⁵².

Kovalev's line did not go unchallenged. In an article published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* on 5 October historian Mikhail Semiryaga pointed out that the text of the secret protocol delineating Soviet-German spheres of influence in Poland corresponded exactly with the military demarcation line agreed by the Soviet and German armies and published in a communiqué of 23 September 1939. The implication was clear enough. More importantly, Semiryaga went on to argue that the pact was a political miscalculation, lacking in strategic foresight, which resulted in the USSR being in a worse position after September 1939 than before it. Taking up the theme of missed opportunities he maintained that the Soviet leadership should have persisted in their negotiations for a military accord with Britain and France. The continuation of these negotiations would have deterred Hitler from attacking Poland, if it had not proved possible to reach an agreement quickly. Semiryaga further argued that the decision to conclude the pact with Nazi Germany was informed by a dogmatic and stereotyped view of the motives and actions of the Western powers. He also pointed out that the decision was taken without consulting officials of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and without even the knowledge of several members of the politburo.

The conclusion to the article is worth quoting directly since it illustrates the point made earlier that Soviet debates about the pact with Germany are as much about the political present as they are about the past, about the future direction of Soviet foreign policy as well as its historical record. The lesson of the Nazi-Soviet pact, according to Semiryaga, is that⁵³:

in a complicated international situation it is imperative that there is

circumspection when taking decisions, persistence, and soberness in evaluation – free from any kind of dogma and stereotypes. Thus, and only thus, is it possible to build constructive relations with the capitalist countries.

Semiryaga's article appeared under the headline 'Was there an alternative?' Three weeks later *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published another article on the Nazi-Soviet pact, this time under the heading 'There was no alternative'. Its authors, two Soviet historians, took issue with Semiryaga's article and reiterated the by now ragged official line that the pact with Nazi Germany was an unfortunate necessity imposed on the USSR by the policies and actions of the Western states⁵⁴.

The exchange in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* typified an emerging pattern in the Soviet debate about the 1939 pact with Germany: trenchant critiques followed by orthodox reiterations of the official line, with the latter very much on the defensive⁵⁵. The arguments and counter-arguments bore an uncanny resemblance to those that had long raged in the West. As the USSR approached the 50th anniversary of the 1939 non-aggression treaty, Soviet historians stood poised to join in that debate on an equal basis for the first time in 40 years.

CHAPTER

3 *From World Revolution to Collective Security: Foundations of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–33*

'I will issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the peoples of the world and then shut up shop.' *L.D. Trotsky, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs in 1917*

'We act on the principle that peace is indivisible'. *M.M. Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs in 1937*

Foreign policy and revolution

When the Bolsheviks came to power in November 1917 they believed the Russian Revolution to be the first act in a world revolutionary drama. 'We, the Russian working and exploited classes have the honour of being in the vanguard of the international socialist revolution', declared Lenin. 'The Russians began it – the Germans, the French and the English will finish it, and socialism will be victorious'¹.

Because of this belief in the imminence of revolution in other countries, the idea of foreign policy as a particular form of state activity figured little in Bolshevik thinking at the moment of their seizure of power². The coming world revolution would make traditional diplomacy and foreign policy redundant. International relations would be reconstituted on an entirely new basis. The antagonisms of nations would be superseded by the solidarity and co-operation of peoples.

In the meantime, however, the Bolsheviks were confronted by a problem more pressing than the project of reorganizing international relations along socialist lines: the ending of the war with Germany on the Eastern front. Peace with Germany was *the* precondition for even the temporary survival of Soviet power in Russia. Hence one of

the very first acts of the new regime was the proclamation of a Decree on Peace which called for a general armistice and negotiations between all the belligerent powers for 'a just, democratic peace'³. The appeal fell on deaf ears.

With no immediate prospect of revolution in the West and faced with the rejection from all sides of the idea of a general armistice, the Soviet Government had no real alternative but to open separate peace negotiations with Germany. On 4 December 1917 Germany and Soviet Russia called a temporary halt to hostilities and on 15 December agreed to an armistice pending peace negotiations. Seven days later those peace negotiations began in Brest-Litovsk⁴.

Although the Bolsheviks accepted the necessity of opening peace negotiations with Germany, they did not enter those negotiations intending actually to conclude a peace treaty with the Germans. The negotiations were viewed as a stage from which to proclaim Soviet proposals for a general peace and, they believed, would buy time for the maturation of revolution in Europe. As Trotsky, the newly-appointed People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, put it⁵:

In the peace negotiations the Soviet power sets itself a dual task: in the first place, to secure the quickest possible cessation of the shameful and criminal slaughter which is destroying Europe; secondly, to help the working class of all countries by every means available to us to overthrow the domination of capital and to seize state power in the interests of a democratic peace and of a socialist transformation of Europe and all mankind.

The formal Soviet stance in the negotiations was spelled out in a declaration by its delegation on the first day of the conference which reaffirmed the Decree on Peace and listed the principles necessary to any peace settlement: no annexations; national independence and self-determination; no punitive reparations; and an end to colonialism⁶.

The Germans agreed to the proposals but only on condition that *all* the belligerent powers did likewise – an extremely improbable eventuality, to say the least. In response the Soviet delegation requested a ten-day adjournment of the peace conference to give the Entente powers an opportunity to reconsider their position in the light of their proposals⁷. This was agreed and on 22 December the Narkomindel (*Narodnyi Kommissariat Inostrannykh Del* – People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs) issued a note to the 'Peoples and

Governments of Allied Countries' calling on them to join the peace negotiations. The note embodied what was becoming the familiar dual thrust of Soviet diplomacy: on the one hand, a proposal (backed by the implied threat of a separate peace between Germany and Soviet Russia) that the allied governments should negotiate a general peace and, on the other, an appeal to the allied working classes to rebel against imperialism and militarism⁸.

When the peace conference reopened at Brest-Litovsk on 9 January 1918 the Soviet delegation, still headed by Trotsky, resumed their delaying tactics. However, on 18 January the German side presented a virtual ultimatum, demanding as part of the peace settlement Soviet acquiescence in their annexation of Poland, parts of Byelorussia, Lithuania and other areas of the former Tsarist empire⁹. The conference adjourned once again and Trotsky returned to Petrograd to seek instructions.

The German ultimatum struck at the very heart of the Bolshevik outlook on foreign relations at this time¹⁰. To accept the German terms entailed the repudiation of the Bolshevik commitment not to sign a separate peace agreement. To reject them would signal a renewed German offensive which threatened to undermine the fragile power base of the Soviets within Russia. Either outcome would, in the Bolshevik view, have grave effects for the European revolution.

Not surprisingly, the dilemma posed by the German ultimatum provoked a deep split in the Bolshevik ranks. Within the party leadership three main responses to the German peace terms emerged: acceptance, urged by Lenin, Stalin and others; a revolutionary war, advocated by the so-called 'left communist' group around Bukharin; and 'neither war nor peace', proposed by Trotsky¹¹. When the Bolshevik party central committee met on 24 January the ensuing discussion was dominated by questions of calculation rather than of principle. Bukharin and his supporters argued that a revolutionary war against Germany would inspire revolution within Germany itself. Lenin agreed that the Russian Revolution should be subordinated to the greater goal of world revolution. But he questioned the tactical wisdom of risking the substance of revolution in Russia for what was still only the spectre of revolution in the West. He urged acceptance of the German peace terms. When it came to the vote, however, the meeting agreed to endorse Trotsky's compromise formula of 'neither war nor peace'¹².

The nature of Trotsky's formula was revealed at Brest-Litovsk on 10 February when he made the following astounding declaration to the peace conference¹³:

On behalf of the Council of People's Commissars, the Government of the Russian Federated Republic, we herewith bring to the notice of the Governments and peoples at war with us, and to allied and neutral nations, the fact that, while refusing to sign a rapacious treaty, Russia, for its part, declares the state of war with Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria, at an end. An order is simultaneously being given to the Russian troops for complete demobilization all along the front.

Trotsky calculated that the Central powers would accept this unilateral declaration of peace, partly because it was in their own military interests and partly because of the possible adverse domestic implications of continuing the war in the east¹⁴. It was a neat solution to the Bolsheviks' dilemma. But Trotsky's calculations were wrong. By the time the central committee met again on 18 February, the Soviet leadership was faced with a rapidly advancing German attack. Faced too with Lenin's threat of resignation, the central committee finally voted to accept new German peace terms, predictably more stringent than those previously on offer¹⁵. The Brest-Litovsk peace treaty between Soviet Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey was signed on 3 March 1918.

E.H. Carr has commented¹⁶:

The Brest-Litovsk crisis brought to a head the unresolved dilemma of the relations of Soviet Russia to the world, the dilemma of an authority which aspired to act at one and the same time as the driving force of world revolution and as the sovereign power of a state in a world of states.

But, except as a tactical issue, the Bolsheviks did not fully recognize the dilemma in these terms. Their faith in a coming world revolution was still strong and the advent of civil war and foreign intervention quickly propelled them into a position of revolutionary intransigence. For the duration of the civil war crisis the survival of the national revolution and its promotion internationally became inextricably intertwined. Diplomacy, even of the propagandist kind initially practised by the Bolsheviks, was eclipsed by revolutionary endeavour. Financial aid to revolutionary movements outside Russia,

propaganda aimed at enemy troops, appeals to people to act against their own governments in support of the Bolshevik Revolution – these were the main instruments of Soviet foreign policy in this period¹⁷.

Foreign intervention in Soviet Russia began in March 1918 with the landing of British troops at Murmansk and rapidly escalated after the November Armistice in Europe. In addition to the British troops, French, Japanese, Polish, Czechoslovak, US and other foreign forces were also involved. But the greatest threat to Soviet power came from within – from the so-called White armies commanded by Kolchak, Yudenich, Denikin and Wrangel which, supported by the Allies, attacked from all sides the territories controlled by the Bolsheviks. The ensuing civil war lasted almost three years. This period of ‘counter-revolution’ was effectively ended with the defeat of Wrangel’s army in the Crimea in October 1920¹⁸.

The peak of Soviet success in this period came in the summer of 1920 when the Red Army launched a counter-offensive against Polish forces which had invaded the Ukraine the previous spring. As the Poles retreated the possibility arose of advancing into Poland and marching on Warsaw. Lenin and the overwhelming majority of the Bolsheviks urged this course of action. The Red Army, they hoped, would be hailed as liberators in Poland and would provide an inspiration for revolutionary workers in Germany and elsewhere.

These revolutionary expectations proved unfounded. The Red Army met with stiff opposition and in August its advance was halted at Warsaw. It was now the Red Army’s turn to retreat as the Poles counter-attacked and drove the Soviet forces back to a position hundreds of miles east of the so-called ‘Curzon Line’, the frontier between Russia and Poland drawn up by a commission of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and named after Lord Curzon, British Foreign Secretary, who proposed it as a basis for peace between the two countries. In October a ceasefire was agreed followed, in March 1921, by the Treaty of Riga which formalized the military demarcation line¹⁹.

Polish-Soviet relations never recovered from the war of 1920–21 and for the next 20 years were soured by mutual hostility. The Poles feared Soviet ambitions to redraw the boundaries agreed in 1921, to repeat the experiment in exporting revolution on the points of the Red Army’s bayonets. The Russians suspected the Poles of complicity in international moves to overthrow Soviet power. In the context of

such enmity the prospects for Polish-Soviet co-operation to counter the threat of even so obviously a common foe as Nazi Germany were bleak indeed. So it was to prove in August 1939 when the Poles stonewalled the Anglo-Soviet-French military negotiations by refusing to agree to Soviet forces crossing their territory in the event of war with Germany²⁰.

From the revolutionary standpoint the most important feature of the invasion débâcle was not the Red Army's military defeat but its *political* failure to export the revolution. Nor was this the first such blow to the international revolutionary aspirations of the Bolsheviks. Germany's 1918 'November Revolution' had forced the Kaiser's abdication but had not advanced beyond the stage of a democratic republic. An attempt in April 1919 to establish a Soviet republic in Bavaria had been crushed, as had a Communist-led uprising in Vienna two months later. A Soviet Republic was successfully established in Hungary in March 1919, but only survived for 133 days²¹. These outcomes fell far short of the expectation of the newly-formed Communist International that the whole of Europe would shortly undergo a revolutionary transformation.

In fact, by the end of 1919, Lenin was already proposing a more realistic timetable of revolution in the West²². To some extent, therefore, the military venture into Poland was a deviation from the main trend in Soviet policy which, by 1920, was towards a reassessment of revolutionary prospects abroad. An important indicator of this trend was the changing perspective of the Communist International.

The Communist International (Comintern) was initiated by the Bolsheviks in March 1919 with the aim of supplying what they saw as the revolutionary key to the postwar political and economic upheavals engulfing Europe: communist leadership of the masses and the defeat of social democracy in the working-class movement. This concept of opposing social democracy and building an alternative political leadership in the international labour movement was a constant factor in Comintern politics during the 1920s. Its original imperative – that there was a revolutionary situation in Europe which demanded revolutionary leadership – was very short-lived, however²³. Prompted by the ebbing of the postwar revolutionary tide, the Comintern at its Third Congress in June-July 1921 adopted the policy of the 'United Front'. According to this policy, revolutionaries should work for united action with social democrats to defend

working class interests, whilst at the same time extending communist mass influence. Essentially it was an adaptation to what the Comintern designated as a period of 'temporary capitalist stabilization'. The United Front tactic was 'designed to fill in time until a new revolutionary crisis made a new and better October possible'²⁴.

The Comintern's retreat on the revolutionary front paralleled a change in domestic policy from the strict regimentation of War Communism to the more liberal New Economic Policy and, on the diplomatic front, the emergence of a new foreign policy. The end of civil war and foreign intervention, the needs of economic reconstruction, and a recognition that the Soviet state was largely dependent on its own resources for survival in a hostile, capitalist international environment, all contributed to the formation of a new foreign strategy. Revolutionary fervour was superseded by the desire for diplomatic recognition, trade agreements, non-aggression treaties, and the adroit exploitation of 'imperialist contradictions'. For more than a decade the main objectives of foreign policy were to end the international isolation of the Soviet state, to forestall the development of anti-Soviet coalitions, to improve economic relations with the capitalist world and to construct a security system around the USSR's borders²⁵.

The Bolsheviks had entered the international arena in 1917 with a single purpose – to further the cause of revolution. But the logic of national survival gradually forced them to adopt a dual policy premised on the idea that 'world revolution was the sole guarantee of national security; but national security was also a condition of the successful promotion of world revolution'²⁶. Initially, at the beginning of the 1920s, the two objectives had equal priority in Soviet foreign policy. However, as the decade progressed the balance tilted decisively in favour of national security. One articulation of this shift in priorities was Stalin's famous dictum of 1927 that²⁷:

An *internationalist* is one who is ready to defend the USSR without reservation, without wavering, unconditionally; for the USSR is the base of the world revolutionary movement, and this revolutionary movement cannot be defended and promoted unless the USSR is defended.

Another facet of the ascendancy of state security interests in Soviet policy was the growing divergence between Narkomindel and

Comintern activities. In the beginning the two institutions had been virtually indistinguishable. In the 1920s, while the Comintern continued to tread the path of revolution, the Narkomindel increasingly embraced the aims and methods of traditional diplomacy.

Ideology and diplomacy

The transformation of Soviet diplomatic practice in the 1920s was largely a function of the political and economic realities confronting the Bolsheviks at the conclusion of the civil war. Economic recovery required the opening of trade with the capitalist countries. Political isolation impelled the Bolsheviks to seek international recognition for the Soviet state. Military weakness dictated diplomatic manoeuvring to reduce the danger of attack by other powers. Overall, the Bolshevik regime needed to create a breathing space in which it could overcome its internal weaknesses and strengthen the Soviet state's position in world politics. But the new diplomacy also reflected important changes in the Bolshevik outlook on foreign relations.

The most important change was the abandonment of an apocalyptic vision of the long-term prospects for Soviet survival. In March 1919 Lenin had said²⁸:

We are living not merely in a state, but in a *system of states*, and the existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with the imperialist states for a long time is unthinkable. One or the other must triumph in the end. And before that end supervenes, a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states will be inevitable.

These remarks, and others made by Lenin in the same period, reflected the circumstances of the time and were inspired by the need to galvanize Bolshevik supporters in their life and death struggle against counter-revolutionaries and foreign interventionists. By 1920–21, however, Lenin had reassessed the situation²⁹:

Is the existence of a socialist republic in a capitalist environment at all conceivable? It seemed inconceivable from the military and political aspects. That it is possible both politically and militarily has been proved; it is a fact.

Around this time too the concept of 'peaceful co-existence' – a term first used by Chicherin (Trotsky's successor as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs) in June 1920³⁰ – began to emerge in Soviet thinking. Peaceful co-existence referred to the likelihood of an interim period in which socialist and capitalist systems would exist side by side and to the desirability during that period of maintaining businesslike relations between capitalist and socialist governments.

As a slogan peaceful co-existence had obvious propaganda value. As an idea it gave a strategic order to Soviet diplomatic activity in the 1920s. After the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, Lenin had exhorted Soviet diplomats 'to extend the respite period' for as long as possible. Now the perspective was one 'not merely of a breathing space, but of a real chance of a new and lengthy period of development'³¹.

But peaceful co-existence was not inevitable. Whether or not Soviet Russia survived long enough to reap the benefits of trade with the capitalist world or to harvest the fruits of internal development depended on the capacity of Soviet diplomacy to exploit the internal and international contradictions of the imperialist states. Exploiting the divisions and conflicts of others was hardly a new idea in diplomacy. But the specifically marxist analysis of international contradictions in terms of the conflicting material interests of the various forces operating in the global arena was novel.

Exploiting inter-imperialist contradictions was the founding and guiding inspiration of Soviet diplomacy. 'As long as we are alone and the capitalist world is strong', said Lenin in 1920, 'our foreign policy must consist in part of the exploitation of contradictions'³². As we shall see, the history of Soviet foreign policy in the interwar period is to an extent the history of the Bolsheviks' changing perceptions and conceptions of the material conflicts they believed underpinned the dynamics of international politics. But there were also constants in Soviet ideology. Two of the most important were a belief in the inevitability of war and the doctrine of socialism in one country.

The belief in the inevitability of war was rooted, at the theoretical level, in Lenin's analysis of imperialism. In the imperialist era, he argued, there is a constant struggle between the major capitalist powers for control over sources of raw materials, cheap labour, markets and investment outlets. Periodically these inter-imperialist conflicts must explode into major wars over the division of colonies

and spheres of influence. The First World War was, in essence, a war of imperialist redivision between, on the one side, the established imperialist powers of Great Britain and France and, on the other, the German challenge to the existing division of the spoils. New wars of redivision were, in terms of the Leninist analysis of imperialism, absolutely inevitable³³.

The prospect of inter-imperialist wars did not trouble the Bolsheviks greatly. After all, the seeds of their own revolution had been sown by the First World War. But they did fear attempts by the 'imperialist states' to resolve their internal contradictions at the expense of the Soviet Union. The economic dynamics of imperialism included, they believed, a tendency towards war with the USSR – a potential source of materials, markets and manpower and by its very existence a constant threat to capitalist power³⁴. This tendency was, however, counteracted by the political dangers inherent in such a project. There was no guarantee of its success and, so the Bolsheviks believed, any such war could spark off working-class revolts in the capitalist countries. War between the USSR and the capitalist states was not, therefore, inevitable, but the danger was nonetheless acute³⁵. From this perspective flowed two tasks for Soviet diplomacy: firstly, political manoeuvring to forestall the danger of a capitalist attack, particularly the emergence of some kind of anti-Soviet capitalist war coalition; and secondly, to contribute on the economic front, through trade agreements, to the strengthening of Soviet defensive capacity.

The second doctrine, that of socialism in one country, was promulgated by Stalin from 1924 onwards. Its gradual ascendancy within Soviet ideology signified the defeat of those within the Bolshevik establishment like Trotsky who challenged the drift towards traditional diplomacy³⁶.

The doctrine asserted, firstly, that it was possible to build socialism within the framework of a single nation-state – in contradistinction to those who argued that the construction of socialism was only possible on an international scale. Secondly, it maintained that the principal class antagonism powering the world revolutionary process was the contradiction between the USSR and the capitalist states; in the words of Herbert Marcuse the class struggle was 'transubstantiated into an international political struggle' between the USSR and imperialism³⁷.

Socialism in one country provided an ideological rationale for the

primacy of Soviet diplomatic requirements over those of the revolutionary movement. If the primary factor in the global revolutionary process was the role of the USSR, it followed that support for Soviet policies and actions must take precedence over everything else. As well as establishing a hierarchy of revolutionary priorities, the doctrine linked them by projecting the inexorable development of international revolution in the form of a gradual tilting of the balance of class forces in favour of socialism. Many factors would contribute to the weight of the socialist forces – the crisis of capitalism, the success of anti-colonial movements, the outbreak of revolutions in the West and, above all, the power of the USSR. E.H. Carr has summed up the relationship between revolution and security in Soviet diplomacy in these terms³⁸:

Soviet security and Soviet prosperity were the themes of Soviet diplomatic relations with the capitalist world. World revolution entered into the picture insofar as it contributed to the realisation of these aims and was now recognised to be dependent on their realisation. But the agents of Soviet diplomacy and world revolution, of the Narkomindel and the Comintern, met on the common ground of an unbounded confidence in the eventual outcome of their efforts.

Carr's reference to 'unbounded confidence' serves to remind us that a complex of subjective beliefs, perceptions, fears, hopes and interpretations also came into play in the Soviet analysis of foreign relations. The potential impact of these factors on Soviet foreign policy was dramatically illustrated by the war scare of 1927.

Following a break in trade and diplomatic relations with Britain, Soviet ruling circles became convinced that a Polish attack with British support was imminent. This conviction had no objective foundation but, for a few weeks, the Soviet political, diplomatic and military establishment was put on a virtual war footing. The scare was short-lived but foreign responses to this development were, nevertheless, hostile and when the perceived emergency had passed the Soviet Government had difficulty in restoring the previous equilibrium in relations with the outside world³⁹.

As the war scare episode illustrated, the subjective dimension of Soviet ideology was a very real factor in Soviet foreign policy and had identifiable effects on diplomatic relations. In the years immediately before the Second World War this was to prove crucial, not least in

the critical months preceding the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact in August 1939.

Diplomacy in action in the 1920s

Despite the setback of the war scare, by the end of the 1920s the original diplomatic prospectus drawn up by the Soviet state at the beginning of the decade was almost complete. The United States was the only major power still refusing diplomatic recognition to Soviet Russia. During 1924–5 no fewer than 13 countries established diplomatic relations with the USSR. Tolerable, and in some cases friendly, relations existed with most of the countries bordering the USSR. Dozens of economic and commercial agreements with states all over Europe, the Middle East and Asia were in operation. Soviet initiatives on peace and disarmament received widespread recognition as useful contributions to lessening international tensions. Most important of all, in spite of Soviet fears, no anti-Soviet coalition aiming either to attack the USSR or to reimpose a *cordon sanitaire* had emerged or seemed likely to do so in the near future. It was an impressive achievement for a state that had entered the decade isolated internationally and internally ravaged by civil war.

The most spectacular success of Soviet diplomacy in the 1920s, and the pivot of Soviet foreign relations strategy, was the special relationship with Weimar Germany inaugurated by the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo. Under the terms of the treaty diplomatic relations between the two states were renewed (they had broken down in November 1918), all past financial claims were jointly renounced and provisions were made for the development of economic relations⁴⁰. The years after Rapallo saw a spectacular growth in Soviet-German economic, military and political co-operation.

The origins of this strange entente lay in a complex convergence of the interests of the two states: mutual enmity toward the newly-created Polish state; common opposition to the Treaty of Versailles; the need of each to break out of the political isolation imposed by the victorious Western powers; the benefits of trade and military co-operation; and, above all, the potential diplomatic exploitation of German-Soviet co-operation in their respective relations with Britain and France⁴¹.

The Soviet-German entente also connected with the curious

ideological phenomenon of 'national Bolshevism'. 'The programme of national Bolshevism' explains E.H. Carr, 'was, as its name implied, an amalgam of nationalist and Bolshevik aims; from the nationalists it took the call for a union of all Germans to liberate the nation from the yoke of the imperialist powers, from the Bolsheviks it took the concept of revolution shorn, however, of its international framework'⁴². The propagators of national Bolshevism were to be found mainly within the German radical right (including sections of the incipient Nazi movement). But it struck a chord too in the German Communist Party. For its part, the Soviet leadership evinced little interest in an ideological alliance of the kind proposed by the proponents of national Bolshevism, although at times its mood converged with that of the German nationalists; for example, during the period of the Polish-Soviet war when a revival of Russian patriotism coincided with a wave of anti-Polish sentiment in Germany. But the leadership did recognize how useful the existence of such a trend in German politics was to the maturing of the Rapallo relationship⁴³. Moreover, the national Bolshevism phenomenon provided a glimpse of the strange ideological combinations that were possible, given the right circumstances. Had observers in the 1920s paid more attention to it, the later Nazi-Soviet ideological *modus vivendi* might not have come as such a shock.

In the economic sphere Germany was, by 1927-8, Soviet Russia's most important trading partner, accounting for a quarter of all Soviet imports and exports. Only Britain had a comparable volume of trade⁴⁴.

Soviet-German military co-operation is not so easily quantifiable since most of it was conducted with the utmost secrecy. But it is known that from July 1922 onwards a number of secret agreements were concluded, resulting in, among other things, a Junkers contract to build an aircraft factory in the USSR, training facilities for Reichswehr personnel on Soviet soil, and joint experiments in the production and use of battlefield poison gas⁴⁵.

The Germans' main objective was to evade the restrictive military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. For the USSR, it was to gain valuable training facilities, the benefit of German technical expertise and a share in the military equipment manufactured on its soil. Co-operation between the Red Army and the Reichswehr was to continue until shortly after Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor in January 1933.

Valuable though economic and military co-operation was, the critical dimension of the Soviet entente with Germany was in the political-diplomatic sphere. For Soviet diplomacy the great triumph of Rapallo was that it ended the USSR's international isolation, thereby alleviating fears of an anti-Bolshevik capitalist coalition. An added bonus was that it also broke the united front of the European powers on the question of the Tsarist war debts and compensation for foreign assets nationalized after the revolution.

Rapallo was viewed by the Soviets as a textbook example of the successful exploitation of imperialist contradictions. Full advantage had been taken of the differences between Germany and the Anglo-French bloc over the punitive nature of the Versailles Treaty. In addition, Soviet diplomacy had successfully used pressures within Germany for rapprochement with the USSR to cement the alliance: pressures from industrialists anxious to penetrate Soviet markets; from military circles wishing to circumvent the restrictions imposed by Versailles; from right-wing political forces favouring an 'eastern orientation' in foreign policy which would enable Germany to manoeuvre freely in the west; and, of course, from the German Communist Party and its supporters⁴⁶.

Through its special relationship with Germany, Soviet Russia averted the construction of a Europe totally dominated by France and Britain and succeeded in restoring a certain balance to European affairs following the Allies' triumph in the Great War. It followed that any German move toward Britain and France threatened to disturb that balance. The Soviet Government viewed with some concern, therefore, the opening of negotiations in 1924 between Germany, Britain and France about Germany's entry into the League of Nations and the conclusion of a security pact freezing its western borders (what became known as the Locarno Pact). To counter this development, Chicherin proposed to Berlin, in December 1924, a political agreement between the USSR and Germany that neither state would enter into 'political or economic blocs, treaties, agreements or combinations with third parties against the Contracting Parties'⁴⁷. Soviet fears of an anti-Soviet combination of Western states were transparent in this proposal – fears which were reinforced by Germany's reorientation to the West coinciding with one of the periodic deteriorations of Soviet relations with Britain and France⁴⁸.

Germany did sign the Locarno Treaty (in December 1925) and thereafter joined the League of Nations. But this shift in policy was to some extent counter-balanced by the Berlin Treaty of Neutrality between the USSR and Germany signed only months later in April 1926⁴⁹. This treaty represented the final and, from Moscow's point of view, less than successful outcome of the negotiations for a Soviet-German political agreement initiated by Chicherin's December 1924 proposal.

The special relationship between the Soviet Union and Germany survived the latter's Western reorientation, but it was never quite the same again. The relations of dependency were broken. Although both sides desired continued co-operation, neither placed as much reliance on the other as a political ally in the sphere of foreign policy as they had done in the heyday of Rapallo in 1922-4⁵⁰.

Unlike Germany, Soviet Russia's options for realignment in the international arena were distinctly limited. Relations with Britain during the 1920s were turbulent. On the credit side was the fact that Britain and the USSR were major trading partners. Indeed, the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of March 1921 was the USSR's first major breakthrough in reopening trade with the capitalist West⁵¹. Political relations between the two states were, however, marred by a series of incidents which periodically threatened to rupture diplomatic relations completely.

In May 1923, for example, the British Government presented the USSR with a memorandum, subsequently known as the 'Curzon ultimatum', demanding, among other things, an end to anti-British propaganda in Iran and Afghanistan allegedly being spread by Comintern agents in those countries⁵². The accompanying threat to break off diplomatic relations never materialized, but the damage to Anglo-Soviet relations was real enough.

The next major incident was the publication in October 1924 of the so-called 'Zinoviev Letter' which purportedly contained instructions from the President of the Communist International for insurrectionary action by the British Communist Party. Despite its doubtful authenticity, publication of the letter helped secure the election of a Conservative Government which subsequently refused to ratify a trade treaty with Soviet Russia negotiated by its Labour predecessor⁵³.

An actual break in Anglo-Soviet relations occurred in May 1927, a

few days after a raid by British police on the London premises of the Soviet Trade Delegation. On the basis of documents seized in that raid the Delegation was accused of anti-British espionage and propaganda. Relations with the USSR were severed and the 1921 trade agreement annulled. It was only after the election of the 1929 Labour Government that Britain restored diplomatic relations with the USSR⁵⁴.

The tension and conflict in Anglo-Soviet relations throughout the 1920s precluded any possibility of rapprochement between the two states. Soviet policy discussions were, if anything, focused in the opposite direction – on the anti-Soviet proclivities of the British establishment and on Britain's potential role as the leader of an anti-Soviet international coalition and even of a war coalition against the USSR. At the height of the war scare crisis of 1927 Stalin opined that⁵⁵:

The entire international situation today, all the facts regarding the 'operations' of the British Government against the USSR. . .unmistakeably goes to show that the British Conservative Government has firmly and determinedly adopted the course of organising war against the USSR. . .the Conservatives may yet succeed in getting together some military bloc or other against the USSR.

What, then, of relations with France? The major political obstacles to Franco-Soviet co-operation (leaving aside the widespread hostility to Bolshevism in French political circles) were Soviet opposition to the Versailles Treaty and, of course, the Rapallo relationship with Germany⁵⁶. Problems in Franco-Soviet relations were further exacerbated by competition between the USSR and Poland for the leadership of the smaller states of Eastern Europe⁵⁷. Poland was France's main ally in Eastern Europe and one of the linchpins of the French system of alliances designed to contain Germany. Soviet-Polish relations were, of course, overshadowed by the 1920–21 war and by territorial disputes arising out of the frontier settlement agreed in the Treaty of Riga.

The most stable of the USSR's foreign relationships in the 1920s, apart from that with Weimar Germany, was with fascist Italy. Italy extended *de jure* diplomatic recognition to Soviet Russia in February 1924 and a trade treaty based on the most-favoured nation principle was concluded simultaneously⁵⁸. Until the Abyssinian war in 1935–6,

Soviet leaders frequently pointed to Italian-Soviet relations as a model for the peaceful co-existence of states with different social systems.

Italy, however, remained a secondary concern of Soviet foreign policy. Nowhere, yet, did Soviet and Italian interests directly confront each other and Italy's role in European diplomacy was a minor one. The key powers in Europe (apart from a defeated Germany) – France, Britain and Poland – were uniformly hostile to the USSR. And of the three major non-European powers, the United States was continuing a political boycott of the Soviet Union; China was in the midst of civil war; and Japan was about to engage in a series of running disputes with the USSR over the Chinese Eastern Railway, fishing rights and territorial concessions⁵⁹.

Although it had only limited room for manoeuvre in foreign relations, Soviet diplomacy embarked on the 1930s in a relatively confident mood – a confidence expressed by Stalin's famous aphorism on Soviet foreign policy at the 16th Party Congress in June 1930⁶⁰:

We do not want a single foot of foreign territory; but of our territory we shall not surrender a single inch to anyone.

Stalin and the rest of the Soviet leadership had every reason for such confidence. The illusory threat of war which had darkened their horizon in 1927–8 had receded. Rapallo was still, more or less, intact. Britain had resumed diplomatic relations in 1929. Trade with the United States was growing and political contacts developing. The Wall Street crash in 1929, although it disturbed the stability of international economic relations, strengthened the economic position of the USSR with its expanding and secure markets. Internally there were deep economic problems – collectivization of agriculture was in full swing – but the first five-year plan promised quickly to make good the military and industrial lag between Soviet Russia and the advanced capitalist countries.

At the beginning of the 1930s, therefore, the stage seemed set for a continuation of Soviet foreign policy along existing lines: the pursuit of national security through a combination of diplomatic manoeuvring and the strengthening of the USSR's independent industrial and military power. What actually followed was a period of complex and critical adjustments in Soviet foreign relations which in

turn paved the way for a fundamental shift in policy in response to the dual challenge from German fascism in the west and Japanese militarism in the east.

Dealignment, 1930–32

The opening years of the 1930s were marked by economic crisis and political instability, particularly in Europe and more especially in Germany. Viewed from Moscow, the most worrying feature of this disquieting turn of events was the rise of political forces in Germany hostile to the USSR and opposed to the continuation of the Rapallo relationship.

In the 1928 elections to the Reichstag, Hitler's National Socialist Party won 810,000 votes. In the September 1930 elections the party's vote increased by nearly 6 million. By July 1932 electoral support for the Nazis was more than double the 1930 figure and the party was by now the largest in the country with 13,745,000 votes (37.3 per cent) and 230 seats (out of 608) in the Reichstag. Hitler himself, although unsuccessful, polled 13.5 million votes in the April 1932 Presidential elections⁶¹.

That same month Soviet apprehension about the potential threat posed by Hitler and the Nazis found expression in a letter from Khinchuk, Soviet Ambassador in Berlin, to Krestinsky, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Commenting on the recent election results, Khinchuk noted⁶²:

The returns reveal the tendency towards a marked strengthening of the fascist camp. . . Since 1928, we have seen a stunning growth of the 'Nazi' following and it is hard to expect any change at present. It is still hard to say whether a coalition will be concluded between the Centre and the 'Nazis' on the basis of a coalition government. . . But the 'Nazis' have shown a marked and growing tendency to edge closer to power, and they may well succeed sooner or later. That is why we cannot ignore the changes that may well follow in the political sphere. The data which came to us by way of journalistic opinion or our own soundings may prove to be wrong. After all we have no direct contacts with the 'Nazis'. Meanwhile, Hitler's interview with foreign journalists cannot be ignored. In that interview and in countless speeches, Hitler has definitely declared that his task is to fight the USSR. Germany is not Italy and Hitler is not

Mussolini. I note this without any intention of spreading panic, merely for the purpose of setting the task of making a deeper study and probing of the actual movement over here, so as to be able to make a correct appreciation of all the factors operating in Germany.

For the present, however, Hitler was not in power and the Soviet Government reserved final judgement on Nazi policy toward the USSR. As Litvinov later commented in relation to the Nazis⁶³:

We understand very well the difference between doctrine and policy. It does happen that an opposition, on coming to power, tries to forget the slogans which it used in the fight against its political opponents.

Of more immediate concern was Brüning's replacement as Chancellor by von Papen at the end of May 1932. Von Papen, widely regarded as anti-Soviet and pro-Western, was viewed with some suspicion in Moscow, a view confirmed by reports that shortly after he took office he offered France a military alliance directed against the Soviet Union. 'Von Papen has proposed a military alliance not ten, but twenty times', Herriot, the French Prime Minister, informed the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in Paris in October 1932⁶⁴.

It is not clear how seriously the Soviet leadership regarded von Papen's approach to the French. But at the very least it must have been interpreted as yet another sign of the instability of Soviet-German relations generated by the political turmoil in Germany.

On the other hand, Germany was not the only centre of instability in international relations. The whole of the capitalist world, Moscow perceived, had entered a period of political and economic disarray following the Wall Street crash and the onset of the Great Depression. Within that context it is not surprising that Soviet Russia clung to Rapallo and, in some respects, actually moved closer to Germany in this period. Soviet-German military co-operation, for example, reached a peak in the early 1930s⁶⁵. Similarly, in the economic sphere the German share of Soviet imports grew from 23.7 per cent in 1930 to 46.5 per cent in 1932⁶⁶. An important political development was the signature in June 1931 of a protocol prolonging the 1926 Berlin Treaty for another five years, while Soviet pronouncements on relations with Germany continued to stress the value of both the spirit and the substance of Rapallo⁶⁷.

The most important political developments in Soviet foreign

relations between 1930 and 1932 concerned France, however, not Germany. Following the announcement of an Austro-German customs union in April 1931, the French, as a partial counter to this alarming development, proposed a Franco-Soviet non-aggression treaty to Moscow. The French initiative appeared to be bound up with the intricacies of domestic politics, notably the forthcoming Presidential elections. Consequently, the Narkomindel at first viewed the proposal with some scepticism. The proposal also came in the wake of a tense period in Franco-Soviet relations, largely the result of a French campaign against Russian 'dumping' of cheap goods on international markets. Nevertheless, by August 1931 a non-aggression treaty had been initialled by both sides. More than a year was to pass, however, before the treaty was actually signed and even longer before it was ratified by the French National Assembly⁶⁸.

The main obstacle on the French side to signature of the treaty was their insistence that Soviet Russia should also conclude non-aggression treaties with Poland and Rumania. A Soviet-Polish non-aggression treaty was eventually signed in July 1932, but parallel negotiations with Rumania broke down in the face of, among other things, the running dispute over the former Tsarist province of Bessarabia, seized by Rumanian troops in 1918⁶⁹.

In assessing the significance of these two non-aggression treaties it is important to remember that in the 1920s and 1930s the USSR concluded similar treaties with numerous other states: Turkey (1925); Afghanistan (1926); Lithuania (1926); Persia (1927); Finland (1932); Latvia (1932); Estonia (1932); Italy (1932); China (1937); and Germany (1939)⁷⁰. The non-aggression pact was a peculiarly Soviet tactic aimed at strengthening national security through formal legal commitments to non-aggression and neutrality. In this respect the treaties with France and Poland were no exception. (Nor for that matter was the most famous of all Soviet non-aggression pacts – that with Germany in 1939.)

In a book published in 1934, Eugene Varga, Director of the Institute of World Economy and Politics in Moscow and a confidant and adviser of Stalin, revealed some of the reasoning behind the non-aggression tactic⁷¹:

They form an important obstacle to the ideological preparation for war against the Soviet Union. When the bourgeoisie of the neighbouring

countries concludes non-aggression pacts with the Soviet Union, and solemnly declares that it will work together with the Soviet Union for the preservation of peace, it cannot begin a war against the Soviet Union *immediately*. It needs a certain amount of time to prepare public opinion for the change in policy. . . And even if this reorientation would not require a long time . . . the pacts do guarantee some gain in time in any case. At the same time they strengthen the movements and forces in every country which are working for the preservation of peace.

Equally, the conclusion of a non-aggression pact served as a barometer of interstate relations and of the general orientation of Soviet foreign policy. Thus, the pact with France in November 1932 signified both partial detente in Franco-Soviet relations and the adoption of a more even-handed stance in the USSR's European policy. Henceforth, the Soviet commitment to the maintenance of the Rapallo relationship with Germany would be counter-balanced by friendlier relations with the Versailles powers, especially France. In effect, by the end of 1932 the USSR had carried through a dealignment of its position in European politics.

Collective security

By the end of 1933, however, a *radical realignment* of the USSR's European policy was well 'under way'. Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January 1933 and the subsequent nazification of Germany dealt the Rapallo relationship a shattering blow. Fear of war with Nazi Germany increasingly dominated the Soviet outlook on foreign relations, fears which were compounded by the growing Japanese military threat in the Far East and, later, by Mussolini's imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean. Moscow's response to this triple challenge was gradually to shift the axis of Soviet foreign strategy toward alliances with Britain and France. The conclusion of the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance in May 1935 marked the completion of this development in Soviet policy.

The Soviet policy shift of 1933–5 was also accompanied by a more far-reaching international reorientation. Moscow embraced the idea of collective action within the framework of the League of Nations (the USSR joined in 1934) to contain the 'aggressor states' of Germany, Italy and Japan. In the League of Nations the USSR

became the most vigorous advocate of collective security to prevent war⁷² – hence the appellation of Soviet foreign policy in this period. Litvinov proclaimed the ‘indivisibility of peace’, arguing that the threat of war posed by the aggressor states endangered the security of all countries, not just those in the front line of their expansionist designs. The USSR became identified with the project of creating an ‘international peace front’⁷³:

a firm and stable combination of great and small powers striving for the maintenance of peace within the framework of the League of Nations and their friendly co-operation to avert war up to the point of applying the most extreme measures in the case of necessity.

If in the 1920s Moscow had been seen as the capital of world revolution, during the 1930s it was looked upon as the citadel of resistance to fascism and militarism. When Mussolini invaded Abyssinia in 1935 the USSR was the strongest proponent of League of Nations sanctions against Italy. When the civil war in Spain erupted in 1936 it was the Soviet Union that supplied arms to the Republican forces. When Japan invaded North China in 1937 it was from Moscow that Chiang Kai-shek received vital military aid. When Czechoslovakia was threatened by Germany in 1938 it was Soviet Russia which lent the greatest moral and political support to the embattled Czechs.

The collective security era from 1933 to 1938 formed a distinct and coherent period in Soviet foreign relations. Its coherence and distinctiveness flowed, in part, from a novel outlook on international relations. As in 1920–21, a change in Soviet ideology moulded a series of ad hoc tactics and policies into a relatively coherent foreign policy strategy.

At the heart of the Soviet collective security *Weltanschauung* was the perception that the ‘imperialist world’ had divided into two camps: an ‘aggressive’ camp led by Germany, Japan and Italy and a ‘democratic’ camp consisting of Britain, France and the United States. In the Soviet view the aggressor states were making a bid for imperialist hegemony; in fact, they were ‘already, through secondary conflicts (e.g. Japan in China), waging a second imperialist war of redivision’⁷⁴.

Unfortunately, the USSR could not afford the luxury of remaining aloof from such imperialist squabbles since the aggressors also

threatened Soviet interests: directly, in the form of a possible attack on the USSR and, indirectly, by provoking a world war into which the USSR might be drawn. Thus, the rise of the aggressive powers resulted in a convergence between the imperialist interests of Britain, France and the United States and the security interests of the Soviet Union. It was this convergence of interests which constituted the objective basis for a peace front against the aggressor states.

There was, however, a snag: the objective conditions for an alliance between the USSR and the democratic states were not matched by subjective policies. Within the Western countries powerful forces sought to head off the challenge of the aggressor states by redirecting their expansionism toward the USSR. Hence the appeasement policies adopted by Britain and France, dubbed by Stalin the 'policy of non-intervention', which aimed at channelling German-Japanese expansionism in the Soviet direction⁷⁵.

Soviet foreign policy, therefore, incorporated two themes in the collective security period: the possibility and desirability of military and political alliances with the Western states and the anti-Soviet dynamic underlying many Western policies.

A second dualism in Soviet policy and ideology concerned the question of the inevitability of war. Was collective security a means of *preventing* the outbreak of general war or was it just an instrument for *postponing* the inevitable? Was Soviet policy a strategy for maintaining peace or a strategy for preparing for war?

The most explicit discussions of this issue took place within the Comintern⁷⁶. At the 7th World Congress of the Comintern in 1935 Togliatti, the Italian communist leader, 'boldly put forward the following perspective: that it is not only possible to postpone war but that it is possible also to prevent the outburst of a new imperialist war'. For Togliatti politics not economics determined the course of events. Whether or not war broke out would be determined by national and international political struggles⁷⁷. Togliatti's preventionist outlook may be contrasted with the postponist views of the British communist theorist, R.P. Dutt⁷⁸:

It is undoubtedly true that imperialism today is racing headlong to war. But the assumption of inevitability only helps its approach. It is also true that war is ultimately inevitable under capitalism. . . . But war is never inevitable at any particular moment. . . . The positive value of collective

security is not as a solution of the problems of imperialism, which from its nature it cannot attempt, but as a temporary method within the conditions of imperialism to delay the outbreak of war.

At the level of theory the dispute was never resolved. In practice, Soviet policy was based on the belief that although war was inevitable it could by diplomatic and political efforts be delayed for a considerable time. Not only that, but during the course of the struggle for peace it should be possible to cement a bloc of national and international forces able to meet the eventual military challenge from the aggressor states.

Conflict and consensus in Soviet foreign policy

The preceding analysis of Soviet policy during the collective security period assumes that Moscow's foreign strategy was organized around a set of policies and perspectives forged into a strategy by ideology; and further, that this strategy commanded a substantial consensus within the Soviet leadership. In the detailed narrative that follows we shall test this thesis against, firstly, the actual course of Soviet foreign policy; secondly, the elaboration of that policy in the private diplomatic correspondence and public political statements of Soviet decision-makers; and, thirdly, what is known about the attitudes, analyses and perceptions of those who played the major role in shaping Moscow's foreign strategy.

The contention that there was a consensus around the collective security strategy does not deny ambivalences and tensions within the Soviet leadership, disagreements over tactics and particular policies, differences of style and emphasis, or personality clashes and conflicts. A number of these contradictions are dealt with in the text. It does deny, however, any fundamental cleavages within the Soviet leadership over foreign policy strategy.

This view is not accepted by all historians. A number of scholars have questioned the extent and depth of the commitment of the Soviet party and state apparatus to the collective security strategy. The struggle for collective security abroad was, they argue, paralleled by a struggle at home against powerful elements within the Soviet leadership who sought to ditch or, at the very least, substantially modify the strategy⁷⁹. According to this view the

history of Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s is, in part, the history of the ascendancy of the opponents of collective security within the Soviet leadership. The culmination of this process was the conclusion of the pact with Nazi Germany, signifying the final victory of this anti-collective security trend.

It is beyond the scope of this study to present a comprehensive critique of the evidence and arguments used by this school of thought, not least because these historians do not agree among themselves as to who the opponents of collective security were, what alternatives they offered, or how and when those opponents made their influence felt! But some of the detailed issues are dealt with later and here it is appropriate to make some general comments.

The question of evidence comes first. There is, as yet, no direct evidence of serious differences in the Soviet leadership over foreign policy. All the first-hand evidence that is available points to consensus rather than conflict; such disagreements as are revealed concern secondary matters. Consequently, all the evidence in support of the 'conflict thesis' is either second-hand (the memoirs of Soviet dissidents and the impressions of Western diplomats) or based on *post hoc* interpretations of public statements by Soviet leaders. One example of the latter is the oft-cited contrast between the tone and emphasis of the speeches of Litvinov – the architect of collective security – and those of Molotov, the supposed advocate of a more conciliatory line toward Nazi Germany. But, as one advocate of the conflict thesis himself admits, 95 per cent of Molotov's and Litvinov's speeches clearly reflect a consensus on foreign policy issues⁸⁰. Moreover, Molotov delivered some of the most anti-Nazi speeches of the 1930s. It was he, after all, who warned delegates to the 1935 Congress of Soviets not to forget 'that there is now a ruling party in Europe which has frankly proclaimed its historical mission to be the seizure of territories in the Soviet Union'⁸¹.

Another source of speculation concerning internal differences over foreign policy is the *Letter of an Old Bolshevik* published in 1936–7, allegedly written by Bukharin. It later transpired, however, that the letter was written by a Russian émigré, Boris Nicolaevsky, following a number of interviews with Bukharin in Paris. While the letter may contain many statements made by Bukharin, it also contains many statements attributed to him but actually derived from discussions in émigré circles. Roy Medvedev sums up the content of the letter in

the following terms: 'The "Letter of an Old Bolshevik" has the air of a careful compilation of many different rumours and reports which leaked out through various channels to the West'⁸². J. Arch Getty is less kind: 'Clearly, the "Letter" is a spurious source. . . It represents only Nicolaevsky's collection of contradictory and unattributed rumors floating around Europe in the 1930s'⁸³.

The second question concerns the source of the evident ebbs and flows of Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s. As we shall see, Soviet policy in the collective security period evolved and changed, Moscow's faith in it was greater at some times than at others, it had its successes and failures and its application was not wholly consistent. Supporters of the conflict thesis identify the sources of these cross-currents primarily in personality and policy differences within the Soviet leadership. What they underestimate, however, is the impact on Soviet policy of world events, the outcomes of diplomatic negotiations and real changes in interstate relations. What they also underplay is the fact that for the Soviet leadership, including Litvinov, collective security was always a *contingent* strategy. They believed that the ultimate guarantee of Soviet security was the USSR's independent strength and resources. They wanted alliances with Britain and France, but were deeply suspicious of Anglo-French motives and aspirations. They feared and abhorred Nazism but recognized the expediency of peaceful co-existence with Germany. They were committed to collective security but accepted the need to maintain other options as well. Given a strategy which contains such attitudinal dualisms, it is easy to ferret out different approaches to foreign policy in the Soviet leadership. But that is to elevate intermittent differences of emphasis to the level of policy schism.

The third and final question concerns Litvinov's role in the formulation of Soviet foreign policy. In the West and in the Soviet Union M.M. Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs from 1930 to 1939, is regarded, rightly, as the personification of collective security. In the field of foreign policy he was a power and influence in his own right and he was consequently able to play an independent and at times crucial part in the making of Moscow's foreign policy. In many accounts by conflict theorists, however, Litvinov is cast in a more dramatic role: that of an heroic figure besieged by isolationists and xenophobes opposed to his internationalist foreign policy. The truth would appear to be more prosaic. Litvinov no doubt had to do

his share of bureaucratic in-fighting, but his status and power were likely to depend not so much on success in those battles as on the consensus within the Soviet leadership around the collective security strategy.

From published Soviet documents we now know what it was reasonable to suppose all along: the Soviet politburo kept a tight rein on the general direction of foreign policy. All the major decisions – adoption of the collective security strategy, sanctions against Italy, aid to Czechoslovakia, tactics in negotiations with Britain and France, and so on – were taken not by Litvinov alone but by the Soviet leadership jointly. Litvinov made regular and frequent reports to the central committee and politburo and often sought instructions and advice, even on matters of secondary importance. His position was not unlike that of any other Foreign Secretary. Where he perhaps differed from counterparts in the West was in his exclusion from the political leadership's inner core. This was the greatest weakness of his position and it was to prove his undoing. When he had outlived his usefulness he was dismissed by the Stalinist inner circle (in May 1939) and replaced by one of their own – Molotov. More evidence for the internal conflict thesis? Only if it can be shown that Molotov's succession led to a change in the policy hitherto articulated by Litvinov. As we shall see, this was not the case. The consensus in Moscow around collective security (transmuted by this time into a policy of collective defence) was maintained until the eve of the Nazi-Soviet pact – at which time it disintegrated under the impact of external events.

To reject as ill-founded the conflict view of the collective security period is not to reject the notion of linkage between Soviet foreign policy and domestic politics. The conflict approach does have the considerable merit of highlighting the fact that Soviet foreign policy was neither made nor implemented in a domestic vacuum. Behind the Soviet state's monolithic facade in the international arena was a divided, crisis-ridden society: an agrarian-based economic and social order engaged in breakneck industrialization; a political system wracked by successive crises; a governing elite whose perceptions of the outside world were dominated by fear and suspicion (the root of the oft-mentioned siege mentality of Soviet society in the 1930s); and a society in which popular moods oscillated between revolutionary internationalism and xenophobic isolationism.

These domestic convulsions spilled over to impact on foreign

policy. The time required to complete industrialization and to build up Soviet defences lent an urgency to the diplomatic struggle for peace and the search for allies against potential aggressors. Popular hysteria about external threats reinforced the paranoiac slant of Soviet analyses and perceptions of international politics. The instabilities of the Soviet political system undermined the Narkomindel's efforts to commit the West to an alliance with the USSR.

These impingements of domestic politics pale, however, in comparison with the impact of one particular process: the Great Purge of the Narkomindel. During the 1930s practically the entire Soviet diplomatic corps was wiped out in successive purges. Notable victims included one-time deputy commissars Karakhan, Krestinsky, Sokolnikov and Stomonyakov; departmental or functional heads Barkov, Gnedin, Shtern, Tsukkerman, Sabinin, Neiman and Fekhner; and Ambassadors Alexandrovsky (Czechoslovakia), Khinchuk (Germany), Rosenberg (Spain), Urenev (Japan and Germany), Bogomolov (China), Davytan (Poland), Asmur (Finland), Ostrovsky (Hungary), Iakubovich (Norway) and Karskii (Turkey). Lower levels of the diplomatic apparatus were similarly devastated, as were the staff in Narkomindel headquarters in Moscow⁸⁴. Only Litvinov (until May 1939) and a few of his key lieutenants survived (notably Suritz in France and Maisky in Britain).

Narkomindel personnel were not the only victims of the Great Purge. Members of every party, state and military organization fell victim too. The purge of the Red Army was of particular significance for foreign policy. According to Soviet statistics the following were either executed, imprisoned or simply disappeared in the 1930s: three out of five Marshals (including Tukhachevsky, the commander-in-chief, shot in 1937), three out of five Army Commanders (First Class), all ten Army Commanders (Second Class), 50 out of 57 Corps Commanders, 154 out of 186 Divisional Commanders, all 16 Army Commissars, 25 out of 28 Corps Commissars, 58 out of 64 Divisional Commissars, 401 out of 456 Colonels⁸⁵. The practical effect of these chilling figures on Soviet defence capacity was devastating. German advances in 1941 were greatly facilitated by the Red Army's lack of a skilled, experienced and professional officer corps.

Many explanations of the Great Purge have been advanced, none of which are very satisfactory. In relation to the Narkomindel, for example, it has been variously argued that the purge was used to

root out ideological unorthodoxy, to destroy political opposition to Stalin, and to get rid of those opposed to a deal with Hitler. The problem is that none of these interpretations wholly fit the known facts. Devotees of party ideology perished, whereas some sceptics survived. Supporters of Stalin were as likely to be purged as those suspected of opposition. The purges destroyed the supposed pro-Rapallo wing of the Narkomindel as well as Germophobes and Anglophiles. The terror that stalked the Narkomindel defies analysis as a function of rational political calculations⁸⁶.

The American scholar J. Arch Getty has suggested a more fruitful line of enquiry. He diagnoses the Great Purge as a chaotic, populist terror fuelled by a series of structural and functional struggles between 'moderates' and 'radicals' within the party and state system. Although the two trends co-existed within a single Stalinist political bloc, they were divided over the tempo and instruments of rapid industrialization. Radicals demanded faster growth and higher economic targets. Much like Mao Tse-tung's Red Guards of the 1960s, they saw the solution to problems of economic development in terms of a political voluntarism. They located the main source of the failure to achieve their aims as the intermediate layers of a conservative state and party bureaucracy. Their natural targets were the moderates in the state and party apparatus who urged a more realistic approach to growth and who stressed the objective constraints on political action. The main instrument of the radicals against the moderates and others who appeared to impede their aims was the unleashing of a violent, anti-bureaucratic grassroots revolution⁸⁷.

The Narkomindel, despite its distance from the main sites of battle – economic institutions and the party – was, arguably, swept up in this anti-bureaucratic, populist revolution. It was a haven for moderates and the very nature of its activities demanded a realistic and sober approach to politics. Because of the large number of former opponents to Stalin in its ranks it was an easy target for the radicals and its foreign connections facilitated false accusations that it harboured 'spies' and 'wreckers' in the pay of Western espionage agencies.

The foregoing analysis is not meant to provide excuses for the terror nor to deny the role of factors involving high state and party politics. The great Show Trials of the 1930s were undoubtedly connected to power politics, as was the final purge of the

Narkomindel in 1939. But it does go some way to explaining the extent and indiscriminate nature of the Great Terror inflicted on the Narkomindel.

The Arch Getty approach also illuminates an important kernel of truth in the conflict thesis. There was a major difference over foreign policy within the Soviet leadership. But it was not a simple divide between supporters and opponents of collective security. It was a tension between those like Molotov – one of the leaders of the radicals on the domestic front – who tended toward a voluntaristic view of foreign policy and those like Litvinov who adopted a more realistic approach. Hence the theme of self-reliance – that the USSR was dependent on no one – occupied a much larger place in Molotov's speeches than in Litvinov's. 'We shall answer any provocative attack on the Soviet Union by the instigators of war', said Molotov in 1938, 'with two blows for their one, three for their one. Anyone who wants to be convinced of the strength and power of our forces is welcome to try'⁸⁸. It was a theme that loomed large when collective security suffered setbacks and when the USSR found itself isolated in international affairs. It was this belief in Soviet self-reliance that gave Stalin the confidence to undertake the great gamble of eschewing collective security and signing the pact with Nazi Germany.

CHAPTER

4 *The Rise and Fall of Collective Security, 1933–8*

‘We have expressly announced our readiness to take part in collective action to rebuff the aggressor jointly with other great states, and small states too. But there is no collective for the rebuff yet.’

M.M. Litvinov, 1937

1933: Towards collective security

Adolf Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933 hailed a new era in European diplomacy. One of the most important benchmarks of this new era was the Soviet Union’s quest for collective security. But the Soviet Government did not take the first major step towards collective security until December of that year when the central committee of the Soviet Communist Party endorsed a resolution favouring collective security in Europe¹. The Narkomindel then drafted a series of proposals on collective security, submitted to the politburo on 19 December and approved the next day². The two most important points of these proposals were an agreement that the USSR should join the League of Nations and a commitment to participate in a regional mutual security pact – a sort of East European equivalent of the western Locarno Pact of 1925³. (The text of the proposals is reproduced in Appendix 1.) Although these decisions were not made public at the time, other evidence revealed the beginning of a radical shift in Soviet foreign policy. Stalin was questioned about Soviet policy on the League of Nations in an interview with American journalist Walter Duranty on 25 December⁴:

Duranty: Is your attitude toward the League of Nations always exclusively negative?

Stalin: No, not always and not under all circumstances . . . In spite of Germany’s and Japan’s withdrawal from the League of Nations – or just possibly because of it – the League may

become a certain factor in retarding the outbreak of hostilities or in preventing them altogether. If that is so, if the League can prove to be something of an obstacle that would make war somewhat more difficult and peace to some extent easier, then we shall not be against the League. Yes, if such is the course of historical events, the possibility is not excluded that we shall support the League of Nations despite its colossal shortcomings.

Stalin's reassessment of the League's potential role was echoed by Molotov in his speech to the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Soviet three days later⁵.

More dramatic evidence of a shift in Soviet policy came the next day in a bombshell speech by Litvinov to the CEC⁶. 'If it is possible to speak of diplomatic eras, then we are now without doubt standing at the junction of two eras.' An era of 'bourgeois' pacifism had come to an end and a new era of wars of imperialist redivision was just beginning, he argued. The present situation was characterized by a struggle between three groups of capitalist states: one group actively preparing to abandon diplomacy in favour of military operations, another not yet ready for war but already following a policy of 'non-intervention', and a third who for the time being wanted to maintain peace. Litvinov did not specify in which category he would place particular states, but the consequences of this new analysis for Soviet policy were specific enough:

We think that even hostilities which do not begin directly on the frontiers of our Union may threaten our security. . .

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 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.

Litvinov also dealt with Soviet-German relations at some length. He pointed out that Hitler's foreign policy was 'by fire and sword to cut a road for expansion to the East . . . and enslave the Soviet peoples.' He made it clear that it was not the nazification of Germany which concerned him but Hitler's foreign objectives. However, he held out the hope that German-Soviet relations could improve:

The entire world knows that we can and do maintain good relations with capitalist states whatever their regime. . . our relations with Germany are determined not by its internal but by its external policy . . . We want to have the best relations with Germany, as with other countries. Nothing but good can come from such relations . . .

Litvinov's remarks about Germany pointed to one of the main reasons for the Soviet turn to collective security: the breakdown of the Rapallo relationship. This deterioration of the Soviet-German relationship was not sudden; it was a gradual and relatively prolonged affair. Only towards the end of this process did the USSR begin to move decisively towards collective security.

The end of Rapallo

The National Socialists' entry into German government at the end of January 1933 provoked anxiety in Narkomindel circles about future German-Soviet relations⁷. Yet, initially, Moscow was optimistic, at least in the short term, about the continuation of the Rapallo relationship. As Krestinsky stated in a letter to Khinchuk on 23 February⁸:

We want the present government to keep to a friendly position in relations with us. We are counting on this – that the Hitler government is dictated by the necessity of not breaking with us and, at least, maintaining previous relations. . . In order that Hitler and his entourage appreciate the necessity of an appropriate public declaration on relations with us it is necessary that they see the restraint on our part in waiting for such a declaration.

Krestinsky reaffirmed the need for a public commitment to good relations in a conversation with Dirksen, the German Ambassador, on 27 February. Dirksen asked about the line of Soviet foreign policy following the recent non-aggression pacts with France and Poland and Soviet support for French proposals at the Geneva Disarmament Conference. Krestinsky assured the Ambassador that Soviet policy towards Germany had not changed. He also spoke of the rumours concerning von Papen's offer to France of a military alliance, made the previous autumn⁹. This was a point which Soviet representatives

were to raise many times with the Germans in the coming year. Their persistent concern in this respect betrayed fears that, with an anti-Soviet government installed in Berlin, a Franco-German coalition directed against the USSR was a distinct possibility¹⁰. Litvinov told Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, on 1 March¹¹:

Naturally, we have no intention of altering our relations with Germany but we certainly cannot look kindly upon the prospect of an anti-Soviet bloc involving Germany. Until now it appeared possible to forestall such a bloc by exerting pressure on Berlin but, if this, however, turns out to be insufficient, we will of course not hesitate to exert pressure on Paris.

The threat was repeated by Litvinov in a meeting with Dirksen ten days later. Dirksen reported to Berlin that the Soviet Union¹²:

. . . considered a German-French alliance contrary to its interests and would seek to prevent it. But while the Soviet Government had in the past sought to prevent a German-French alliance by bringing influence to bear on the German side, it would now endeavour to attain the same objective through closer relations with France.

On the other hand, Litvinov had declared:

emphatically that the Soviet Government would never enter into any alliance with France and in any way confirm the Treaty of Versailles; it would merely seek to develop its relations with France.

These private exchanges between Moscow and Berlin were largely shadow boxing, for there were no outward signs of Franco-German rapprochement nor of any Franco-Soviet detente. Indeed, public developments over the next few weeks appeared to indicate a limited rebuilding of the Rapallo relationship. In a speech on 23 March Hitler made the requested declaration of good intent towards the USSR¹³, and on 5 May Germany finally ratified the 1931 protocol prolonging the Berlin Treaty of 1926 for five years¹⁴. *Izvestiya* welcomed the ratification enthusiastically, but warned that 'the treaty will have that significance which is given to it by the concrete actions of both parties'¹⁵.

Izvestiya's attitude summed up the Soviet assessment of relations with Germany in the spring of 1933: they were sanguine about the

immediate future but had forebodings about the medium- and long-term menace posed by Nazi foreign policy. One expression of those forebodings was a letter from Alexandrovsky, a political counsellor in the Berlin embassy, who was destined to become Soviet Ambassador in Czechoslovakia. On 18 April he wrote¹⁶:

Every other government in Germany except Hitler's could have striven for a gradual improvement in its international position, for a slow swaying of the foundations of Versailles, for the destruction of the brick wall surrounding Germany, for the gradual rehabilitation of its government in the international arena. . . . Reality will make the severest amendments to the foreign policy fantasies of the Nazis, but it cannot change one thing – Hitler cannot exist without a big foreign policy and . . . this means extreme, including military adventurism and, ultimately, war and intervention against the USSR.

Similarly, on 19 May Krestinsky wrote to Khinchuk that even if Nazi Germany normalized its relations with the USSR it would not signify 'a final reorientation of the Hitler government, its repudiation of its former conception. It would mean for us a definite breathing space, which the longer it is, the more favourable it will be to the international position of the USSR'¹⁷.

In public Moscow's apprehensions concerning the German threat were aired in the columns of *Pravda* in an article by the Soviet publicist Karl Radek, who denounced Hitler's demands for revision of the Versailles Treaty¹⁸:

The path of revision . . . leads through a new world war. All attempts by interested parties to represent the matter of revision merely as a peaceful resettlement of old treaties cannot deceive anyone. The diplomatic talk concerning the revision of the Versailles Treaty is simply a means of preparing for war. . . . The word 'revision' is simply another name for a new world war. . . . This program of the seeking of the revision of the Versailles Treaty is the foreign policy program of German fascism.

Soviet fears about Nazi adventurism reached a climax in June 1933, when at the World Economic Conference in London, the German Economics Minister, Hugenberg, submitted a memorandum on international economic development which the Russians inter-

preted as a German demand for 'living space' in the USSR¹⁹. The USSR protested to the German Government²⁰ about the memorandum and Hugenberg resigned a few days later²¹, but the incident triggered a momentary panic within the Narkomindel. In a letter to Khinchuk on 27 June, Krestinsky argued that²²:

The 'Hugenberg Memorandum' shows us that the present government, notwithstanding the repeated declarations of Dirksen, Neurath, Goering and Hitler about their determination to keep to a friendly policy towards the USSR, have actually not given up the foreign policy ideas which the National Socialists developed in theory and actively worked for in all the years of their struggle for power. The German government is prepared to participate in a military coalition against us, is prepared to expand its military power for war with us, and requires only two things: armaments freedom and compensation at the expense of the USSR. . . We must all, first and foremost, remember that the friendly assurances of the German government are not to be believed, that in the further estrangement are the political plans of Germany to enter into war with us and that the present position is only a temporary respite.

Not surprisingly, the sequel to the Hugenberg incident was an acceleration of the breakdown of the Rapallo relationship. Most notably, although not directly connected to the Hugenberg affair, military co-operation came to an end²³. The ostensible reason, relayed by Krestinsky to Dirksen in early June, was that continued co-operation was incompatible with Soviet participation in international discussions on disarmament²⁴. But it may have been prompted by Moscow's receipt of a report that von Papen had divulged some secrets of Soviet-German military agreements to France's Ambassador in Italy²⁵.

On 14 October, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations Disarmament Conference and from the League itself. *Izvestiya* condemned the German action: 'German fascism declares to the entire world that it has decided to take the path of preparation for war'²⁶.

It is also important to note at this point the 'impact of certain internal events in Germany on Soviet-German relations. In February the Reichstag was burned down. The Nazis blamed the German Communist Party and issued decrees dissolving the party and expelling its deputies from parliament. Mass arrests of communists

began soon after²⁷. Despite its diplomatic disavowal of the Comintern, Moscow cannot have been happy with this turn of events; particularly when they were accompanied by widespread and unrelenting Nazi attacks on Soviet property, personnel and organizations in Germany. The Soviet embassy in Berlin addressed no fewer than 217 notes of protest to the German Foreign Ministry during the course of 1933²⁸. The banning (and subsequent arrest) of two Soviet-employed journalists from the trial of Dimitrov and others accused of the Reichstag fire also damaged Soviet-German relations, as did the Comintern's international campaign for the release of the Reichstag trial defendants²⁹.

By the end of 1933 the Rapallo relationship was beyond rescue. But that in itself did not cause Moscow to embrace collective security. It was the coalescence of this breakdown in the Soviet-German rapprochement and a growing detente with France that set Moscow on the path to collective security.

Franco-Soviet detente

The first sign of impending Franco-Soviet detente had come at the Disarmament Conference in February 1933 when the Soviet delegation responded favourably to French proposals to extend the principles of the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact for the renunciation of war to include action against aggression. As a contribution to making the French proposals more workable, Litvinov offered a draft definition of 'aggression' which the French accepted³⁰. 'These suggestions', Max Beloff points out, 'mark a fundamental transition from the previous emphasis [in Soviet policy] on "disarmament" to an alternative conception of "security"'³¹. This tentative step on the road to political co-operation was followed in April by the exchange of military attachés and, in May, by the French ratification of the 1932 Non-Aggression Treaty with the USSR³².

On the Soviet side, efforts for better relations were spurred on by Mussolini's proposal in the spring for a four-power pact between Italy, Britain, Germany and France. The basic idea was to ease the process of revising the postwar peace settlement through co-operation between the European great powers. Litvinov, annoyed by the USSR's exclusion from the four-power pact discussions, instructed Moscow's ambassador to tell the French the Soviets

viewed the pact as 'without us, consequently against us'³³. *Izvestiya* was less elliptical³⁴:

The Soviet Union as a world power cannot remain indifferent at the sight of conflicting currents on the world stage and the efforts to create a so-called concert of four powers that arrogates to itself the right to direct the destinies of nations.

The pact was signed in July but consigned to the dustbin of diplomatic history by France's subsequent refusal to ratify it³⁵. That same month, at a reception in Paris, Litvinov expanded on the implications of the Soviet change of heart the previous February on the question of international security³⁶:

It can scarcely be doubted that in the present international situation no war, wherever it may break out, can be localised, and that no country can be certain that it will not be drawn into the war once it has begun. The Soviet Union therefore is interested not only in its own peaceful relations with other states, but in the maintenance of peace generally.

During this visit it appears Litvinov proposed a secret verbal agreement to the French whereby the two states would undertake to consult each other prior to entering any agreements with other powers³⁷ – a proposal remarkably similar to that put by Chicherin to the Germans in 1924. The proposal came to nothing, but it was by no means the last hint to Paris that Moscow was ready to discuss a deal. In September 1933 the French Air Minister visited the Soviet Union (the first *official* visit by a French minister). He reported on his return that the Soviets were suggesting a non-aggression treaty which would include a clause on mutual assistance in the event of aggression³⁸. Cot's trip took place immediately after a personal tour of the USSR by Herriot, the French Prime Minister, who had been welcomed enthusiastically wherever he went³⁹.

The initiative transferred to the French following Germany's departure from the League of Nations on 14 October. On 20 October in Paris Paul-Boncour, the French Foreign Minister, told Dovgalevsky, the Soviet Ambassador, that⁴⁰:

if the position in Germany did not change then the question would arise of supplementing the Franco-Soviet pact and the London pact on the definition of aggression with a pact of mutual assistance.

The 'London pact' referred to by Paul-Boncour was a convention signed in July 1933 which committed the signatories to recognizing various forms of aggression; among its adherents were the USSR, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Estonia and Latvia. The pact, which was concluded on Soviet initiative, was basically an extension of the non-aggression treaty idea and did not commit the signatories to aid victims of aggression.

On 31 October Litvinov spoke to Paul-Boncour and reported that the French Minister:

once again spoke of the necessity for us and France to think about countermeasures in the event of German armament preparation for war and referred several times to a mutual assistance supplement to the pact of non-aggression.

Both sides agreed to draft agreements in line with this⁴¹.

Although the French were taking the initiative, the Narkomindel was aware of counter-tendencies in French foreign policy, notably that towards an agreement with Germany. In mid-November 1933 the Soviet embassy in Paris reported on a 'grouping which is actually striving for a general deal with Germany' and which understood this would only be possible 'if Germany is given freedom of action in the "East"'⁴². From the embassy in Berlin came another report that the French Ambassador François-Poncet 'as well as the entire Embassy, have from the outset been supporters of direct negotiations with Germany'⁴³.

This information must have reinforced Moscow's determination to encourage the Paul-Boncour initiative. Hence the Soviets' positive response to Paul-Boncour's next suggestion that the USSR should join the League of Nations⁴⁴ – an idea which Moscow had hitherto shunned. They agreed to discuss exactly what it was the French were proposing, and instructions to this effect were telegraphed to Dovgalevsky in Paris on 29 November⁴⁵. There followed conversations between Paul-Boncour and Dovgalevsky in which the issue of Soviet membership of the League crystallized as the key to further progress in negotiations⁴⁶.

At this point the action once again switched to Moscow. The central committee passed its collective security resolution on 12 December, Dovgalevsky was recalled for discussions⁴⁷ and, on 20 December, the politburo agreed to Narkomindel proposals on collective security and Soviet participation in the League of Nations.

Commenting on the question of League membership, the Narkomindel pointed out to the politburo that joining was essential if the USSR was to achieve equality with France in any future security arrangements between the two states⁴⁸.

It is not clear whether this consideration had any effect on the politburo's calculations, but it is known that on 28 December, Dovgalevsky presented the Soviet proposals to Paul-Boncour⁴⁹ and then, on 4 January, to Léger, the Secretary-General of the French Foreign Ministry⁵⁰. Paul-Boncour told Dovgalevsky 'we are together undertaking a matter of great importance, today we have together begun to make history'⁵¹. The scene was set for what became known as the negotiations for an Eastern pact of mutual assistance or, more loosely, for an 'Eastern Locarno'. But history was slow in the making. The French took until April to reply to the Soviet proposals and a further year was to elapse before those epoch-making negotiations bore fruit.

In the meantime, there was a hiatus in Soviet foreign policy. The Rapallo era was over but that of collective security had not definitively begun⁵². This was reflected in Stalin's speech to the 17th party congress in January 1934, in which he struck a markedly less militant note on relations with Germany than had Litvinov in his speech to the Central Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet at the end of December⁵³:

Some German politicians say that the USSR has now taken an orientation towards France and Poland; that from an opponent of Versailles it has become a supporter of it. . . That is not true. Of course we are far from being enthusiastic about the fascist regime in Germany. But it is not a question of fascism here. . . Nor is it a question of any alleged change in our attitude towards the Versailles Treaty. It is not for us . . . to sing the praises of the Versailles Treaty. We merely do not agree to the world being flung into a new war on account of this treaty. The same must be said of the alleged new orientation taken by the USSR. We never had any orientation towards Germany, nor have we any orientation towards Poland and France. Our orientation in the past and our orientation at the present time is towards the USSR and towards the USSR alone. And if the interests of the USSR demand rapprochement with one country or another which is not interested in disturbing peace, we adopt this course without hesitation. . . . No, that is not the point. The point is that Germany's policy has changed.

Stalin's equivocations were, however, a short-lived feature of Soviet foreign policy. When in April 1934 the French responded positively to Moscow's proposals on collective security, Franco-Soviet detente moved into a qualitatively new phase.

'Eastern Locarno' negotiations, 1934-5

The 'Eastern Locarno' negotiations of 1934-5 originated from Paul-Boncour's October 1933 suggestion that the London Convention on the Definition of Non-Aggression should be supplemented by a pact of mutual assistance. In Moscow's hands this suggestion developed in December 1933 into a proposal for a 'regional agreement about mutual defence from aggression on the part of Germany' with the participation of 'Belgium, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia'. The next move came in April 1934 from Léger who proposed a regional mutual assistance pact *including Germany*⁵⁴. The Narkomindel commented on the French proposal in an internal document⁵⁵:

The new French proposal has to be discussed and replied to. Actually there is no new proposal but only a modification of our own proposal:

1. Germany is included in the mutual assistance pact.
2. Excluded from the proposed pact is France which, however, is to conclude with the USSR a separate pact to guarantee assistance to us on the part of France and to make us party to the Locarno Treaty, to the advantage of France. . . .
3. Assistance to the country subjected to attack is to be given not by all parties to such a pact but only directly neighbouring countries. . . The limiting of assistance to closely neighbouring states would make the proposed pact somewhat artificial, for it would in fact fix no mutual obligations of any kind between ourselves and Czechoslovakia and between the Baltic States and Czechoslovakia.

Despite these and other reservations, including ones concerning the security of the Baltic States within the projected pact, the Soviets decided to proceed with the negotiations. Meetings to hammer out the provisions of the pact were held between Barthou, the new French Foreign Minister, and Litvinov in Geneva on 18 May and 4 June⁵⁶. After further discussions a draft pact was agreed at the end of June⁵⁷.

Whatever might be decided in Paris and Moscow, the Narkomindel was conscious that the fate of the pact lay in Berlin and Warsaw⁵⁸:

Nothing would come of the project for an Eastern pact if France cannot exert sufficient pressure on Poland in order to compel Germany to enter into the combination by means of a threat to achieve it without her or actually to bring about a combination without Germany.

In line with this assessment, Moscow took a back seat in approaches to Poland and Germany, although early in June Litvinov did present Soviet proposals for a regional security agreement to Neurath in Berlin⁵⁹. A fortnight later, however, Litvinov informed his Berlin embassy that 'we are not considering any further measures in Berlin, leaving further talks to France which is supposed to exert pressure in London and Warsaw'⁶⁰.

But Moscow did attempt to probe London's attitude to the proposed pact. Indeed, the Soviet Ambassador's initial assessment that Britain would not favour it turned out to be inaccurate⁶¹. In July 1934 London came out in support of the pact and relayed its views to Rome, Warsaw and Berlin⁶². 'Undoubtedly France's somewhat intimidating method of declaring on all sides that she would conclude a military alliance with the USSR in the event of the non-realization of the proposed pact had its influence on Britain', noted the Narkomindel⁶³.

Unfortunately, the British attitude was not shared by the Poles and Germans who both adopted tactics of delay and opposition. As a result negotiations dragged on over the summer, making no visible progress⁶⁴. Because the negotiations about the pact were unproductive, the French switched their attention to the issue of Soviet membership of the League of Nations. On 23 July the French Chargé in Moscow informed the Narkomindel that if the USSR did not apply for League membership in September it might be another year before it could gain admission. Moscow replied that it considered its entry into the League to be linked with the successful conclusion of the Eastern Locarno negotiations. However, the USSR was prepared to join before then if it was invited to do so and given a permanent seat on the League Council⁶⁵. The USSR was admitted to the League of Nations on 18 September 1934, following its acceptance of an invitation to join by 30 member states⁶⁶.

Just as the negotiations around Soviet admission to the League of

Nations were reaching their climax, on 8 September Germany issued a memorandum on the 'Eastern Pact'. Its gist was that the Germans rejected participation on the grounds that they objected in principle to automatic assistance in the event of aggression, as envisaged by the pact, and argued that bilateral arrangements for this purpose were more appropriate⁶⁷. Subsequently, the Poles seized on the German refusal to countenance participation as the basis for their own rejection of the proposed pact. Neither, in any event, could they agree to assume any commitments to Czechoslovakia and the Baltic States⁶⁸.

Without German and Polish participation there could be no all-embracing regional security pact in Eastern Europe. For several months more, however, discussions between France and the USSR continued on the basis that it might still be possible to involve Poland and Germany. But during this period Moscow began to move towards the idea of an agreement excluding Poland and Germany, towards, in fact, any mutual security agreement that would avert the danger of French alignment with the Germans. This trend in Soviet policy was reinforced by the appointment of Pierre Laval as French Foreign Minister following Barthou's assassination by Croation terrorists in Marseilles on 9 October. Laval's first encounters with Soviet diplomats in Paris did nothing to assuage Moscow's fears of a Franco-German deal. As a Narkomindel report put it⁶⁹:

What is most important is Laval's frank admission about seeking agreement with Germany. . . Laval's phrase about the exploration of ways for rapprochement with Germany via Moscow could, it seems, be understood as the desire for a combination uniting France, Germany and the USSR. A more likely supposition . . . is that either Laval has let out a secret or has deliberately, with cynical frankness, said that rapprochement with us must be 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.

Not that Moscow was above playing such games. A decision was taken to revive the proposal, first mooted in July 1933, that France and the USSR should sign an agreement that neither would conclude agreements with other countries without prior consultation and that each would keep the other fully informed of any negotiations with third parties⁷⁰.

To encourage the French to accept an agreement of this kind the Narkomindel employed the tactic of informing them of an unofficial German proposal for an Eastern Pact excluding France and Czechoslovakia, at the same time reassuring Paris that the USSR would not, of course, countenance such a proposal⁷¹. After some hesitation and manoeuvring, Laval finally agreed to a Soviet-French protocol, which he duly signed in Geneva on 5 December. The protocol committed both sides to sign no agreements with other states which could undermine the negotiations for an East European regional security pact⁷².

Having achieved their objective of forestalling, for the time being, any Franco-German agreement, Soviet diplomats once again turned their attention to the Eastern Pact negotiations. Diplomatic exchanges in various European capitals continued through December and into January 1935, but to little effect.

On 3 February 1935, however, the negotiations took a new turn. Britain and France published a communiqué proposing that the Eastern Pact should be concluded within the framework of a general settlement with Germany⁷³. The Narkomindel interpreted the communiqué as 'a desire to drown the proposed Eastern pact in some general European agreement which should cover a wide range of problems, including disarmament'⁷⁴. In response, Moscow resolved to 'exert pressure on France to take negotiations with Germany into her own hands without trusting them to Britain's mediation' and 'to work for the immediate continuation of the talks about an Eastern pact outside the general scheme set out in the communiqué'⁷⁵. Soviet diplomats in London and Paris were despatched to the Foreign Office and the Quai D'Orsay in pursuit of this line⁷⁶. And on 20 February the Soviet Government handed to the British and French Governments a declaration which stressed the centrality of an Eastern Pact to any general European settlement and argued the case for a system of regional security pacts⁷⁷.

What also emerged during this period was the prospect of a regional *non-aggression* pact, favoured by Berlin, as opposed to a regional *security* pact. 'The struggle will be waged around excluding mutual assistance obligations from the proposed pact and reducing it to a non-aggression pact', the Narkomindel noted on 10 February⁷⁸. Stalin himself took up this point with Eden, at that time British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, at a meeting in Moscow on 29 March⁷⁹:

You told Litvinov that the German Government objected to the Eastern Pact of mutual assistance. She only agrees to a pact of non-aggression. But where is the guarantee that the German Government, which so easily violates its international agreements, will adhere to a pact of non-aggression? No guarantee whatsoever. Therefore, we cannot be content with a pact of non-aggression with Germany. To secure peace we need a real guarantee and the only such guarantee is an Eastern pact of mutual assistance.

To illustrate his point, Stalin delivered the following homily on collective security:

There are here in this room six people, imagine that between ourselves there is a pact of mutual assistance and imagine that, for example, Comrade Maisky wanted to attack one of us – what would happen? We would all join forces to beat Comrade Maisky. . . It is the same with the countries of Eastern Europe. . .

During this meeting with Stalin, Eden had asked the Soviet leader whether he wanted an agreement with or without Germany. 'With Germany, of course, with Germany', replied Stalin. 'We do not wish to encircle anyone.' Stalin was, in fact, being disingenuous for as early as 2 November 1934 the politburo had taken a decision to accept, if necessary, a pact without German or Polish participation⁸⁰.

There was a certain irony in Soviet opposition to German proposals for non-aggression treaties and bilateral agreements for this was precisely what the USSR had advocated in the 1920s. 'Our policy', said Litvinov in 1926, 'is aimed at the conclusion of individual friendship treaties with all countries . . . we are offering a plan for the abolition of the system of political alliances and groups that inevitably lead to war'⁸¹. By 1934 he had changed his tune somewhat⁸²:

As a matter of fact, bilateral non-aggression pacts do not always serve to promote the cause of peace. The most avowedly aggressive state may conclude pacts of non-aggression with some states in order to free its hands and secure its rear or flanks for an attack on other states.

On 25 March the negotiations with France about the Eastern Pact took an unwelcome turn when Léger informed Potemkin,

Dovgalevsky's successor in Paris, that France was considering modifying its Eastern Pact proposal to meet German and Polish objections to its mutual assistance provisions. The two states would instead be allowed to participate in the pact on the basis of commitments to non-aggression and consultation⁸³.

Moscow, however, was not interested in pledges of non-aggression. The Soviets now doubted the utility of such pledges and, moreover, feared the latest French proposals could lead to the whole Eastern Pact project collapsing into a regional non-aggression treaty. Hence on 29 March Potemkin raised with Laval the issue of a tri-lateral security pact between the USSR, France and Czechoslovakia⁸⁴. What Moscow had in mind was a pact which would retain something of the regional character of the original Eastern Pact idea, thereby leaving the door open to other states to join the pact at a later stage.

Laval replied to Potemkin the next day with a counter-proposal for a series of *bilateral* security pacts, in the first instance between the USSR and France and the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Potemkin objected that the proposed pacts had no regional character, that their mutual assistance provisions were tied to League of Nations procedures and decisions, and that the French plan made no provision for immediate assistance in the event of aggression, as was the case under the Locarno Pact. In response Laval sidestepped Potemkin's points by insisting that under his plan assistance would be guaranteed by the signatories of the proposed bilateral pacts⁸⁵.

On 2 April Litvinov telegraphed Moscow's negative response to Laval's proposal; 'It is not clear to us what we can gain from it'⁸⁶. Potemkin relayed this to Laval on 6 April. Laval continued to insist, however, that Soviet proposals for a regional security pact, albeit reduced in scale, were not realistic and that his own proposals were the only way forward⁸⁷.

Moscow continued to press for some kind of regional security agreement. On 8 April Potemkin was instructed to tell Laval that the USSR⁸⁸

does not understand his objections to a tripartite pact between the USSR, France and Czechoslovakia. Such a pact brings less to mind the policy of alliance than a bilateral agreement, it would be open to other previously contemplated signatories to an Eastern Pact and would be more sympathetically received by public opinion.

However, he was also instructed, in the event of continuing

obstinacy on Laval's part, to obtain from the French a commitment to sign a bilateral pact by 1 May. With this instruction Moscow had, in effect, conceded that the project of a regional security pact be shelved in favour of bilateral treaties of mutual assistance.

The next day (9 April) Potemkin submitted to the French a memorandum which reflected the dual nature of his instructions – an account of the history of the Eastern Pact negotiations indicating the Soviet desire to proceed with a regional security agreement, but specific proposals that France should commit itself to signing a bilateral mutual assistance treaty with the USSR⁸⁹. In a meeting with Potemkin on the same day Laval reaffirmed the French commitment to sign a mutual assistance treaty but was reluctant to announce that fact on the eve of a conference in Stresa between Britain, France and Italy⁹⁰. It was, in fact, the Stresa conference – which discussed the Western response to Hitler's reintroduction of conscription – that prompted Moscow's insistence on a French commitment to a bilateral mutual assistance treaty⁹¹. As usual, Moscow feared the worst for its own interests as a result of this conference. At his meeting with Laval, therefore, Potemkin pressed hard for French commitment to the Soviet timetable for a mutual assistance treaty (i.e. an immediate public announcement and signature by early May). If Paris did not feel obligated to commit itself, then Moscow would deem itself freed of its own obligations, he told Laval⁹². The trick worked. Later that same day the two men agreed the text of a telegram to Moscow specifying a French commitment to sign a mutual assistance treaty⁹³.

The Eastern Locarno negotiations were dead. All that remained was to bury them with the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Agreement of 2 May 1935.

The Franco-Soviet pact

The negotiations which led to the Franco-Soviet pact of May 1935 began in earnest in Geneva on 15-17 April. Litvinov and Laval were in Geneva for a meeting of the League of Nations Council and the two exchanged drafts of the proposed pact. The Soviet draft was straightforward enough: in the event of either country being attacked the other would lend immediate and effective assistance. The French, however, wanted to link the operation of the treaty to their

consultation commitments under the Locarno Pact and to the League of Nations procedures on action against aggression. Eventually a compromise was reached in which the Soviet desire for immediate assistance was conceded on the basis that any action undertaken would be in conformity with the League of Nations covenant. French obligations under the Locarno Pact were also recognized⁹⁴.

In a telegram to Moscow on 18 April Litvinov summed up the political results of the Geneva negotiations⁹⁵:

Although real assistance in the projected pact is problematic on the French side. . .the pact will have great political significance as a factor diminishing the temptation on the part of Germany, Poland and Japan to attack, and hindering the establishment of close ties between France and Germany.

A few days later, on 22 April, Litvinov made the same point from a slightly different angle⁹⁶:

One should not place any serious hopes on the pact in the sense of real military aid in the event of war. Our security will still remain exclusively in the hands of the Red Army. For us the pact has predominantly a political significance, reducing the chance of war on the part of Germany and also Poland and Japan.

But the negotiations with France were far from over yet. On his return from Geneva to Paris on 19 April, Potemkin was confronted with further French demands to dilute the immediate assistance provisions of the pact. Several days more were required to negotiate a compromise in which mutual assistance under the pact was subordinated to League pronouncements on the aggression in question, but with both sides agreeing to take joint action to secure a speedy decision from the League and in the event of no decision being forthcoming to render assistance anyway. The final text of the pact, signed in Paris on 2 May, embodied this compromise formula⁹⁷.

Almost as a footnote to the pact with France, the USSR also signed a treaty of mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia, on 16 May. At the suggestion of Beneš, the Czechoslovak President, a clause was inserted stating that mutual assistance was conditional on France fulfilling its mutual assistance obligations to the party under attack⁹⁸. Soviet aid to Czechoslovakia was, thus, made dependent

on French action – as the Czechoslovak people were to find out to their dismay in 1938. In 1935, however, the Czechoslovak Government was concerned not to be drawn into a war on the side of the Soviet Union unless the French were too.

The Franco-Soviet pact did not formally end the negotiations for an Eastern Locarno, which meandered on for almost another year. What finally killed them stone-dead was Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936⁹⁹. For the Russians, however, those negotiations had long been dead. On 3 June 1935 Litvinov wrote to Suritz, Khinchuk's successor as Ambassador in Berlin, informing him that¹⁰⁰:

Immediately after my arrival [in Moscow] I wrote a note suggesting we refrain from participation in talks about the Eastern pact, leaving the initiative to France. This suggestion has been accepted. . . . Thus it is possible to say that for the time being the question of the Eastern pact can be considered liquidated.

The mutual assistance pacts with France and Czechoslovakia were seen by Moscow as the first step on the road to collective security in Europe. France's opposition to Germany on the political-diplomatic level had been consolidated and, despite Laval's personal inclinations, a Franco-German coalition had been averted. The next stage would be to supplement the Franco-Soviet political treaty with a military agreement and co-operation at the General Staff level. The Soviets were optimistic about relations with Britain too; London's involvement in the Eastern Pact negotiations had facilitated an Anglo-Soviet rapprochement. With regard to the League of Nations there was every possibility that it could be honed into an effective weapon in the fight for peace and collective security.

All these hopes were confounded. The pact with France turned out to be worth little more than the paper it was written on. The League proved to be an ineffective instrument of the Soviet collective security strategy. The Anglo-Soviet detente was very short-lived. Over the next two years the Soviets' quest for collective security reeled under a succession of blows.

Collective security in eclipse, 1935–7

The first blow struck against collective security came from an unexpected quarter; at the beginning of October 1935 Italy invaded Abyssinia. For some time before the crisis broke, the Narkomindel had been working for a peaceful settlement of the Italo-Abyssinian dispute¹⁰¹. The stakes were high – Abyssinian security, the defence of League principles and the continuation of good relations with Italy to ensure that Mussolini was not driven into the Hitler camp. Nevertheless, when it became apparent that war was unavoidable the USSR opted for active opposition to Italian aggression. One factor influencing the Soviet position was the impact on Germany of taking a firm stand against Italy. 'The fact of the application of League sanctions against Italy will itself be a stern warning to Germany', Litvinov emphasized in a telegram to Moscow from Geneva¹⁰².

The day after the Italian attack the Narkomindel was instructed by the politburo to treat Italy's action as aggression. On 11 October the League voted to apply economic sanctions against Italy and on 15 October the Soviet delegation in Geneva was informed that the politburo intended to implement the sanctions. Shortly after, the Council of People's Commissars (the Soviet 'Cabinet') passed a resolution banning the export of war materials to Italy¹⁰³.

League sanctions lasted until July 1936, but were ineffective. The sanctions policy was undermined from the start by the League's failure to include key war-waging items on the embargo list – coal, iron, steel and, particularly, oil. Consequently, throughout the Italo-Abyssinian war League members, including the Soviet Union, continued to export war materials to Italy. With Rumania, the USSR was Italy's biggest oil supplier before the war. Moscow was willing to ban the export of oil, but only if everyone else did so too. This was a stance the Soviet Union adopted time and again within the League; it argued for the strongest and most consistent application of League principles and policies in the struggle against aggression, but was unwilling to take unilateral action in pursuit of that objective. The practical effects of this equivocal position during the Abyssinian crisis should not, however, be exaggerated. Soviet oil continued to flow into Italian ports but at only a third of the previous rate. By contrast, Rumanian oil exports to Italy were several times larger

than the USSR's, while the United States doubled its level of oil exports to Italy during the crisis¹⁰⁴.

The political effects of the Abyssinian débâcle were far-reaching. It exposed the League's weakness as a defensive instrument against aggression. Despite subsequent Soviet efforts to strengthen the League¹⁰⁵, it never recovered from its failure over Abyssinia. Equally, if not more important, was the impact of the Abyssinian crisis on Italy's role in European affairs. As the crisis developed Mussolini increasingly steered Italy toward realignment with Hitler's Germany.

Before the summer of 1936 the view prevalent in the Narkomindel was that Italian-German disagreements over Austria (particularly the status of the Austrian Tyrol – claimed by Italy) would preclude an effective alliance between the two states¹⁰⁶. The Abyssinian crisis paved the way for the Austro-German agreement of July 1936 which, endorsed by Mussolini, acknowledged Austria as a sovereign, but German, state¹⁰⁷. As Krestinsky noted in a letter to Suritz, it was possible that 'the new situation created by the Austrian-German agreement will lead to a durable and long-term agreement between Italy, Germany, Poland, Austria and Hungary'¹⁰⁸.

Krestinsky's presentiment, at least in regard to Italy and Germany, proved well-founded. In November 1936 Mussolini announced that the axis of European politics would now revolve around Rome and Berlin. A year later Italy joined Germany and Japan's Anti-Comintern Pact, paving the way for the 'Pact of Steel' between Hitler and Mussolini in May 1939. The outcome most feared by the Narkomindel at the beginning of the Abyssinian crisis had happened.

The Abyssinian events also exposed the fragility of Moscow's developing relationships with London and Paris. In the very midst of the crisis (November 1935) news leaked out of a plan hatched by Laval and Hoare (the British Foreign Secretary) to force Abyssinia to cede large tracts of its territory and to accept effective Italian control of the rest¹⁰⁹. On the publication of the plan Hoare was forced to resign and there the matter rested. The Laval-Hoare affair caused a minor panic in Moscow¹¹⁰ but it did not divert the Soviets from their chosen course of alliance with the Western powers. For there were positive straws in the wind too.

A period of Anglo-Soviet detente had followed Eden's trip to Moscow in March 1935, hailed by the obsequities of the joint

communiqué issued on his departure¹¹¹. The next development was a British proposal in the summer of 1935 to finance a large loan to the Soviet Union¹¹². In December, Eden succeeded Hoare as Foreign Secretary. His appointment was followed by a number of frank Anglo-Soviet exchanges about containing Italian and German aggression¹¹³. These discussions were inconclusive, but positive enough for the Russians to raise with the British the question of a formal link between the two states similar to the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact¹¹⁴.

That, however, was the full extent of the Anglo-Soviet rapprochement. In February 1936 the British Cabinet finally rejected the idea of a loan to the Soviet Union. For the previous six months a debate had raged in Whitehall between advocates of a general settlement with Germany and those who proposed a policy of encircling Germany through a Franco-British-Soviet alliance. The Cabinet decision on the loan represented, in essence, a victory for the appeasement faction¹¹⁵.

In March 1936 an event of even greater import for Soviet relations with the Western powers occurred: Germany remilitarized the Rhineland. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles Germany's Rhineland was to remain permanently demilitarized. This arrangement was also enshrined in the 1925 Locarno Pact¹¹⁶. By his military occupation of the Rhineland, Hitler effectively repudiated the Locarno agreements as well as the Treaty of Versailles. More importantly, his action constituted a direct threat to French security. As Suritz wrote from Berlin¹¹⁷:

The 7 March action greatly strengthened. . . Germany's military-strategic position; created for the German army a new, strategically advantageous bridgehead for the deployment of military forces and for threatening neighbouring states.

Apart from condemning the German move and pledging full support for any action against Germany, the Russians used the Rhineland operation as an opportunity for another attempt to consolidate an anti-German front with Britain and France¹¹⁸. But to no avail. Already, on 9 March, the Narkomindel was detecting tendencies in British foreign policy towards a negotiated settlement with Germany, tendencies which signified¹¹⁹:

a return to the policy of rewarding the aggressor, a rupture of the

collective security system and the end of the League of Nations [and] the encouragement not only of Germany but also Italy and Japan.

Hitler's 'March action' did, however, result in one positive development for Soviet foreign policy: on 12 March the French Senate finally ratified the Franco-Soviet pact. This opened the way for renewed efforts by Moscow to secure talks with France about the military implications of the pact. The election in June 1936 of Blum's popular front government also raised Soviet hopes¹²⁰. However, Potemkin was unable to discuss this with Blum until February 1937. At that meeting he explained to Blum that Soviet military aid to France could take two forms. If Poland and Rumania consented, Soviet troops could be transported to the military front through their territories. On the other hand, if this was not possible, Soviet assistance would be limited to sea and air support. France, however, gave no answer to Potemkin's question as to what aid it could offer to the Soviet Union¹²¹. Negotiations finally petered out in summer 1937 with no result¹²².

France's reasons for refusing a military accord with the USSR were spelled out in a paper prepared by the French military in May 1937. Such an accord, the paper argued, would create difficulties with France's Polish and Rumanian allies, provoke Germany, and endanger Anglo-French relations¹²³. Paris's priorities were clear.

By the middle of 1937 the Soviet collective security front with Britain and France, which had emerged in outline in 1935, was in the final stages of disintegration. Indeed, that process of disintegration had entered a qualitatively new stage with the outbreak of the Spanish civil war in July 1936.

The Soviet Union's initial response to the civil war was to support French- and British-sponsored proposals for non-intervention by outside powers. A declaration to this effect was made by the Soviet Government on 23 August 1936¹²⁴, followed a week later by a ban on arms exports to Spain¹²⁵. In September the USSR joined an international Non-Intervention Committee which met for the first time in London on the 9th. These Soviet actions were designed to keep in step with British and French policy and to secure the diplomatic isolation of Germany and Italy (who were already supplying arms to Franco's fascist forces)¹²⁶.

In the meantime, however, political pressure was building up in Moscow for military and financial aid to the Spanish Republican

forces¹²⁷. This pressure, from the Comintern and from within the Soviet Communist Party, resulted in a Narkomindel statement to the Non-Intervention Committee on 7 October that, if German and Italian violations of the non-intervention agreement continued, the USSR would consider itself free to act too¹²⁸. In fact, the first shiploads of Soviet supplies to the Republic were already on their way to Spanish ports¹²⁹. Soviet intervention was formalized by a letter from Maisky to the Non-Intervention Committee on 23 October which stated that the USSR would only bind itself to the non-intervention agreement to the extent that all other participants did¹³⁰. Since Italy and Germany were supplying arms and personnel to the fascist rebels on a huge scale, this was *carte blanche* for uninhibited Soviet aid to Republican Spain. For the duration of the civil war Moscow pursued a dual-track strategy in relation to Spain: maintaining Soviet membership of the Non-Intervention Committee as a means of obstructing German and Italian support for Franco and despatching its own aid to the Republic – directly through military supplies and indirectly through the Comintern's International Brigades and political campaigning on behalf of the Republic.

The Non-Intervention Committee proved to be ineffectual. It did little to prevent German and Italian aid to Franco, taking almost a year, for example, to come up with an effective plan to prevent Italo-German submarine and air attacks on neutral shipping. It did, however, obstruct the Republican war effort by encouraging France to close the Franco-Spanish border to arms supplies. Moscow must have breathed a sigh of relief when its involvement in the whole distasteful episode of the Non-Intervention Committee came to an end in March 1939 with the recall of the Soviet representative¹³¹.

The other track of Moscow's strategy was more successful. Soviet aid played a crucial role in propping up the Republic during the three years of the civil war. In 1937 alone the USSR supplied more than 450,000 tons of goods to Spain. Soviet aid included millions of bullets, half a million rifles, 20,000 machine guns, and hundreds each of artillery pieces, mortars, tanks, armoured cars and aeroplanes. Two thousand Soviet volunteers fought in Spain. Ninety-six Soviet merchant ships were captured or sunk supplying aid¹³².

The Comintern did its bit too. Over 40,000 volunteers of the International Brigades fought in some of the most brutal battles¹³³. In Britain, France, the United States and other countries communists led an impressive political campaign in support of Republican Spain¹³⁴.

The efforts of Moscow and the Comintern were in vain. The Spanish Republic fell in March 1939.

In the years since the defeat of the Republic a number of historians have ascribed sinister, machiavellian motives to Soviet policy towards Spain. Stalin, it has been argued, did not want the Republican Government to win the civil war for fear of its radical bent embarrassing Soviet relations with Britain and France. Nor, it has been said, did he want the Republic to lose because a Fascist Spain would endanger his French ally and thereby increase the threat to Soviet security. Hence, so the argument goes, Soviet policy was geared to supplying just enough aid to keep the Republic going and to providing a lever for Moscow's interference in Spanish politics to ensure that the revolutionary impulses of the Republican regime did not get out of hand¹³⁵. The conclusion often drawn from this line of argument is that, if the USSR had given more aid and refrained from meddling in Spain's domestic politics, the Republic might very well have won. Such arguments are often linked to a more general critique of Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s which seeks to demonstrate the hollowness of the collective security strategy.

This view of Moscow's Spanish policy is largely fantasy. Soviet policy was unequivocally directed toward a Republican victory. Far from subordinating aid to Spain to its own diplomatic requirements, Moscow paid a heavy political price for its support for the Republican cause. As a result of Soviet aid, Britain and France were further alienated from the project of a collective security front against fascism¹³⁶. Moscow did, it is true, interfere in Spain's domestic politics but its intent was to ensure that the Republican government pursued a political and military strategy that would maximize its chances of survival. The essence of Soviet, and Comintern, strategy was to defeat fascism in Spain by the formation of the broadest possible political alliances at the national and international levels. They also believed that the primary objective should be first to win the civil war; any far-reaching socialist transformation of Spain should await the outcome of that primary struggle. The efficacy of the Soviet-Comintern strategy is, of course, open to challenge; it was questioned at the time and is still subject to fierce debate today¹³⁷. The point being made here concerns the motives behind that strategy and its relationship to broader Soviet objectives for collective security.

The critics of Soviet policy towards Spain do, however, draw attention to two very important issues. The first concerns the impact

of foreign intervention on the outcome of the civil war. While the reasons for the defeat of the Republican forces are varied and complex, there can be little doubt that the weight of the foreign intervention against their cause was a major factor. This can be illustrated by the following comparative table of Soviet and Italo-German military aid to the Republic and Franco, respectively. The period covered is 1936–8¹³⁸.

	<i>USSR</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Italy</i>
Planes	648	593	656
Tanks	347	250	950
Armoured Cars	120		
Artillery Pieces	1,186	700	1,930
Machine Guns	20,486	31,000	3,436
Rifles	497,813	157,306	240,747
Mortars	340	6,174	1,426
Bullets	826 m.	250 m.	324 m.
Shells	3.4 m.	1.1 m.	7.7 m.

As the table shows, in respect of all the most important items of modern warfare – planes, tanks, artillery, mortars and machine guns – the Republic received far less aid from the USSR than Franco did from Germany and Italy. The balance was further tipped by the presence on Spanish soil of 150,000 Italian and 50,000 German military personnel, as opposed to 40,000 Soviet and international volunteers¹³⁹.

Could the USSR have provided more aid to Republican Spain? Providing the formidable logistical problems could have been overcome, the answer must be yes. But only at a price. At the price of its own rearmament programme, at the price of aid to Nationalist China in its war with Japan, and, most important of all, at the price of the further escalation of foreign intervention in the Spanish civil war. In retrospect it is easy to see that the Non-Intervention Committee was of very limited value in containing Italo-German intervention in Spain. But at the time it looked far more promising and the objective of a great power front against foreign intervention in Spain a feasible one. Soviet policy was influenced by diplomatic factors, but ones which Moscow considered in the interests of the Republicans themselves.

The second issue highlighted by critics of Moscow's policy is the

negative side of Soviet-Comintern aid to Spain. With the arms, medical aid and military advisers and volunteers came the politics of Stalin's Great Terror. Soviet and communist aid to Spain was undermined by a civil war within the civil war against trotskyites, anarchists and others and by successive purges of Soviet and Comintern military and political personnel¹⁴⁰. It was not Stalin's foreign policy towards Spain that was reprehensible but the projection of his domestic politics into the Republican camp. It is doubtful whether the damage it did to the Republican cause was decisive, but it did besmirch an otherwise creditable episode in prewar Soviet foreign policy.

As the civil war in Spain progressed, Soviet complaints about British and French resistance to an effective collective security front against aggression became increasingly shrill. In a series of speeches delivered in 1936–7 Litvinov mocked British and French policy toward Spain, accusing them of timidity in the face of aggression. He could not understand, he told his audiences, why the Western powers refused to make a stand against the aggressor states. In combination with the Soviet Union and other 'peace-loving' states they were far stronger than the aggressors, who relied mainly on bluff and surprise for their successes. Litvinov's sentiments were echoed in other Soviet public political statements, as was, too, his other theme of Soviet self-reliance – that in the event of a direct threat to Soviet interests and security the USSR could and would meet it head on¹⁴¹.

By the end of 1937 the Soviet collective security project was at its lowest ebb. The Soviet reaction to the frustration of the hopes they had cherished in 1934–5 was summed up by an acerbic interview given by Litvinov to a *Les Temps* journalist on Christmas Day 1937:

Les Temps: I asked him [Litvinov] if it would be accurate to characterize the present Soviet position as 'isolation', 'inwardlookingness'.

Litvinov: Obviously, since at this moment no one wants anything to do with us, we will wait. . . and then we'll see.

Les Temps: What do you mean, Commissar?

Litvinov: There are other possible combinations.

Les Temps: With Germany?

Litvinov: Why not. . .

Les Temps: But is a German-Soviet rapprochement possible?

Litvinov: Perfectly. When he came to power Hitler renewed the 1926

treaty. He wanted to stay on good terms with us. He changed his attitude when he realised that we were opposed to German expansionism in central Europe, that we wanted to maintain the territorial status quo, and that through our policy of collective security we were an obstacle to his plans.

But what if we gave him to understand that today we are uninterested in maintaining the status quo. . . ?

It is you French who have an interest in respect of the territorial clauses of Versailles. But we gave no undertaking at Versailles. We have nothing to give back. . . The USSR would not be affected by territorial revision. We could therefore disinterest ourselves. . . .

There [is] no place in Europe for two hegemonic powers. It is hegemony that Hitler wants and it is France that's in the way. . .

The interview, which was never published, was reported to the French embassy in Moscow. Commenting on the significance of Litvinov's remarks, the French Ambassador argued that it was¹⁴²:

Unlikely, given that the subject was so serious and related unofficially to a journalist, that Litvinov would have made this point without previously clearing it at the highest levels. His declaration appears to me as a sort of warning the Soviet government wanted to give us via an indirect source.

It was a sad commentary on Franco-Soviet relations that Litvinov had been reduced to such crude tactics. And Soviet relations with Britain were no better. A few months earlier Potemkin, now back in Moscow as a Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, had telegraphed the following to Maisky¹⁴³:

Reports from several of our ambassadors point to mounting British diplomatic activity in Central and South-East Europe in favour of Germany and against the Soviet Union. . . Information about Britain's attempts to discredit the Franco-Soviet and Czechoslovak-Soviet pacts has also been confirmed. Britain is reported to be supporting the idea of creating a cordon sanitaire of neutral countries along our Western borders.

Threats to France, on the one hand, deep suspicions of Britain, on the other. The scene was set for the final dénouement of the collective security era in Soviet foreign relations at Munich in 1938. But before considering in detail the USSR's role in the Czechoslovakian crisis, it is necessary to complete the picture of Soviet policy in the collective security period by a brief consideration of Comintern activities and of Moscow's response to the growing threat posed by Japan in the Far East.

The Comintern and collective security

At the height of the Soviet drive for collective security, in the summer of 1935, the 7th World Congress of the Communist International opened in Moscow. It was the first Comintern congress to have been convened for seven years. The previous congress in 1928 had foreshadowed the Comintern's so-called 'third period', during which communist strategy and tactics were predicated on the belief that Europe was on the brink of a revolutionary crisis. Comintern politics were also characterized by extreme sectarianism (in which, most famously, social democrats were dubbed 'social fascists') and by a catastrophic underestimation of the threat which fascism posed to the labour movement¹⁴⁴.

This combination of fanatical sectarianism and fantastical leftism was embraced with enthusiasm by the German Communist Party, whose tactics helped split the potential opposition to Hitler and contributed directly to the Nazis' rise to power. The result was a disaster of historic proportions for the Comintern. Within a few weeks of Hitler's ascent to the Chancellorship the jewel in its crown – a party with hundreds of thousands of members, millions of voters and almost 100 parliamentary deputies – had been completely destroyed¹⁴⁵.

The German Communist Party's annihilation was not the only setback for the Comintern cause. In February 1934 the Austrian labour movement was effectively crushed after four days of street-fighting with fascist forces in Vienna. In October 1934 miners in Spain's Asturias rose in armed revolt; thousands died as the uprising was quelled. Throughout Europe ultra-right and fascist movements began to make their presence felt, notably Mosley's Brownshirts and Action Française.

All these events contributed to a re-evaluation of the third period policies. From the spring of 1934 a new strategy and tactics were hammered out by the Comintern's inner councils, and were finally unveiled at the 7th congress by Georgi Dimitrov, the new General-Secretary. Dimitrov proposed that the struggle against fascism and the danger of a new world war should be the priorities for the Comintern. Communists were urged to make common cause with social democrats and other progressive forces. Member parties were enjoined to adopt policies specific to their national political terrain¹⁴⁶.

The Comintern's popular front policy – so-called because it attempted to recruit non-socialist forces to a broad political alliance – intersected with the Soviet collective security drive at a number of points. The organization of popular fronts against fascism and war added to the pressure on Western governments to adopt collective security policies and helped stem the fascist tide, which was running high in a number of countries. Popular front agitation and propaganda reinforced Litvinov's efforts to mobilize international opinion against the 'aggressor states'. In turn, the international role of the USSR in resistance to aggression served as an example to national struggles for peace and collective security.

The Soviet-Comintern relationship was not without its tensions during the collective security period, however. These tensions were given a rare public airing by Togliatti, the Italian communist leader, in his report to the 7th congress¹⁴⁷:

For us it is absolutely indisputable that there is a complete identity of aim between the peace policy of the Soviet Union and the policy of the working class and Communist Parties of the capitalist countries. . . . But this identity of aims by no means signifies that at every given moment there must be a complete coincidence in all acts and on all questions between the tactics of the. . . Communist Parties. . . and the concrete tactical measures of the . . . CPSU.

What Togliatti had in mind was the difficulty caused by a Soviet statement in May 1935 supporting France's national defence policy – which ran counter to the French Communist Party's opposition to rearmament, increases in defence expenditure and the extension of national service, a position which they maintained until after the election of Blum's popular front government in July 1936¹⁴⁸.

The discomfort caused to Moscow by this particular episode was

minimal, since its suspicions of its new ally were no less than those of the French Communists. However, it does illustrate that, while in general terms Comintern activities did contribute to Soviet foreign policy objectives, the execution of the popular front policy also undermined the strategy of collective security in certain respects. This was certainly the case in France where communist activities played into the hands of conservatives who opposed an alliance with the USSR and urged co-operation with Germany on the grounds that Bolshevism posed a greater threat¹⁴⁹. However, the difficulties created by the Comintern were a minor irritation as far as the Soviet leadership was concerned; they had long ago relegated it to a matter of secondary importance in the sphere of foreign policy. The same cannot be said of the threat to Soviet security posed by the rise of Japanese militarism.

Threat from the East

When the Japanese invaded Manchuria in September 1931 the news was received with equanimity in Moscow. At that time the USSR had no diplomatic relations with China, contacts having been broken off in 1929 following armed clashes between Soviet and Chinese forces over control of the Chinese Eastern Railway – a relic from Tsarist days. By contrast, Soviet relations with Japan were comparatively friendly. Moreover, while Japan and China engaged each other in Manchuria the chances of a Sino-Japanese alliance directed against Soviet interests were minimal¹⁵⁰.

As Japan advanced, however, Moscow's concern for its own security in the Far East increased, concerns which were magnified by Japan's refusal in 1932 to conclude a non-aggression treaty with the USSR and by the growing strength in Japan of the proponents of a Japanese-Soviet war¹⁵¹. Moscow's response to this threat was twofold. First, it sought to minimize the danger of a major conflict with Japan by the removal of potential sources of friction. Hence the sale to Japan of the Chinese Eastern Railway (which ran through Manchuria) in 1935¹⁵². Second, it undertook an extensive build-up of Red Army forces along the Sino-Soviet border. Indeed, by the end of 1933 the balance of military power between the USSR and Japan along the border had tilted decisively in the Soviet favour¹⁵³. From this position of strength the Red Army was able to inflict severe

losses on Japanese forces in a series of incidents along the border after 1931 – notably, at the Amur River in 1937, at Lake Khasan in 1938 and at Khalkin-Gol in 1939. These ‘incidents’, it should be noted, were not mere skirmishes between border guards, but full-scale battles involving whole divisions, tanks, artillery, and aircraft¹⁵⁴.

But big border clashes were one thing, involvement in a major war with Japan was another. There were definite limits to Moscow’s determination to resist Japanese expansionism in the Far East, as evidenced by Moscow’s refusal to conclude a mutual assistance treaty with China following the Japanese invasion of Peking’s northern provinces in July 1937. Instead Moscow proposed a non-aggression treaty, which was signed in August 1937¹⁵⁵, and, under a credit agreement concluded in September 1937, agreed to supply China with military equipment. By the middle of 1938 the Soviet Union had delivered to China about 100 tanks, nearly 300 aircraft, hundreds of machine guns and artillery pieces, many thousands of shells, and millions of bullets¹⁵⁶.

The key to Moscow’s diffidence in the face of the Japanese threat was located on the other side of the world – in Europe. It was the threat to Soviet security in Europe that spurred Moscow’s efforts to avoid full-scale war with Japan in the Far East. Both militarily and politically the threat of Nazi Germany was far greater than that of Japan. Until that threat had been defused, the secondary danger posed by Japan could wait. Hence the prioritization in Soviet foreign policy of a potential war zone (in Europe) over an actual war zone (in the Far East), a set of priorities that was reinforced by a series of diplomatic and intelligence reports suggesting that Moscow was not alone in its fear of a two-front war. Japan feared it, too. Tokyo was willing to join with Nazi Germany in an attack on the USSR, but only on condition that Japan did not simultaneously become embroiled in a war with other Pacific Powers – Britain, France and the United States¹⁵⁷. Such reports could only emphasize the critical importance of the collective security policy in Europe; the formation of a collective peace front in Europe would help to contain Japanese, as well as German, expansionism. Of course, the failure of collective security might well lead to the opposite outcome – to Soviet involvement in war in Europe and in the Far East. As we shall see in the following section, the débâcle of Munich did not augur well for the Soviet strategy of meeting the Japanese threat through its collective security programme in Europe.

The road to Munich

By the end of 1937 all that remained of the battered edifice of the Versailles Treaty was the territorial settlement in Central and Eastern Europe. In 1938 this, too, began to crumble as first Austria and then the Sudetenland fell to Hitler.

Central to Hitler's foreign policy programme was the unification of all German peoples under the Reich. In a speech in February 1938 he spoke of 10 million Germans in adjacent states, the overwhelming majority of whom lived in Austria and Czechoslovakia¹⁵⁸. The Austrian Anschluss in March, therefore, came as no surprise. Indeed, as early as July 1936 Krestinsky had predicted that 'in several months or in a year or two, when the ground in Austria is sufficiently prepared, Germany will simply annex Austria'¹⁵⁹. Earlier still, in March 1935, Litvinov had argued that Austria's fate seriously affected Soviet security interests. 'We cannot be indifferent towards it, no matter how aggravating it may be to Hitler's Germany'¹⁶⁰. When the Anschluss actually took place Litvinov warned the Soviet party central committee that 'the annexation of Austria is the greatest event since the World War and is fraught with the greatest dangers, not least to our Union'¹⁶¹. But the USSR was powerless either to prevent or to reverse Germany's takeover of Austria; it could only wage a virulent protest campaign through its own press¹⁶².

The USSR did, however, have the ability to intervene in Czechoslovakia's fate. Both the USSR and France were committed by mutual assistance treaties to defend Czechoslovakia against German aggression.

Although Hitler made no immediate demands concerning the Sudeten Germans, it was obvious that Czechoslovakia would be his next target. Moscow, for its part, assumed the worst. On 17 March it issued a public statement about the 'menace' to Czechoslovakia and declared the USSR's readiness 'to participate in collective actions, which would be decided upon jointly with it and which would aim at checking the further development of aggression and at eliminating the increased danger of a new world war'¹⁶³.

The international response to the Soviet declaration was decidedly uneven. Czechoslovakia naturally welcomed it¹⁶⁴; Britain rejected it as inappropriate¹⁶⁵; and the French made no formal response at all.

This last was characteristic of what Litvinov described in April as Paris's 'indecision, inertia and credulity in the face of events creating a threat to peace and a direct danger to France'¹⁶⁶. A few days later the Soviet Ambassador in Prague was recalled to Moscow for consultations about the political situation in Czechoslovakia. Alexandrovsky was instructed to tell President Beneš that the Soviet Union was prepared, in combination with France, to take all necessary measures relating to the security of the country¹⁶⁷.

Because Soviet aid to Czechoslovakia was formally tied to that of France, the French role in the coming crisis would be critical. At a League session in Geneva in mid-May Litvinov had the opportunity to probe Bonnet (the latest French Foreign Minister) on French policy. The discussion was not very encouraging. In response to Litvinov's remark that Soviet support for any future French mobilization in aid of Czechoslovakia depended on the passage of Soviet forces across Poland and Rumania, Bonnet's only reply was that both these countries were emphatically opposed to such action¹⁶⁸.

French policy was, in turn, tied to that of Britain. Unlike the Czechs, Litvinov was not optimistic that an effective Anglo-French alliance in support of Czechoslovakia would be forged in time¹⁶⁹.

On the weekend of 20–22 May Czechoslovakia took its fate into its own hands. Upon receiving reports of German troop concentrations along the border, the Czech Cabinet ordered a partial mobilization. In fact, these reports of German troop movements were untrue. Nevertheless, Hitler appeared to back down in the face of a determined Czech stand¹⁷⁰. The lesson could not have been lost on the Soviets who had consistently argued that successful resistance to Hitler short of war was possible. Litvinov took up this theme in an important speech at the end of June¹⁷¹:

Before our very eyes is now being unwound the entire skein that had been wound twenty years ago. . . Without firing a single shot, without any agreement with the authors of the Versailles and other treaties, Germany has already succeeded in nullifying nearly all the results for which the West European powers waged the world war. . . The spectre of Germany's military and industrial hegemony has once more risen before its opponents in the world war, inspiring them with greater fear than they ever felt prior to that war. The entire diplomacy of the Western Powers in the last five years resolves itself into an avoidance of any

resistance to Germany's aggressive actions, to compliance with its demands and even its caprices, fearing to arouse its dissatisfaction and disapproval even in the slightest degree.

Such tactics of non-resistance naturally encourage Germany to further aggression and to an intensification of its efforts to reconquer as quickly as possible the territories which it had to cede to other states. . . .

It remains to be seen whether [the aggressor states] will risk launching a war if they have grounds to expect serious resistance, and if they are opposed by states with equal forces, to say nothing of countries with superior forces.

Following Litvinov's speech there was a lull in the developing crisis, punctuated only by Britain's despatch of the Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia to investigate the conditions of the Sudeten Germans¹⁷². Meanwhile, the Narkomindel kept up its diplomatic pressure in London, Paris and Berlin on behalf of the Czechs. But the results were not very encouraging¹⁷³.

The final phase of the Czechoslovak crisis, as viewed from Moscow, opened at the beginning of September. The first move came from Paris. On 31 August Bonnet cabled Payart, the French Chargé in Moscow, with instructions to ascertain what Russian aid to Czechoslovakia could be expected, given the opposition of Poland and Rumania to Soviet troop movements across their territory¹⁷⁴. Payart saw Potemkin the next day¹⁷⁵ and on the following day received an answer from Litvinov. Polish and Rumanian intransigence would be overcome, or at least undermined, by a League decision against aggression towards Czechoslovakia. Litvinov further proposed joint Franco-Soviet-Czech military talks and revived the idea, first raised in March, of a conference to discuss and issue a declaration on Czechoslovakia¹⁷⁶.

It seems that Litvinov realized that the French wanted an indecisive response to their question, which would let them off the hook of their commitments to Czechoslovakia¹⁷⁷. This view of the purpose of the French initiative was confirmed by a telegram from Suritz, the Soviet Ambassador in Paris¹⁷⁸.

On 5 September Payart returned to clarify some points of the Soviet answer. The Soviet position remained the same as before¹⁷⁹. In a formal statement to Payart Potemkin reiterated the policy previously outlined by Litvinov, emphasizing in particular 'the determination of the USSR, in the event of Germany attacking

Czechoslovakia, to carry out, together with France, all its obligations as laid down in the Soviet-Czechoslovak Pact¹⁸⁰.

What Moscow made of these equivocal approaches by France is unclear. However, by the end of the mid-September session of the League in Geneva, Litvinov (who had had further talks with Bonnet in Switzerland¹⁸¹) was certain that 'Czechoslovakia will be betrayed'. The question was 'only whether Czechoslovakia will reconcile herself to this'¹⁸².

From Prague on 17 September Alexandrovsky telegraphed that 'the situation in Czechoslovakia is extremely tense, but there is no panic. The wave of resistance is mounting'¹⁸³. This tension had been sparked off by Chamberlain's conference with Hitler at Berchtesgaden two days earlier¹⁸⁴. On 19 September Britain and France presented Czechoslovakia with proposals that those Sudeten districts with a German majority should be transferred to Germany¹⁸⁵. Beneš asked Alexandrovsky if the USSR would follow France in fulfilling its commitments to Czechoslovakia and whether the Soviet Union was prepared to support a Czech appeal to the League for aid¹⁸⁶. Within 24 hours Potemkin had telegraphed the politburo's unqualified yes to both questions, and Alexandrovsky telephoned the reply to the Czech Cabinet, then in session¹⁸⁷. Czechoslovakia rejected the Anglo-French proposals on the evening of 20 September¹⁸⁸. A few hours later the British and French diplomatic representatives in Prague delivered a virtual ultimatum that the Czechoslovak Government should accept the proposals or be abandoned by the Western powers. The Czechs duly submitted on 21 September¹⁸⁹.

Meanwhile, Litvinov had returned to Geneva to hear rumours that France's cautious stand on Czechoslovakia was due to Soviet passivity in the face of the crisis. It was these rumours, according to Maisky, that prompted Litvinov's speech to the League Assembly on 21 September in which he revealed publicly the Soviet stance on Czechoslovakia, as relayed to France at the beginning of the month¹⁹⁰.

On the same day Soviet military units along the western border were put on alert – the first stage of a partial mobilization of Soviet armed forces which continued until the end of the month¹⁹¹. The Soviet military build-up was partly inspired by reports received in Moscow on 22 September that Poland had begun to assemble its forces along the Czechoslovak border in anticipation of an opportunity to grab the disputed Czech territory of Teschen¹⁹². The next day the

Soviet Union warned Poland that its intervention in Czechoslovakia would result in Moscow's repudiation of the Soviet-Polish Non-Aggression Treaty¹⁹³.

Litvinov was still in Geneva. On 23 September he met De La Warr and Butler from the British Foreign Office and suggested a British-French-Soviet conference to discuss the Czechoslovak crisis¹⁹⁴. However, Moscow itself responded negatively to this initiative by Litvinov¹⁹⁵, which perhaps explains why on the same day the People's Commissar telegraphed home advocating a stronger line¹⁹⁶:

Although Hitler has committed himself to such an extent that it is difficult for him to turn back, I still think that he would turn back if he was certain beforehand of the possibility of joint Soviet-French-English action against him. No joint declaration or conferences even can now make any impression. A determined stand is necessary. Believing that a European war into which we would be drawn is not in our interests and that we need to do everything necessary to prevent it, I pose the question: should we not declare even partial mobilization and carry on such a campaign in the press that would force Hitler and Beck to believe in the possibility of a major war involving ourselves? De La Warr told me that the mood in Paris is stiffening. It is now possible that France will agree to a simultaneous declaration of partial mobilization with us. It is necessary to act quickly.

On the way back to the hotel after the meeting with De La Warr and Butler, Maisky asked Litvinov about his proposals at the meeting¹⁹⁷:

'What you proposed to the British just now means war. . . Has it been seriously considered in Moscow and decided in earnest?'

'Yes, it's been decided in earnest', Litvinov said firmly. 'When I was leaving for Geneva, we had started concentrating troops on the Rumanian and Polish border. It's nearly a fortnight since then, and I would say we have at least 25 to 30 divisions there now. . .'

'Suppose France backs out and doesn't act?' I asked. 'What then?'

'Doesn't matter', Litvinov grunted with an angry shrug.

'What about Poland and Rumania? Will they let us through?'

'Poland won't, of course', he replied, 'but Rumania is another matter. We have information that Rumania will, particularly if the League of

Nations pronounces Czechoslovakia a victim of aggression. Not even unanimously, but by a big majority. . .'

He was silent for a moment, then said: 'The main thing is how the Czechs behave. . . If they fight, we'll fight alongside them.'

Maisky's memoir comes from his diary, but either his memory was playing him tricks or Litvinov was deliberately exaggerating the extent of Soviet mobilization and his own and Moscow's belief in the inevitability of war. Litvinov's comment to Maisky about the possibility of Rumania* allowing Soviet forces to cross its territory is accurate and throws into relief one of the more obscure episodes of the Munich crisis, one that generally has been ignored by Western and Soviet historians alike¹⁹⁸.

Negotiations about the passage of Soviet forces took place between Litvinov and Comnène, the Rumanian Foreign Minister, in Geneva between 9 and 13 September. Rumania eventually agreed to the passage of Soviet forces on 24–25 September¹⁹⁹. However, this agreement was hedged about with provisos and, had it come into effect, would have severely restricted Soviet military aid to Czechoslovakia via Rumania. For example, the Rumanians insisted that the Soviets could move only 100,000 men through their territory and that this had to be done within six days – an extremely difficult task in view of the state of Rumania's transportation network²⁰⁰.

The Rumanian concessions to the Soviet Union were, however, a side issue compared to the position being taken up by France and Great Britain. At the Godesberg Conference with Britain and France on 23–24 September Germany rejected the Anglo-French proposals for a compromise over the Sudetenland²⁰¹. Hitler's rebuff led to a temporary hardening of the Anglo-French stance in the Czechoslovak crisis. It did not last long, however. Meeting in Munich on 29–30 September the leaders of Britain, France, Germany and Italy (the sponsor of the conference) resolved their differences and agreed that the Sudetenland should be handed over to Germany forthwith.

Neither Czechoslovakia nor the USSR was consulted about the conference and both were excluded from its proceedings. On the second day of the conference the Czechs were presented with a

*Rumania, it should be remembered, was allied to Czechoslovakia through the Little Entente, established in 1929. This was an alliance of these two states, together with Yugoslavia, dedicated to the maintenance of the status quo in central and south-eastern Europe.

demand for their immediate withdrawal from the Sudetenland²⁰². Before taking a decision Beneš asked Alexandrovsky to question Moscow about the USSR's attitude if Czechoslovakia decided to fight on alone, without French support. Alexandrovsky's telegram from Prague was received at 5.00 p.m. Moscow time. Forty-five minutes later, before the Soviets had time to reply to the first, a second telegram arrived stating that Beneš had withdrawn the question and would shortly announce Czechoslovakia's acceptance of the Munich agreement²⁰³.

One of the most tantalizing unanswered questions of the Munich crisis is what the Soviet Union would have done if Czechoslovakia had decided to stand and fight alone. Soviet historians have always maintained that the USSR would have fought alongside Czechoslovakia, and insist that an offer of unilateral aid (i.e. one not dependent on French action) was communicated to Beneš. However, they are strangely vague and contradictory as to when and how this offer was made and have still to produce any hard evidence to confirm their assertions²⁰⁴. Indeed, in December 1988 the Soviet journal *International Affairs* published a document which proves beyond any reasonable doubt that the USSR did not offer to aid Czechoslovakia unilaterally. The document in question is an account of the last days of the Czechoslovak crisis by the Soviet Ambassador in Prague, Sergei Alexandrovsky, written in October 1938. Alexandrovsky discusses quite explicitly the issue of Soviet unilateral aid in the context of an account of the Czechoslovak domestic debate about whether or not such aid would be forthcoming, but makes no mention of any such Soviet offer. He also clarifies the reason why: no clear request for such a commitment was forthcoming from Beneš and the Czechoslovak Government, at least not before 30 September 1938 (when the question was withdrawn before it could be answered). Further, he argues that from the Soviet point of view Beneš was playing a subtle diplomatic game with them – on the one hand, anxious for Soviet aid, but on the other hand fearful that Moscow would be 'scared off' by the prospect of war with Germany without the involvement of Britain and France. Throughout the crisis, therefore, he attempted to give Alexandrovsky the impression that British and French aid would be forthcoming come what may, and tried to entice the USSR into unsolicited commitments on its part²⁰⁵. It was a game that Moscow was evidently not willing to play, at least not according to Beneš' rules.

The fact that Moscow did not make an offer of unilateral aid does not prove that the USSR would not have supported Czechoslovakia on its own in the event of a German attack. Judging by Alexandrovksy's report, not to mention Soviet actions throughout the crisis, it would have done so. But what *could* the Soviet Union have done to aid Czechoslovakia on its own? One who has addressed this issue is Telford Taylor. He points to three limitations on the Soviet ability to assist Czechoslovakia in the event of war with Germany:

- (a) the lack of a common frontier which would have meant Soviet forces travelling 300 miles across Rumania and Slovakia to make contact with the invading Germans in Bohemia and Moravia – an operation that might have taken three months;
- (b) the absence of a common frontier with Germany meant that in order to apply direct military pressure on the Germans the Red Army would have had to cross Poland or the Baltic States;
- (c) the distances separating Czechoslovakia from the USSR which would have made air support and supply difficult and hazardous.

Taylor concludes that the most likely forms of Soviet military assistance would have been the deployment of forces along the Polish border in order to restrain Warsaw's designs on Teschen, pressure on East Prussia via the threat of a lunge along the Baltic coast, efforts to gain Rumanian co-operation in the passage of Soviet forces to Czechoslovakia, and material aid to the Czechs similar to that provided to the Spanish Republicans. Even in the event of France coming to Czechoslovakia's aid, it is doubtful that the USSR would have been able to do much more than this – unless France had invaded Germany and Poland had agreed to the transit of Soviet forces across its territory²⁰⁶.

The intriguing question of whether the USSR would have fought alongside Czechoslovakia and what it could have done to aid the Czechs should not be allowed to obscure a much more important facet of the Munich crisis from the Soviet point of view. In Soviet eyes Munich was the last opportunity to halt Hitler's advance short of all-out war. The accretion of German power resulting from the annexation of Austria and the subjugation of Czechoslovakia signified to Moscow that the threat of war would no longer be enough to deter Hitler. To that extent Munich marked the final failure of collective security's original objective of checking German expansion-

ism and postponing the outbreak of war for the foreseeable future.

The USSR did not formally abandon the collective security strategy after Munich; indeed, the spring of 1939 was to witness the revival of the Soviet collective security programme in the wake of Hitler's march on Prague. But by this time the Soviet objective was not deterrence. It was a war-fighting alliance. Collective security was superseded by a strategy of collective defence.

Paradoxically, as Moscow reformulated its collective security project in new terms, the British and French began to embrace the pre-Munich Soviet formula of deterring Hitler by a strong stand and a show of force. It was too late. By the time of the triple alliance negotiations in the summer of 1939 Moscow was convinced that war was inevitable. The Soviets wanted a war-fighting alliance with the British and French. If that was not possible, there was always the option of standing alone – of protecting Soviet security by whatever means were available, including a deal with Hitler.

At this point in the narrative it is necessary to make a detour from the main chronology of events leading to the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 in order to review Soviet-German relations during the collective security period. Moscow's diplomatic tactics in Nazi Germany have long been a source of controversy in the West. The next chapter examines those tactics in some detail.

CHAPTER

5 *Bridge-Building in Berlin: Soviet-German Relations in the Collective Security Era*

‘We, as a State, are not concerned with the internal Fascist regime of this or that country. Our collaboration with other countries and our participation in the League of Nations are based on the principle of peaceful co-existence of two systems – the Socialist and Capitalist – and we consider the latter includes the Fascist system. But Fascism is now ceasing to be an internal affair of the countries which preach it.’ *M.M. Litvinov, November 1936*

Bridges to Berlin

By the end of 1933 the Rapallo relationship between the Soviet Union and Germany had been shattered. But that did not end Moscow’s hopes for at least an equitable relationship with Berlin. Indeed, the collective security era was punctuated throughout by Moscow’s efforts to restore the equilibrium in Soviet-German relations.

Soviet attempts to build bridges to Berlin spanned two main phases. The first – from the beginning of 1934 to early 1935 – coincided with the period of transition in Soviet foreign relations from the era of Rapallo to that of collective security. Not surprisingly, therefore, Soviet policy towards Germany in this period oscillated between a belief that it was possible to arrive at some kind of *modus vivendi* with Hitler and militant opposition to Nazi plans for aggrandizement; between containing Hitler by securing German commitments to peace and collective security, and encirclement of the Nazi regime through founding a grand alliance against fascism. Events pushed Moscow increasingly towards opposition and encirclement. In April 1934 Berlin rebuffed Moscow’s proposals for a mutual guarantee of the Baltic States. This was followed, in September, by its refusal to participate in the Eastern pact of mutual security and in

March 1935 by Hitler's announcement of conscription and a programme of rearmament. Meanwhile, Germany gave no indication that it would rejoin the League of Nations nor that the anti-Bolshevik crusade of the Nazis would be toned down. The final blow to Rapallo came with the Franco-Soviet and Soviet-Czechoslovak pacts of mutual assistance in May 1935. The Nazi chorus of indignation and denunciation of the pacts resounded for nearly a year. Indeed, Hitler later used them as a pretext for the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936.

Against this background of almost total diplomatic estrangement the Soviets shaped their policy for the second phase. Towards the end of 1935 the Narkomindél's activities in relation to Germany took a new tack. Having concluded that an accommodation with Hitler was extremely unlikely, Moscow decided to cultivate potential sources of opposition to the Nazi dictator – the Rapalloites in the German Foreign Office, those sections of the Reichswehr that feared the military consequences of Nazi adventurism, bankers and industrialists with an interest in trade with the USSR, and even Nazis who favoured a more conciliatory line towards the Soviet Union. For nearly a year Soviet diplomats gently courted these circles to encourage opposition to Hitler's foreign policy and to enhance the prospects for a rapid normalization of German-Soviet relations in the event of the Nazi leader's downfall.

Much of the impetus behind this new tactical line derived from a growing perception in Soviet circles that the German economy was in crisis. Rearmament, the policy of economic autarky and problems in agricultural production had combined, it was believed, to produce inflation, balance of payments difficulties and severe food shortages. The concomitant of this economic crisis was a political fracturing of the Nazi power bloc which presented new opportunities for Soviet diplomacy¹.

By early 1937, however, it had become clear that the harvest to be reaped from these new tactics was very meagre indeed. German foreign policy continued its anti-Soviet course and there was no sign of Hitler's position weakening, despite continuing economic problems. The bridge to Berlin had proved too difficult to span and thereafter Soviet diplomatic initiatives in the German capital subsided and were not revived until the spring of 1939.

Faced with the apparent discrepancy between Moscow's averred commitment to a collective security front against fascism and its

private diplomatic overtures in Berlin, many historians have sought to ascribe a deeper significance to Soviet policy towards Germany. They have argued that Moscow's political probes in Berlin were part of a strategy to secure a secret rapprochement with Hitler, a sort of precursor to the negotiations that resulted in the Nazi-Soviet pact. In addition, the two policy phases are seen as evidence of a split in the Soviet leadership between adherents of collective security and advocates of a Rapallo-type policy². As we shall see, such contentions are not supported by the evidence, particularly that now available from Soviet archives. However, more important to note at this point is that such interpretations fail to acknowledge the complexity of the ideological, political, tactical and strategic considerations which determined Soviet policy towards Nazi Germany.

In the realm of ideology the prime determinant was the doctrine of peaceful co-existence – a belief in the desirability of businesslike relations between states with different social systems, even fascism and communism. Successive Soviet diplomats arriving in Berlin brought essentially the same message. There was no inherent reason why Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia could not live with each other. It was changes in German policy that had ended the special relationship. It was the reality of Hitler's hostile policy towards the USSR which finally soured relations, not his anti-Soviet ravings at Nuremberg. Hitler's overt intention to make war on the USSR provoked Soviet counter-measures, not the iron dreams of *Lebensraum* in *Mein Kampf*. It was not terrorism inside Germany which mattered, but its aggressive foreign policies.

At one level these Soviet statements were bombast, supporting an expedient position in the day-to-day conduct of bilateral relations; a cynical device to rationalize diplomatic initiatives taken for purely political reasons. But at another level they expressed a deeply-ingrained commitment and belief in Soviet diplomatic outlook and practice.

The doctrine of peaceful co-existence made an equitable relationship with Nazi Germany conceivable in theory, but it did not make it possible in practice. Moscow's faith in that respect drew its strength from the political analysis of the condition of Nazi Germany referred to earlier: that behind the Nazi threats and tirades there was domestic instability and political division. This perception in turn intersected with an optimistic belief that sooner or later popular discontent with the Nazi regime would force German foreign policy

to change. Hence the Narkomindel's persistent concern not to offend public opinion in Germany, as expressed, for example, in a letter from Ambassador Suritz in November 1934³:

In executing our political and tactical line in Germany we must not lose sight of the fact that the current regime will not last forever and that there are millions and millions of Germans who while far from supporting the policy of the present government remain fervent patriots. It would, therefore, be a profound mistake to forget these millions when it comes to our words and deeds. Our approach to the current regime must not appear to take a form which can be misinterpreted by the broad masses as an attack on the national interests of Germany as a whole.

Hence, also Moscow's perennial appeals to the interests of the German people over the heads of the Nazi Government, as, for example, in Molotov's speech to the Central Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet in January 1936⁴:

The development of commercial and economic relations with other States, irrespective of the political forces temporarily ruling those countries, is in conformity with the policy of the Soviet Government. We think that it is also in keeping with the interests of the German people, and it is the business of the Government of Germany, of course, to draw practical conclusions from this.

In retrospect, we can judge Soviet perceptions of domestic politics in Nazi Germany as misconstrued. They underestimated the strength of Hitler's position, overvalued the significance of the opposition to him and exaggerated popular discontent with the Nazi regime. However, the inadequacies of Moscow's view of the instability and weakness of Nazi Germany should not obscure the important tactical benefits that accrued from the tactics it spawned. The activities of Soviet diplomats in Berlin sparked off repeated rumours of an impending Soviet-German rapprochement⁵. The prospect of such a turnaround was a card the Narkomindel played time and again in its relations with Britain and France.

It is important to note, too, that Moscow was not the only or the most important player in the Berlin diplomatic game. The activities of the Narkomindel were a side-show compared to the central drama played out between German and British and French diplomats as the

Versailles powers strove to arrive at a new settlement with Germany. Moscow, of course, manoeuvred to prevent this and to secure Anglo-French support for the Soviet alternative of collective security. Quite sensibly, in the face of the danger of an Anglo-French settlement with Germany, the Soviets took out an insurance policy. On no account would they burn all diplomatic bridges to Berlin. At the very least, lines of communication would be maintained and the option to reconstruct Soviet-German relations retained.

The Baltic guarantee

During 1934–5 Moscow's bridge-building to Berlin took place in the context of negotiations for an Eastern Locarno, discussed in the previous chapter. The USSR did, however, attempt one major unilateral initiative, which illustrates that, despite the traumas of 1933, Moscow still thought a renewal of Soviet-German relations possible. On 28 March 1934 Litvinov approached Nadolny, the German Ambassador, with the idea of a joint Soviet-German guarantee of the independence and integrity of the Baltic States, pointing out that Berlin's acceptance of this proposition would help to improve German-Soviet relations. Later that day Nadolny talked further about the Baltic guarantee with Krestinsky and Voroshilov (the Soviet Defence Minister), who tried to persuade him of the merit of the proposal⁶.

As a Rapalloite, Nadolny was not unsympathetic but the response from Berlin was emphatically negative. On 14 April Nadolny relayed to Litvinov Berlin's rejection of the proposal on the grounds that since there was no threat to the Baltic States there was no need for such a guarantee and that, in any case, there were more suitable means to improve Soviet-German relations⁷.

Moscow viewed as ominous the German rejection of a Baltic guarantee. It was a further signal that Hitler's expansionist ambitions would take him eastwards. The rejection also coincided with some unwelcome developments in Soviet-Polish and German-Polish relations which underlined Soviet fears about the direction of German expansion.

In December 1933 the Poles had refused a similar Soviet proposal for a joint guarantee of the Baltic States⁸. Worse still, in January 1934, they had signed a declaration of non-aggression with

Germany⁹. Soviet suspicions were particularly aroused by the absence of any clause that would allow either party to renounce the agreement in the event of aggression against a third party. As a Narkomindel official explained, the omission of such a clause¹⁰

secures for Germany Poland's neutrality in the event of German aggression. . . This means that not only will Poland assume neutrality in the event of a German invasion of Austria, but also in the case of German aggression against Lithuania and the East in general.

The Narkomindel's pessimistic judgement was confirmed during Polish Foreign Minister Beck's visit to Moscow between 13 and 18 February. Summing up his discussions with Beck, Litvinov concluded that there was no possibility of collaboration with Poland against Germany in the near future, nor any prospect of a joint agreement to guarantee the Baltic States. He also considered that Poland had fundamentally changed its foreign policy and was now trying to disguise this by creating an impression of good relations with the USSR¹¹.

Nor did the Soviets regard as helpful Poland's lukewarm attitude towards a proposal to extend the non-aggression pact between them for another ten years. Litvinov wrote, on 26 March, that the Polish attitude¹²

once again confirmed the correctness of our assumption that Poland will firmly keep to a policy of a free hand in relation to the USSR. . . it is absolutely clear that she wishes to preserve the possibility of denouncing the pact in 1935.

The Polish-Soviet Treaty of Non-Aggression was, in fact, prolonged for 10 years on 5 May 1934¹³. This did not, however, allay Soviet fears about the danger of a Polish-German alliance directed against the USSR. Such an alliance did not materialize in any real form during the 1930s, but while Beck continued the traditional Polish policy of manoeuvring between the USSR and Germany the possibility still existed in principle. Moscow's suspicions of Warsaw's intentions in this respect remained unabated until Hitler's denunciation of the Polish-German non-aggression treaty in April 1939¹⁴.

Soviet anxieties concerning Poland were lent added piquancy by the strategic problem posed by the Baltic States. Bounded by East

Prussia, Poland, the USSR and the Baltic Sea, these countries represented in Soviet eyes a weak link in their defensive chain stretching from Odessa in the south to Leningrad in the north. A German or German-Polish advance in the north-east along the Baltic coast could rapidly surround and cut off Leningrad from the rest of the USSR. For this reason the Narkomindel always insisted (but not always successfully) that the Baltic States should be included in any system of security guarantees in Eastern Europe. This was the case during the negotiations for an Eastern Locarno and during the tripartite alliance talks with the British and French in 1939. As we shall see later, Moscow finally solved this thorny security problem in 1940 when the Baltic States were occupied and then incorporated into the USSR.

The Baltic guarantee was the last major political agreement formally discussed between Germany and the USSR until the Nazi-Soviet negotiations five years later in the summer of 1939. A further round of public recriminations in Soviet-German relations followed the Baltic failure, culminating on the Soviet side in Molotov's report to the 7th Congress of Soviets in January 1935. Molotov reminded delegates of Hitler's statements in *Mein Kampf* and then demanded to know whether Hitler's policy of territorial conquest in Eastern Europe remained in force. 'Apparently this statement does remain in force, because it is only this assumption that can explain many things in the present attitude of the German Government towards the USSR'¹⁵.

Molotov's public sentiments were echoed in the private diplomatic correspondence of the Narkomindel. In January 1935 the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin wrote to Moscow that¹⁶:

hostility towards the USSR. . . is the basis of Hitler's tactical line in foreign policy. Hitler and his closest entourage are firmly convinced that only by following a thoroughly anti-Soviet course would the Third Reich be able to achieve its objectives and gain allies and friends.

Litvinov agreed. In June 1935 he wrote to the Berlin embassy that¹⁷:

We assume that Hitler continues to fight all efforts at the organization of collective security, since the basis of his policy is still in accordance with his book *My Struggle*, the gathering of power and preparation for aggression, in the first place in a south-eastern and eastern direction.

In January 1936, at a meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, Molotov returned to his attack on Hitler's foreign policy, but, significantly, tempered it by a more conciliatory tone¹⁸. As Krestinsky explained in a letter to Suritz¹⁹.

Molotov's speech was . . . far softer in relation to Germany than his speech last year. He has, after all, openly declared our desire to improve relations with the German Government and mentioned our readiness to maintain and even widen our trade with Germany on the basis of a loan which should be granted to us. That is why I think that German government circles will not perceive Molotov's speech as particularly hostile.

In the intervening period, Soviet policy towards Germany had moved into its second phase, characterized by Moscow's attempts to build new bridges to German 'opposition' circles. Hence the olive branch in Molotov's speech and Krestinsky's concern that Suritz should convey the right impression to the Germans.

Economics and politics

Between March 1934 and April 1936 the USSR and Germany concluded four economic agreements²⁰, negotiations around which occurred intermittently throughout 1934, 1935 and 1936. The main substance of these negotiations was the desire of both sides to reverse the decline in trade between them which set in from 1934. Before Hitler's rise to power, Germany was, after Britain, the USSR's second biggest trading partner. Hitler or no, the Soviet need for credits to buy German industrial goods remained, as did Germany's need for Soviet food and raw material exports. Both, therefore, wanted the negotiations to be successful. But despite this mutual interest and the agreements that were signed, the long-term decline in Soviet-German commerce continued, and was not reversed until after the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939²¹.

The economic discussions were the main point of diplomatic contact between the two states and it was in this context that Moscow pursued its strategy of courting those in government circles thought to be favourable to the renewal of German-Soviet relations.

A key figure in Soviet political overtures is said to have been the

Georgian David Kandelaki, the Soviet trade representative in Germany, who had been a childhood friend of Stalin. There has been much speculation that Stalin and Molotov asked Kandelaki to open the way to Soviet-German rapprochement on a secret mission which bypassed Litvinov and the Narkomindel. Some substance has been lent to these speculations by the recollections of former Soviet diplomat Yevgeny Gnedin²²:

I was First Press Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Berlin when Kandelaki was the USSR trade representative. . . I do not know to what extent Ambassador Suritz was aware of Kandelaki's talks with the German ministers. I have reason to think that Kandelaki did not inform Suritz of his reports. . . Kandelaki clearly gave us the impression that he had confidential instructions from Stalin personally and the power to go beyond economic subjects in talks with the Germans. The trade representatives and embassy officials were aware that Kandelaki was close to Stalin . . . and that he was actively attempting, irrespective of Litvinov and his co-workers, to 'build bridges' between the Soviet and Hitler governments.

The Soviet Government has still to release the papers relating to Kandelaki's 'secret mission' and his role in Berlin. But we do know that there were separate lines of communication between the Soviet foreign trade organization in Moscow and its representatives abroad²³. Perhaps it was these communications that Gnedin picked up. We also know that the Soviet embassy in Berlin was intimately involved in the economic negotiations with the Germans, that Litvinov received regular reports of these contacts and that tactics in the negotiations were the subject of regular exchanges between Moscow and Berlin²⁴. Finally, and most importantly, we know that Kandelaki was not the only one involved in sounding out the Germans about the prospects for improving Soviet-German relations. Ambassador Suritz, Bessonov (an embassy counsellor) and *Gnedin himself* were also very active.

Kandelaki was an unlikely secret emissary. His first documented attempt to probe the prospects of an improvement in Soviet-German political relations was at a meeting in July 1935 with Schacht, the German Economics Minister. Schacht's report of the meeting conveys the impression of a rather inept performance by Kandelaki²⁵. Interestingly, at another meeting in November, Kandelaki made no

further overtures²⁶. But there were other signs that a new Soviet diplomatic initiative towards Germany was in the offing. In October 1935 Tukhachevsky told the German Military Attaché in Moscow that

he was sorry that Germany and the Soviet Union were not working together. The two countries could very well complement each other economically and they had no territorial issues in dispute. . . If Germany and the Soviet Union still had the same friendly political relations they used to have, they would be in a position to dictate peace to the world.

This was followed by a pointed toast from Litvinov to German Ambassador Schulenburg at a reception to celebrate the anniversary of the Russian Revolution: 'I drink to the rebirth of our friendship'²⁷.

The most interesting developments were still to come. Towards the end of November Suritz returned to Berlin from Moscow with instructions 'to activate contacts with the Germans'. He reported²⁸:

All the conversations I had with the Germans only strengthened the conviction I had before that the course against us, on which Hitler has embarked, will remain unchanged and that we cannot expect any serious alteration in the future. . . My talk with Neurath was not exactly encouraging. He let me know directly that our relations have to remain in a narrow economic frame for the time being. Though he emphasized that this will certainly be reflected in our political relations. . . It is particularly noteworthy that to my cautious enquiry – whether cultural relations cannot be re-established between our countries along with economic ones – he replied that this is hardly to be accomplished in the 'present climate'. I repeat that it's more obvious to me now than at any time before that Hitler and his entourage will not voluntarily change their course as far as relations with us are concerned. The only impulse for this could be some far-reaching events within the country. . . or the strengthening of the anti-German international front. . . There is nothing we can do at the moment, but wait patiently and continue to strengthen our economic work. . . Implementation of our agreements will set interested commercial circles in motion and bring them closer to us, it will doubtless strengthen our 'basis' in Germany and will make a turning in the political course considerably easier when the present German leadership is forced to it by further events.

Despite Suritz's apparent misgivings about the short-term efficacy of Moscow's new tactical line, he and his staff pursued it vigorously. Gnedin started the ball rolling on 2 December when he broached the question of Soviet-German relations with a member of the foreign policy office run by Nazi Party ideologist Rosenberg²⁹. On 10 December Bessonov and Suritz met German Foreign Office official Twardowski (formerly attached to the German embassy in Moscow). Bessonov wanted to know how German-Soviet relations could be improved, particularly in view of the impending economic negotiations. Suritz went further and suggested that the 1926 Berlin Treaty could be 'developed'. He was also at pains to emphasize that Litvinov was not an opponent of Soviet-German rapprochement³⁰.

On 13 December Suritz reported to Litvinov³¹:

The problem of relations with us is presently arousing much more attention and, it seems, is becoming the subject of discussion in circles close to the top leadership. As far as it is possible to judge from private reports. . . the official anti-Soviet course is being criticized not only from the side of the Reichswehr, Schacht and the foreign ministry but also from sections of the [Nazi] party.

Four days later he wrote to Krestinsky noting that, although there had been no improvements in Soviet-German relations, there was in 'Reichswehr and industrial circles a growing belief in the unproductiveness and erroneousness of National Socialism's anti-Soviet course'³². The next day Suritz informed Litvinov that 'we are not interrupting the efforts to widen our German contacts. We have recently made some new acquaintances and are keeping up old ones'³³. During the same period Bessonov noted in his diary that several conversations had 'confirmed the pressure in Germany. . . to "normalize" relations with the USSR'³⁴.

Moscow, however, was not so sanguine. On 19 December Litvinov wrote to Suritz³⁵:

Concerning your reports and those of your colleagues about the allegedly noticeable turn in German policy towards the USSR I am somewhat sceptical. . . It is no surprise that some Reichswehr circles, industrialists and some people from culture adhere to a slightly different line [from Hitler]. This could have been expected earlier and we have never had any

doubts about it. Thanks to more intensive personal contacts we managed to hear things that we had presumed before. There is nothing new and unexpected about it.

Three weeks later Krestinsky wrote to Suritz in a similar vein³⁶:

As far as the question of the Germans changing their political position in relation to us is concerned, neither in Berlin, nor in Moscow, nor in any other quarter of the globe are there any indications of any changes in this direction.

Are these hints of dissent in Moscow about the new tactical line? Possibly, but a more likely explanation is that the perceptions of those on the ground in Berlin, not unexpectedly, differed from those back at the centre in Moscow. As Litvinov made clear to Suritz in his letter of 19 December, his main concern was that Soviet diplomats in Berlin appeared to have been somewhat remiss in pointing out to the Germans that it was their policies which had created an impasse in Soviet-German relations and that it was up to Berlin, not Moscow, to prove its goodwill³⁷.

The Soviet approaches to the Germans nonetheless continued. On 20 December Bessonov suggested to a German Foreign Office official that the 1926 Berlin Treaty could be supplemented with a non-aggression pact³⁸. New Year 1936 brought Molotov's speech to the Central Executive Committee which the Soviet Premier followed up in a interview with a French journalist in March. Asked about Soviet opinions of Germany Molotov replied³⁹:

There is a tendency among certain sections of the Soviet public towards an attitude of thoroughgoing irreconcilability to the present rules of Germany, particularly because of the ever repeated hostile speeches of German leaders against the Soviet Union. But the chief tendency, and the one determining the Soviet Government's policy, thinks an improvement in Soviet-German relations possible.

In April both Suritz and Litvinov had meetings with Schulenburg, at which they asked about Soviet-German relations, but neither had anything new to report⁴⁰. In early May the Soviet trade delegation in Berlin hosted a reception and once again Bessonov and Gnedin spoke to their German counterparts of the need for political detente

between Germany and the Soviet Union⁴¹. This was followed on 22 May by a further meeting between Neurath and Suritz at which the Soviet Ambassador asked whether any changes in Soviet-German political relations could be expected now that economic negotiations had been concluded⁴². Finally, in July Bessonov again raised the possibility of a German-Soviet non-aggression treaty⁴³.

Bessonov's overture in July 1936 was, for the time being, the last real Soviet effort to sow the seeds of political co-operation with Germany. Further, subdued overtures by Gnedin in October⁴⁴ and by Kandelaki in December and in January 1937⁴⁵ were hollow echoes of a strategy that had exhausted itself. All the Soviet approaches had met a blank wall of German lack of interest. External political events, too, had intervened to nudge German-Soviet diplomatic relations again into a downward spiral. The Spanish civil war which broke out in July 1936 developed into a virtual war-by-proxy between Germany and the Soviet Union. In September Hitler launched an anti-Bolshevik crusade at the annual Nuremberg rally. In November Japan and Germany signed the Anti-Comintern Pact.

Nor were domestic political developments in the USSR particularly auspicious for Soviet-German relations. In August 1936 the first of the great Show Trials was staged in Moscow. The trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev and others, like those that followed in January 1937 (Radek and Pyatakov) and March 1938 (Bukharin and Krestinsky), had a distinctly anti-Nazi theme. The defendants were accused of involvement in a Gestapo-Trotskyite conspiracy against the USSR⁴⁶.

It was a sign of the times that on 4 August 1936 Krestinsky wrote to Suritz that 'German affairs have not been discussed here for a relatively long time'. He said that prospects for German-Soviet relations were still viewed negatively since 'Germany does not conceal its definitely hostile attitude towards us'. This view, he concluded pointedly, coincided with his own, that of Litvinov and of 'the leading comrades'⁴⁷.

The 'leading comrades' also apparently held the view that, despite the downturn in Soviet-German relations, the USSR should take no precipitate action. On 11 September Suritz proposed to Moscow the following response to the 'mad anti-Soviet campaign'⁴⁸ launched at Nuremberg: a note of protest, a public statement from a Soviet leader, and a suspension of the supply of some raw materials. On 19 September Krestinsky relayed the (presumably) politburo's decision

– not to send a note of protest, to restrict the Soviet response to press articles, and for Suritz to raise the question sharply with political leaders in Germany⁴⁹.

It is not clear what precise calculations led to the politburo's measured response to Nuremberg. Certainly it is possible that they had taken to heart the tenor of a long series of despatches on Nazi foreign policy from Suritz in Berlin. The Nazi diplomatic aim, Suritz argued, was to isolate the USSR internationally. They intended to achieve this through pointed anti-Soviet policies and pronouncements to frighten off potential collaborators with the Soviet Union. It would be imprudent of the USSR, therefore, to reinforce this tactic by adopting an equally intransigent course. It made no sense for Moscow to add fuel to the anti-Soviet flames⁵⁰.

Another of Suritz's themes was the domestic weakness of the Nazi regime, in accordance with the reports that littered the Soviet and Comintern press in 1935–6. In October 1936, for example, he wrote⁵¹:

More than ever at the present time Germany's strength lies exclusively in the weakness of the peace front. Possibly our decisive action on the Spanish question will have a beneficial effect and might result in at least some kind of consolidation of the forces counterposed to fascism. If this kind of consolidation comes about then the Germans might be forced to retreat, for Germany's economic and even military power is being seriously undermined by economic and general internal political difficulties.

It is necessary to stress . . . that the fascist regime is being tested by difficulties it has not encountered in the last two years of its existence. Last month fully confirmed . . . that the anti-Soviet hysteria at Nuremberg . . . is to be explained by internal weakness. The food position is worsening rapidly and industrial raw materials have passed from a critical to a catastrophic position.

Suritz left Berlin to become Ambassador to France in the summer of 1937. He was replaced by Urenev, former Soviet Ambassador in Tokyo. Urenev's sojourn in Berlin was brief. Two weeks after he presented his credentials (on 21 July) he was recalled to Moscow, never to return to Berlin⁵². In March 1938 he emerged as a co-defendant in the Bukharin/Krestinsky show trial along with, among others, Bessonov. All four were subsequently executed. Kandelaki had already perished in the purges. Moscow had liquidated the

agents of its abortive attempt in 1935–6 to meddle in German domestic politics as well as the tactical line itself.

Of all the principals in the diplomatic dramas of 1935–6 only Suritz and Gnedin survived. Gnedin returned to Moscow in 1937 to serve in the Narkomindel's press section. In May 1939 he too was arrested and imprisoned, but survived 15 years in the labour camps and in internal exile⁵³. Suritz escaped relatively unscathed. Returning to Moscow from Paris in 1940, he served in the Narkomindel's central apparatus until 1945. He died, of natural causes, in 1951.

CHAPTER

6 *Alliance Versus Isolation: Soviet Foreign Policy after Munich*

'... out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.' *Henry IV Part 1*, Act 2, Scene 3, lines 11-12. Cited by Neville Chamberlain after his return from the Munich conference.

'The purpose you undertake is dangerous; the friends you have named uncertain; the time itself unsorted; and your whole plot too light for the counterpoise of so great an opposition.' *Henry IV Part 1*, Act 2, Scene 3, lines 12-16. Cited by *Izvestiya* in response to Chamberlain.

Post-Munich reflections

The Soviet reaction to the Munich settlement was one of shock followed by anger and, finally, sullen acquiescence. In a melodramatic telegram to Litvinov from London on 2 October Maisky echoed Lloyd George¹:

The League of Nations and collective security are dead. International relations are entering an era of the most violent upsurge of savagery and brute force and policy of the mailed fist.

Litvinov had just returned to Moscow from Geneva via France. While in Paris, he refused to see Bonnet and when a meeting was forced upon him berated the Foreign Minister over the French capitulation at Munich².

Nothing angered the Russians more than the suggestion that the USSR was implicated in Czechoslovakia's dismemberment. Press stories published in early October, apparently of Anglo-French origin, reported that the Soviet Union had been fully informed and consulted about the discussions at the Munich Conference. Tass issued two separate denials of Soviet involvement, completely disassociating the USSR from the four-power agreement on

Czechoslovakia³. On 4 October Potemkin instructed Soviet embassies to publicize the Tass statements⁴:

We must expose the Anglo-French intrigue, the purpose of which is either to whitewash England and France through our supposed complicity . . . or to compromise us . . . before international public opinion and in the eyes of the democratic masses.

Such indignation, however, was no substitute for political initiative, which was completely lacking in Soviet foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of the September crisis and for another six months. Collective security was dead, as Maisky recorded, but the opening of a distinctively new period in Europe's diplomatic manoeuvring awaited Hitler's occupation of Prague in March 1939. In the meantime European affairs entered an interregnum of relative political stability. Apart from discredited rumours of a possible German thrust into the Ukraine, Soviet foreign relations in Europe in the period from 'Munich' to 'Prague' are singularly uneventful.

The main interest of this period is the reflections of Stalin, Litvinov, Molotov and others on the new situation in Europe after Munich. And 'reflections' rather than decisions or actions are the appropriate object of analysis since Soviet foreign policy in these months is characterized, above all, by passivity. This hiatus in Soviet policy has often been interpreted as a retreat into isolation. Certainly, there must have been a sense of isolation in Moscow – heightened by the withdrawal shortly after Munich of both the British and French Ambassadors⁵. With the defeat of the collective security strategy the Soviet Union withdrew not into isolation but out of any active intervention in European affairs, and adopted a wait-and-see policy. In November 1938 Litvinov told Payart, the French Chargé in Moscow, that⁶:

We consider the Munich Agreement to be an international misfortune. England and France will now hardly succeed in retreating from the policy they have charted which amounts to the unilateral satisfaction of the demands of all three aggressors, Germany, Italy and Japan. They will present their claims in turn, and England and France will offer them one concession after another. I believe, however, that they will reach the point where the peoples of England and France would have to stop them. Then they will probably have to return to the old path of collective security, for there is no other way to organize the peace.

Litvinov's statement indicated that the basis of Soviet policy had not changed as a consequence of Munich – a view common to diplomatic observers in Moscow⁷ – but its silence on proposals for action raised some awkward questions. What did a 'return to the old path of collective security' mean? How precisely would Soviet Russia respond to changes in British and French policy? What situation would exist when appeasement had exhausted itself? Such issues were destined to be resolved in an unexpected fashion in the spring of 1939.

As it turned out, Munich signified the appeasers' last major concession. British and French policy changed mainly of its own accord, not through popular pressure, and mutual defence rather than collective security emerged as the main plank of Soviet diplomatic strategy.

Litvinov's inaccurate forecasts were not the first nor the last he was to make in this period. But with the assessments, evaluations and attitudes of others, they played an important role in the evolution of the Soviet outlook on foreign relations. This in turn was to have a crucial bearing on the Soviet response to the new opportunities presented by Germany's takeover of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and the reactions to this from Britain and France.

Evidence of Soviet thinking on foreign policy comes from two main sources: the diplomatic correspondence between Litvinov, his Ambassadors in London and Paris, and Soviet embassies in other countries, and major speeches by Molotov and Stalin on the international situation delivered in November 1938 and March 1939, respectively. Significantly, the public political statements of Molotov and Stalin echoed and amplified the themes of the confidential exchanges of Litvinov and his lieutenants abroad. A picture emerges of a basic foreign policy consensus between the elite of party and state and the leading figures in the Narkomindel. It might be objected that, given the nature of the Soviet political system by this time, the picture could hardly have been otherwise. An unprejudiced reading of the reports and letters of Litvinov and his lieutenants indicates, however, that they believed what they said. Although circumspect at times they were not primarily engaged in currying favour with the Soviet leadership⁸.

The central concern of the USSR in the wake of Munich was its future relations with Britain and France and, in particular, the impact of appeasement policies adopted by London and Paris.

Analysing British and French appeasement of Germany ('politiki umirotvoreniya') had been a major preoccupation of the Narkomindel since 1935. In the wake of Munich, however, Moscow's indictment of Anglo-French foreign policy became even more pointed.

A useful summary of the Soviet view on appeasement is contained in a survey of British foreign policy prepared by Maisky in February 1939⁹:

The year 1938 will no doubt go down in the history of British foreign policy as a year that passed entirely under hallmark of Chamberlain's policy of 'appeasement'. . . (which) . . . consists essentially of two points: 1) peace at all costs, and 2) collusion with the aggressors at the expense of third countries by way of granting the aggressor concessions without reciprocity.

Chamberlain's foreign policy, Maisky continued, was fundamentally anti-Communist and anti-Soviet:

his entire foreign policy is based not on resisting the aggressors, but on striking a bargain with the aggressors at the expense of third countries, and if possible, at the expense of the USSR as well. As a result. . . the British Government has been conducting a kind of diplomatic boycott of the Soviet Union.

As a consequence Anglo-Soviet relations had become 'ever cooler and more strained'. Maisky concluded:

Despite isolated instances of zig-zags and vacillations due to temporary considerations, the general line of British foreign policy throughout 1938 remained unchanged . . . there are all grounds to believe that Chamberlain's line . . . will go on being the 'general line' of British foreign policy.

Litvinov's verdict on British foreign policy was similar to Maisky's but harsher in tone, and even more pessimistic. On 17 October 1938, he wrote¹⁰:

The immediate future belongs to Chamberlain, unless Hitler and Mussolini really go too far. Indeed, if the English and French were able to previously offer resistance but did not want to, the question now is

whether they, having lost their positions, will be able to oppose the onslaught of the aggressors even if they wanted to, and whether there is any limit to their compliant attitude.

And two days later¹¹:

There is no doubt that for the sake of reaching an agreement with Germany and Italy, Chamberlain and Daladier-Bonnet will go to any lengths. Of course, it is not to their advantage to make a clean break with us right now, or they would lose their trump card in negotiating with Berlin. They will turn to us only if no agreement can be wangled with Berlin and if the latter puts forward demands even they would find unacceptable.

Looming ever larger in Soviet calculations was their long-standing belief that Britain and France wished to foment conflict between the USSR and Germany. In November, Suritz reported from Paris that 'enjoying great popularity . . . is the theory of giving Germany freedom of action and a free hand in the East.'¹² Litvinov agreed¹³:

The fact that England and France would like to prod Germany to take action against the East is quite understandable and well known . . . it is also true, however, that they would like to direct aggression exclusively against us, so that Poland should not be affected.

But what London and Paris intended and what Berlin wanted were two different things. Both Suritz and Maisky were of the opinion that after Munich appeasement had exhausted itself because Britain and France had nothing left to concede except their own vital security interests. Although the Western powers seemed to want German expansionism directed eastwards, it was doubtful that Hitler was prepared to follow such a course. There was, in fact, a distinct possibility that Hitler (and also Mussolini) would make too many demands of the Western powers and precipitate a conflict with them¹⁴. Litvinov did not agree. On 19 February, in response to a letter from Maisky, he argued¹⁵:

Your letter has not convinced me that Hitler and Mussolini may confront Chamberlain with the unavoidability of war already this year. I believe both Chamberlain and, still more so, the French have decided to avoid

war, at least in the coming years, at all costs, and I would even say at any price. It is incorrect to think that the resources of concessions have run out or are running out.

So far, Hitler has been pretending not to understand the Anglo-French hints about freedom of action in the East, but he may understand them if, in addition to the hints, something else should be offered to him by England and France at their own expense or else if he is promised, in the event of conflict in the East, not only neutrality or even sympathetic neutrality, but also some active assistance, which I on no account consider to be ruled out . . . Both Mussolini and Hitler, who do not at all relish the prospect of war, will go no further in their demands than the line beyond which . . . even Chamberlain's and Bonnet's tractability can come to an end.

Judging by the content of Molotov's and Stalin's speeches in the same period, it seems likely that Litvinov's view predominated in Moscow. The appeasers would continue to make what concessions they could, whilst at the same time actively encouraging German expansion eastwards.

Moscow viewed Anglo-French policy with increasing hostility and suspicion, but fears about British and French objectives were counter-balanced by a more optimistic view of German foreign policy. It is evident, first of all, that Soviet analysts believed that the immediate aspirations of German foreign policy centred on the return of Germany's former colonies. This was the conclusion of three reports submitted by Chargé Astakhov from Berlin in November and December 1938 and of a survey of German foreign policy drawn up by the Soviet Embassy there in February 1939¹⁶.

Secondly, Moscow discounted, in the short term, the possibility of a German attack in the East. One illustration of this was the Soviet response to speculation in December 1938 about an impending German thrust into the Ukraine following Nazi press support for nationalist agitation in favour of a united and independent Ukraine¹⁷. German motives for their press campaign over the Ukraine were analysed in a leading article in Litvinov's house magazine, *Journal de Moscou*. It said the clamour over the Ukraine was designed to mask German aims in the West and lull Britain and France into a false sense of security¹⁸.

Thirdly, the indications that Hitler was more interested in colonial expansion than eastern 'adventures' led Soviet analysts to conclude

that by early 1939 there had been a 'gradual shift in emphasis' in German foreign policy aims to a westerly direction¹⁹.

In their public pronouncements Soviet leaders continued to stress the general threat of war posed by the aggressor nations. Privately, however, they were more sanguine about the short-term prospects for peace. As Litvinov argued, Hitler and Mussolini did not relish the prospect of war, preferring to secure their objectives through the process of appeasement. Since there appeared little likelihood of an immediate change in Anglo-French policy, major conflicts in Europe perhaps lay in the future. But the Soviet Government did detect one potential source of European instability – Poland.

In the autumn of 1938 Moscow and Warsaw attempted to repair the damage to their relations caused by Poland's seizure of the Teschen area from Czechoslovakia at the time of Munich²⁰. On 20 October the Polish Ambassador called on Potemkin and raised the question of improving Polish-Soviet relations. Potemkin interpreted the approach as a sign of Warsaw's fear of future German expansion²¹. Two days later Litvinov himself met Ambassador Grzybowski and, although the Pole was evasive about Warsaw's intentions, Litvinov subsequently proposed a joint communiqué on relations between the two countries²². After further discussions a Polish draft of the communiqué was finally accepted by Litvinov and published on 27 November²³.

The communiqué, which reaffirmed the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty and spoke of expanding trade between the two states²⁴, was far less innovative than the Russians had originally hoped. 'The Polish Government has totally emasculated our plan', Litvinov reported to the Soviet embassy in Warsaw, 'and the document has proved to be decidedly unsuccessful'²⁵.

December saw little progress in Soviet-Polish relations, but Litvinov was optimistic about future co-operation²⁶:

Through another rejection of rapprochement with us he [Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister] is hoping to buy some concessions from Hitler. Logically speaking it is hard to believe that there could be a serious German-Polish agreement since Poland has nothing to offer Germany by way of payment for Germany's renunciation of her claims to Danzig, the 'Corridor', Silesia or Lithuania. . . It would appear therefore that the logic of events should drive Poland quite far down the road of co-operation with us.

He returned to this analysis of incipient German-Polish conflict in January in a letter to Suritz²⁷:

Beck . . . will, as before, try to preserve his freedom of action by manoeuvring between us and Germany without binding himself too strongly to either side. But will Hitler allow him to do that? Will he not confront Poland with the dilemma of either completely obeying the orders of Berlin and associating herself with its policy or else subjecting herself to Hitler's wrath . . . A great many points of issue between Germany and Poland . . . have accumulated, and a lasting and stable agreement is hardly possible.

The only other event which galvanized the Narkomindel in the immediate post-Munich period was the Franco-German declaration of 6 December 1938. The document committed the two countries to mutual consultation about international affairs and recognized as permanent the existing western borders²⁸. Litvinov was convinced that²⁹:

a certain compensation on the part of France – and probably a very big one – was included in the secret part of the talks or even in a secret agreement. I would be inclined to think that this compensation is not exclusively in the political sphere or even in the financial and economic sphere.

Suritz was instructed to find out more about the Franco-German talks. He was able to assuage Litvinov's concerns about a possible secret agreement in the territorial sphere. The significance of the declaration, he argued, was twofold. Firstly, the bilateral nature of the consultation agreement buried even deeper the coffin containing the principles and system of collective security. Secondly, it signalled a further retreat by France from involvement in Central and Eastern European affairs and an increased concentration on protecting its own interests in the west. "Not a single inch of French soil" – under this proud slogan now stands French diplomacy³⁰.

A few months after the Franco-German declaration, at the 18th Party Congress in March 1939, Stalin reiterated the essence of Soviet foreign policy, with the famous and oft-quoted warning that the USSR would not 'be drawn into conflict by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull their chestnuts out of the fire for them'.

Stalin's speech to the 18th Congress was the most important public pronouncement on the USSR's foreign policy in the period between the Czechoslovak crisis of September 1938 and the Polish crisis of August 1939. Some guidelines for interpreting the speech can be drawn from a comparison with Molotov's address to the Supreme Soviet in November 1938. Stalin's statements five months later do not differ essentially from the analysis presented by Molotov. Not surprisingly, given the timing of their delivery, Stalin devoted his report to the consequences of Munich, whereas Molotov had been concerned to explain the reasons for the victory of the 'aggressors'.

As with previous defeats for collective security, the Munich defeat was a consequence of policy, not power, said Molotov³¹:

It is not at all a question of the military or economic weakness of the 'democratic' States. The question is quite a different one. The real point is the absence of a united front of the 'democratic' States against the fascist powers.

Britain and France, Molotov argued, had sacrificed Czechoslovakia in the mistaken belief that the 'aggressors' would be satisfied. Concluding with a warning about the danger of war, Molotov threw down the following challenge to the aggressors: 'Anyone who wants to be convinced of the strength and power of our forces is welcome to try'.

The tenor of Molotov's concluding remark expressed the relative international isolation of the Soviet state in the period following Munich. Boasts of military self-sufficiency, however, seemed a poor substitute for the promise of a grand alliance against fascism that had hitherto inspired Soviet foreign policy. Ominous warnings about war with no proposals to meet the danger inspired little confidence. Indeed, arguably, all the signs in Molotov's speech pointed to Soviet weakness not strength. The same was true of Stalin's congress report in March 1939.

Stalin began his report by expounding the fundamental perspectives on international relations developed during the collective security period. International affairs were characterized by a struggle for the redivision of the world between two blocs of imperialist states: a 'bloc of three aggressor states' consisting of Germany, Japan and Italy, and a group of 'non-aggressive states, primarily England, France and the United States'³². Further,

a new imperialist war is already in its second year. . . The map of Europe, Africa and Asia is being forcibly redrawn. The entire postwar system, the so-called regime of peace, has been shaken to its foundations.

Stalin continued that 'combined, the non-aggressive, democratic states are unquestionably stronger than the fascist states, both economically and in a military sense'. Why, then, had fascist expansionism hitherto proceeded unchecked? Because, he said:

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'. . . the policy of non-intervention means conniving at aggression, giving free rein to war, and, consequently, transforming the war into a world war. The policy of non-intervention reveals an eagerness, a desire, not to hinder the aggressors in their nefarious work: not to hinder Japan, say, from embroiling herself in a war with China, or, better still, with the Soviet Union; not to hinder Germany, say, from enmeshing herself in European affairs, from embroiling herself in a war with the Soviet Union.

But, Stalin warned, the actual direction of fascist expansion might not be what Britain and France thought. Germany 'instead of marching farther east, against the Soviet Union. . . [has]. . . turned, you see, to the west and [is] demanding colonies'. In conclusion, Stalin reaffirmed the traditional principles of Soviet foreign policy and remarked that

the big and dangerous political game started by the supporters of the policy of non-intervention may end in a serious fiasco for them.

Stalin's speech aroused considerable speculation about imminent changes in Soviet foreign policy. Of particular interest then and now was the meaning of his enigmatic reference to pulling chestnuts out of the fire.

There is no real mystery about Stalin's remarks. He was saying that the USSR was not prepared to fight British and French wars for them; a sentiment which is perhaps more apparent from a literal translation of his chestnuts statement – 'to rake the fire with somebody else's hands'³³, ('zagrebat zhar chuzhimi rukami'). More

important was the general tenor of Stalin's speech which reflected the uncertainty and stagnation of Soviet foreign policy following the Munich crisis. Although Stalin might condemn Western appeasement policies and warn Britain and France about their possible consequences, the USSR had little option, in the face of continuing German hostility, but adherence to the aim of creating an anti-fascist alliance in the hope that more propitious circumstances for its realization would materialize in the future. Less than a week later Hitler came to Stalin's rescue and presented Moscow with an opportunity to renew its efforts to forge an alliance with Britain and France.

Decision for alliance: March-April 1939

On 15 March 1939 the peace of Munich was shattered by Germany's occupation of Czechoslovakia. The Germans occupied the Czech lands of Moravia and Bohemia, the Slovaks, with German 'encouragement', having declared their 'independence' the day before. German troops marching on Prague met no resistance. The annexation followed the same pattern as the Austrian Anschluss a year earlier – Hitler browbeat the Czech President, Hacha, into placing his country under the protection of the Reich (Slovakia followed suit the next day)³⁴.

Hitler had broken his plèdges at Munich concerning the security and integrity of dismembered Czechoslovakia and, moreover, had for the first time occupied 'non-German' territories. Condemnation of his action was immediate. More important to the ensuing diplomatic chain of events were the rumours that the annexation of Czechoslovakia was merely the first of a series of German expansionary moves. Rumanian sovereignty was seen to be at risk³⁵ and on 18 March, Seeds, the new British Ambassador, called on Litvinov to inquire what the Soviet position would be in the event of a German ultimatum to King Carol³⁶. By the evening Litvinov had informed Seeds that the USSR was proposing 'the immediate convocation of a conference of representatives of the USSR, England, France, Poland and Rumania' to consider counter-measures to aggression³⁷. The next day Maisky telegraphed the British reply that a conference would be premature, suggesting instead a joint declaration on the security and territorial integrity of Eastern Europe³⁸.

Despite the speed with which the Soviet Union began to revive its previous proposals for collective security against aggression, at this point there were still limits to the kind of initiative it was prepared to take. Litvinov remained sceptical that the 'spring thaw' would have lasting consequences for Anglo-French policy³⁹:

The Czechoslovak events seem to have aroused public opinion in both England and France . . . Nonetheless if in the immediate future Hitler does not commit any new acts of expansion and perhaps even makes a new peace gesture, Chamberlain and Daladier will again start defending the Munich line. They have by no means surrendered yet. The mood built up in governmental circles in favour of co-operation with the USSR cannot therefore be considered a lasting one. Even if the Czechoslovak events and the ultimatum to Rumania have somewhat alarmed Chamberlain and Daladier. . . they fit in completely with their favourite concept of Germany's movement to the East. . .

For five years in the foreign policy field we have been making suggestions for the organization of peace and security, but the Powers have been ignoring them and acting in defiance of them. If England and France are really changing their line let them either make known their views on our previously advanced proposals or else make their own proposals. The initiative must be left to them.³⁹

The British joint declaration fizzled out. On 21 March Seeds delivered to Litvinov a draft of their proposed declaration⁴⁰. On 22 March it was accepted by the Soviet Government⁴¹. But by the end of the month the idea had been dropped. Instead, on 31 March, Britain issued a unilateral guarantee of the independence of Poland⁴².

The Russians were not impressed by their treatment at the hands of the British. Seeds got a very cold reception when he visited Litvinov to find out about the Soviet response to the British guarantee⁴³. Nor were they very impressed by the guarantee itself. The Soviet embassy in London commented⁴⁴:

What can, indeed, Britain . . . really do for Poland and Rumania in the event of a German attack against them? Very little. Before a British blockade of Germany becomes a formidable threat to her, Poland and Rumania will have ceased to exist.

From conversations with Grzybowski in Moscow and other sources, it was apparent that the idea of a joint declaration had been

dropped because the Poles objected to entering any combination which included the USSR⁴⁵. 'Until Poland received a direct blow from Germany', Litvinov complained to Payart, 'it would hardly be possible to change Beck's line'⁴⁶. But the Soviets believed this was no excuse for the British attitude, and they were suspicious that Britain had some ulterior motive for the guarantee to Poland. On 4 April Litvinov assessed the position⁴⁷:

It is possible that by his unexpected readiness to come to the aid of Poland and Rumania Chamberlain is prompting Hitler to direct his aggression to the northeast. Chamberlain is counting on us to resist occupation of the Baltic area and expecting that this will lead to the Soviet-German clash he has been hoping for. But Poland too can hardly take a calm view of Germany's thrust into the Baltic. . .

Of course we cannot be content with the explanation given by the English and their references to Poland, for the legitimate question arises as to why Britain should be so considerate . . . So far it seems to be a question of assistance not to Britain but to Poland: so it is up to Chamberlain and Daladier, not Beck, to have the last word. This is not the first time Britain has been addressing proposals to us and then taking them back because of the real or possible objections of Poland. It is intolerable for us to be in the situation of a man invited to a party and then asked not to come because some of the other guests do not wish to meet him. We would prefer to be crossed off the list of guests altogether.

The alternative, of course, was for the Soviet Union to draw up a guest list and have its own party. And this is what happened when, on 17 April, Litvinov handed the British Ambassador an eight-point plan for a triple alliance between Great Britain, France and the USSR. (See Appendix 2 for the full text of the Soviet proposals.) The essence of the plan was a three-power mutual security treaty which would include political and military guarantees of the security of Eastern Europe. Also at the heart of the plan was a military convention of the three great powers setting out the extent and forms of military aid in the event of aggression.

In proposing such a binding and unqualified mutual security pact between France, Britain and the USSR, Litvinov was attempting to put discussion about defence against German aggression on a new, more secure footing – one which placed the Soviet Union in an equal relation to the Western powers and which would circumvent Polish

opposition to any kind of direct alliance with the USSR. Less obvious is the evolution of this strategy within the Narkomindel, especially the reversal of Litvinov's stated position on 19 March to await Anglo-French initiatives.

The 17 April proposals had their origins, it appears, in Moscow's response to French overtures for the conclusion of a formal mutual security agreement between Britain, France and the USSR. At meetings in Paris on 5 and 7 April, Bonnet raised with Suritz the question of assistance to Poland and Rumania in the event of a German attack. A further meeting took place on 10 April⁴⁸. That same day, Litvinov telegraphed Suritz with instructions to ascertain whether or not Bonnet had any concrete proposals to make, which the Ambassador did the following day⁴⁹. Bonnet replied on 14 April, proposing an agreement whereby the two states would lend each other assistance in the event of a war with Germany as a result of giving military support to Poland and Rumania. Significantly, Bonnet left the way open for Moscow to make counter-proposals. Suritz commented that 'Bonnet himself undoubtedly realizes that his "proposal" . . . is not a serious one, that it is one-sided . . . and that there is no chance of our accepting it'⁵⁰.

Litvinov had already expressed scepticism about the French initiatives. On 11 April he wrote to Suritz⁵¹:

Bonnet is no more inclined to assist Poland, Rumania or anyone else in Eastern Europe than he was inclined to help Czechoslovakia . . . in their discussion with us after the episode of the joint declaration, the British and French have not hinted at any kind of concrete proposal or any kind of treaty with us. If we analyse these discussions, it becomes clear that what they want is to get some kind of binding promise from us without entering into any agreement with us and without undertaking any commitments in respect to us. We are to undertake . . . to assist Poland and Rumania at their first request and in whatever form they should themselves indicate to us. But why should we undertake such unilateral commitments? We are told that it is in our interest to protect Poland and Rumania against Germany. But we shall always be aware of our own interests and will do whatever they require us to do. Why then should we commit ourselves in advance, without deriving any advantage from those commitments?

Suritz shared Litvinov's sentiments on French policy, but he

thought other factors had to be taken into account. Whatever the intentions of the 'Munichmen', their actions since 15 March were having the effect of undermining their previous appeasement policy, particularly in popular opinion. The danger of a negative response to French initiatives (half-hearted though they were) was that it would not be understood by the 'masses' and might present the appeasers with an opportunity to blame the Soviet Union for the failure of collective security. Suritz concluded that Moscow should negotiate with the British and French, but only on the basis of reciprocal obligations⁵².

It must have been considerations of this kind which tipped the balance in Moscow in favour of a new collective security initiative. In addition, signs from London indicated that Britain would take Soviet mutual assistance proposals seriously. In a conversation with Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary, about the Anglo-Polish communiqué of 6 April (which announced negotiations for a mutual assistance pact between the two countries), Maisky was told that the paragraph in the communiqué leaving open the possibility of security arrangements with third countries had been inserted by the British Government with the intention of securing Soviet participation in any future collective security alliance⁵³.

On 13 April Britain and France extended security guarantees to Greece and Rumania. Halifax wanted to know whether the Soviet Union would follow suit⁵⁴. Litvinov responded by asking what concrete forms of assistance Britain envisaged being given to the threatened states in Eastern Europe. Halifax indicated that he wanted a reply to his question about Soviet guarantees by 17 April⁵⁵. Litvinov's reply on that date – the triple alliance plan – combined the British proposal of guarantees to Poland and Rumania (also to the Baltic States, but not to Greece) with an extended version of the French proposal for a mutual assistance agreement. It is significant that Litvinov presented the Soviet plan as being based on earlier British and French proposals⁵⁶.

Having made their move, the Russians retired to consider the position. Between 21 and 28 April a series of conferences were held in the Kremlin. Very little is known about these discussions. The only published account appears in Maisky's memoirs⁵⁷:

In Moscow I attended the Government Conference at which the question of the triple pact was examined in great detail. I had to give the fullest

possible information and explanation about . . . [the UK situation] . . . At that well-remembered conference in the Kremlin. . . I told the truth . . . and the picture in consequence was not a very consoling one. Nevertheless, the Government decided to continue the negotiations and to make every possible effort to persuade the British and French to change their attitude.

Shortly after his return to London in early May, Maisky sent two despatches to Moscow which reported on the growing movement for alliance with the USSR. Chamberlain and the other appeasers had not given up their policies, but were being forced to retreat. 'The logic of events', concluded Maisky in the second of his reports, 'will force England to take the path of resisting the aggressors'⁵⁸. The reports must have confirmed Moscow in its strategy of pursuing a triple alliance with Britain and France.

The foregoing account of the outcome of internal Soviet discussions in the spring of 1939 and of the policy decisions taken by the Soviet leadership would be fiercely contested by many historians. In their view this period is also marked by determined efforts by Moscow to re-establish the option of reconciliation with Berlin⁵⁹. Some accounts even argue that rapprochement with Germany was the Soviet leadership's favoured option and that their actions in this period led directly to the conclusion of the pact with the Nazis in August 1939⁶⁰. Much of their case rests on two crucial pieces of evidence: the first concerns what they would call an infamous secret encounter in Berlin, the second a public bombshell in Moscow.

Infamous encounter: the Merekalov-Weizsäcker meeting

On 17 April 1939 Alexei Merekalov, the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin, paid a visit to Ernst Weizsäcker, State Secretary in the German Foreign Office. According to Weizsäcker, Merekalov had called 'for the first time since he assumed charge of his post here . . . to discuss official matters'. The matters in question were fulfilment of Soviet contracts with the Skoda arms factory in occupied Czechoslovakia. Towards the end of the meeting, Weizsäcker reports, Merekalov steered the conversation towards the following concluding remarks⁶¹:

Russian policy had always followed a straight course. Ideological differences of opinion had had very little adverse effect on relations between Russia and Italy and need not disturb those with Germany either. Russia had not exploited the present friction between Germany and the Western democracies . . . neither did she wish to do that. As far as Russia was concerned there was no reason why she should not live on a normal footing with us, and out of normal relations could grow increasingly improved relations.

To unravel the meaning and significance of Merekalov's statement it is necessary to go back to 1938. It was in July of that year that Merekalov presented his credentials to Hitler. A week earlier, on 6 July, he had met Weizsäcker. At that first encounter Weizsäcker expressed an interest in Soviet-German relations and wondered if Merekalov had plans to expand trade and credit arrangements between the two states⁶². Weizsäcker's presentation of the circumstances in which the meeting in April 1939 took place is, therefore, somewhat misleading.

Before his appointment as Ambassador, Merekalov was a Deputy Commissar for Foreign Trade. His main assignment in Berlin appears to have been connected with Soviet-German economic relations and all the reports of his activities while there confirm that this was the case⁶³. It was not until January 1939, however, that his mission began to make any headway. On the 11th Merekalov informed the Germans that the Soviet Union was prepared to accept Berlin's proposal (made in December 1938) to resume the credit negotiations which had been discontinued in March 1938⁶⁴. It was subsequently agreed that Schnurre, a German economics specialist, would negotiate a new credit agreement in Moscow at the end of January⁶⁵. However, at the last moment – and much to the consternation of the Russians – Schnurre's trip was cancelled⁶⁶. The projected negotiations quickly fizzled out⁶⁷ and there the matter rested until the spring.

A few days before his famous meeting with Weizsäcker, Merekalov talked to Wiehl, Head of the Commercial Policy Division of the German Foreign Office. Wiehl apparently expressed an interest in developing German-Soviet economic relations⁶⁸. Around the same time the Soviet Chargé in Berlin, Georgei Astakhov, had a meeting with Peter Kleist. Kleist was one of Ribbentrop's personal assistants and he had been ordered by the Reich Foreign Minister to

arrange the meeting with a view to cultivating contacts with Soviet diplomats in Berlin⁶⁹.

With this background in mind we can now turn to the meeting on 17 April itself. The fame of this encounter stems from the fact that Weizsäcker's report of it is the very first document printed (under the heading 'Tentative Efforts to improve German-Soviet Relations') in the US Department of State's *Nazi-Soviet Relations*. That report, however, is not the only memorandum Weizsäcker wrote on the meeting (a fact omitted by *Nazi-Soviet Relations*). Weizsäcker wrote a second, rarely-quoted memorandum. In it he recorded that Merekalov had handed him a *note verbale* and a memorandum. These documents have not been found but presumably they concerned economic matters for Weizsäcker goes on to state that Merekalov emphasized his personal role in Soviet-German economic relations and how important fulfilment of the Skoda contracts was for future relations. Weizsäcker also noted Merekalov's comment that he was leaving for Moscow in a few days and that it was important for him to receive a reply to his requests before then⁷⁰.

Merekalov had been recalled to Moscow to take part, together with his Military Attaché, in the Kremlin conference on the triple pact recorded in Maisky's memoirs. Given what we know of Merekalov, of his activities in Berlin and of the background to the 17 April meeting, it is possible to interpret his encounter with Weizsäcker in the following way. Quite simply, encouraged by the meetings with Wiehl and Kleist, he went to see Weizsäcker in order to secure Soviet contracts with Skoda and to start the economic negotiations between Germany and the USSR moving again – quite a feather for a young diplomat to wear in his cap on his return to Moscow. This interpretation is supported by Weizsäcker's second memorandum and also by information on the Soviet interests at stake in Czechoslovakia. It was not just a question of the Skoda contracts. The Germans had seized Soviet credits in Czechoslovak banks and were still refusing to allow a group of Soviet technicians to leave the country⁷¹.

But, what then, of Merekalov's political remarks to Weizsäcker? The first point to note is that it was Weizsäcker who started the discussion about politics⁷².

Towards the end of the discussion I threw in a remark to the Ambassador that, even given goodwill on our side, the atmosphere was not exactly

favourable at the present moment for making deliveries of war material to Soviet Russia owing to reports of a Russian-Anglo-French air pact and such like. M. Merekalov took advantage of this interjection to pass on to politics.

Merekalov's response to Weizsäcker's interjection was in the time-honoured tradition of Soviet diplomats in Berlin, repeated at every opportunity, regardless of the circumstances: there was no inherent reason why Germany and the USSR could not co-exist peacefully and do business together. Viewed from the Soviet side, Merekalov's remarks were neither significant nor exceptional and the meeting itself no more than a routine encounter. Viewed from the other side, the picture was somewhat different. For the Germans, desperate to avert a Soviet alliance with Britain and France, saw Merekalov's remarks as a hopeful sign for their efforts to secure a deal of their own with Moscow. In the coming months they were to refer back to the Merekalov-Weizsäcker meeting many times.

There is one final footnote to the Merekalov-Weizsäcker encounter, which concerns the personal fate of the Soviet Ambassador. Merekalov departed for Moscow on 21 April, never to return to Berlin. Repeated German inquiries as to his whereabouts elicited no response from Moscow. A replacement was not appointed until September 1939⁷³. Merekalov's return to Moscow coincided with the last great purge of the Narkomindel, so it was reasonable to assume that he too had perished. It was an assumption reinforced by Merekalov's absence from the annals of Soviet diplomatic history – the typical fate of purge victims awaiting rehabilitation. However, during the 1970s and early 1980s his name began to creep back into Soviet books and articles⁷⁴. The mystery was finally resolved in 1986 with the publication of the 4th edition of the *Diplomaticheskii Slovar* (*Diplomatic Dictionary*). In an appendix to that volume there appeared an entry on Merekalov from which we learn that between 1940 and 1958 he was engaged in 'state and scientific work' (a probable euphemism for a labour camp), after which he retired. He died in 1983⁷⁵.

Famous departure: The dismissal of Litvinov

It is likely that Merekalov's meeting with Weizsacker on 17 April would have faded into the minutiae of diplomatic history had it not been for its proximity to the second, much more important event in Soviet foreign relations that spring. On 4 May *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* announced Litvinov's 'resignation' and his replacement by Molotov as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Litvinov's dismissal was a bolt from the blue. His impending departure from office, particularly following setbacks for Soviet foreign policy, had often been rumoured in the past. But it was not expected that Moscow would replace the main architect of collective security a fortnight after proposing a triple alliance to the British and French. Indeed, only hours before his 'resignation' Litvinov met Seeds to receive the latest information on the British response to the Soviet treaty proposals⁷⁶. In March at the 18th Party Congress he had been re-elected to the Central Committee. On May Day he was seen reviewing the parade from his usual place on the platform.

Quite naturally, the change in foreign ministers sparked off speculation that it was a prelude to a new line in foreign policy. The Russians used every resource, including a broadcast by Moscow Radio, to deny that the change in personnel indicated any change in policy⁷⁷. The transition from Litvinov to Molotov did not break the continuity of Soviet foreign policy. But what has never been satisfactorily explained is why it was necessary for Litvinov to go.

In the West the most popular explanation has been that Litvinov (a Jew and an opponent of rapprochement with Nazi Germany) was removed to facilitate negotiations with Hitler, as a prelude to the abandonment of collective security. Soviet historians have shown a marked reluctance to discuss the affair, usually confining their comments to a repetition of the official line in *Falsifiers of History* that Litvinov resigned in order to make way for a more senior member of the Soviet leadership. The evidence is incomplete, but there is an alternative to both these views. Litvinov was not the only diplomat to have his services dispensed with. The spring and early summer of 1939 saw a massive purge of the Narkomindel's central apparatus. According to one report up to 90 per cent of Foreign Ministry officials were dismissed. Many, for example Gnedin and Korzhenko, the Narkomindel's personnel director (himself an NKVD

agent), were arrested. The *Journal de Moscou*, the Narkomindel's house magazine, was also abruptly closed down. The instrument of this purge was Dekanozov, a close associate of Beria, the secret police chief. Dekanozov's subsequent elevation to the post of Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs was one of a number of changes in the 'status' of Narkomindel personnel. Merekalov disappeared. Boris Shtein was recalled from Italy to become a professor at the Higher Diplomatic School. Lozovsky, formerly attached to the Comintern, joined Potemkin and Dekanozov as a Deputy Commissar. The 'reshuffling' of the Narkomindel continued through 1939 and into 1940. In this period a new generation of Soviet diplomats, including the young Andrei Gromyko, emerged to replace the Litvinov and Chicherin appointees of the 1920s and 1930s⁷⁸.

The supposition is, then, that Litvinov became the victim of a purge which extended the power of the Stalinist inner core of the Soviet leadership (Molotov, Beria and Stalin himself) in the field of foreign policy. Some evidence for this hypothesis can be derived from the memoirs of Aleksei Roshchin, who at the time was head of the Narkomindel's Western Europe department. Roshchin records a statement made by Molotov at a Narkomindel staff meeting in July 1939⁷⁹:

Comrade Litvinov failed to ensure the pursuance of the party line, the line of the CPSU Central Committee in the People's Commissariat. It is wrong to say that before the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs was non-Bolshevik . . . but as regards the choice and training of the personnel, the commissariat was not quite Bolshevik, because Comrade Litvinov was clinging to a number of people alien and hostile to the party and to the Soviet State, and he displayed a non-party attitude to the new people who came to serve at the commissariat.

The purge explains why Litvinov was removed but it does not account for the specific timing of his dismissal. For this we must turn to the Soviet reaction to the British and French responses to Moscow's triple alliance proposals.

On 25 April Suritz transmitted from Paris the formal French response to the 17 April initiative. They proposed an agreement whereby the USSR would undertake to aid Britain and France in defence of Eastern Europe. Should the Soviet Union find itself at war with Germany as a result of this assistance then Britain and France

would aid the USSR⁸⁰. As Litvinov commented, the wording of the agreement was 'humiliating'⁸¹. Suritz agreed⁸²:

According to the new draft . . . 'reciprocity' amounts to our being committed to render assistance to the French and English in the event of their getting involved in a war as a result of their actions . . . whereas they would come to our assistance not under comparable conditions, but only after we were at war with Germany as a result of our coming to the assistance of France and England, i.e. when the French and English are already at war with Germany. It appears that whenever France and England consider it necessary to fight Germany to protect the status quo, we will automatically be drawn into war on their side. But if we were to defend the same status quo on our own initiative, England and France would not be committed to anything. A strange equality.

Litvinov further commented in an internal submission to the politburo on 28 April that⁸³:

Bonnet's modified proposal sounds almost like a mockery. If the original proposal was at least couched in such a way as to give a semblance of reciprocity and equality, and assistance to us was offered also in the event of our taking action on our own initiative, according to the new proposal we will receive assistance only in the event that Britain and France should, on their own initiative, take action leading to a conflict with Germany and in the event that they receive our assistance.

By 29 April the French had changed their proposal to take account of these objections⁸⁴. But it was too late. The French reply, together with the delayed British response⁸⁵, sufficiently weakened Litvinov's position, making him vulnerable to dismissal, and his staff vulnerable to Beria and his henchmen. As Roshchin also relates in his memoirs⁸⁶:

In the CPSU Central Committee they were dissatisfied with the results of the policy oriented primarily on co-operation with Britain and France, on participation in the League of Nations. The idea of collective security in Europe had little effect due to the position adopted by London and Paris.

It seems likely that the Soviet leadership calculated that Molotov's appointment would put further pressure on the French and British to

come to terms. And with Molotov in the driving seat, the Stalinist inner core of the Soviet leadership would be able to control what were obviously destined to be the most critical diplomatic negotiations for the Soviet State since the Brest-Litovsk conference of 1918.

The Soviet Union and Poland

The negotiations with Britain and France did not begin in earnest until the end of May when the Western powers accepted in principle the Soviet proposal for a trilateral security pact. In the meantime Moscow launched a minor diplomatic offensive directed at Poland, among others. At the end of April Potemkin was despatched on a tour of Eastern Europe and the Near East which concluded with his arrival in Warsaw on 9 May.

Potemkin's talk with Beck in Warsaw was one of a series of Soviet probes into Polish policy toward the projected triple alliance with Britain and France. Polish opposition to direct links with the USSR had, of course, scuppered the original British proposal for a joint declaration of the powers. But after Hitler's renunciation of the German-Polish Non-Aggression Treaty on 28 April, Poland was propelled into the front line of resistance to German expansionism. The question was what effect this would have on Warsaw's attitude to the Soviet mutual security proposals.

Molotov called in the Polish Ambassador on 8 May and a further meeting, this time by Polish request, took place on 11 May⁸⁷. From these discussions Molotov drew the conclusion that although 'Poland does not wish at present to bind herself through any agreement with the USSR or to consent to the participation of the USSR in guaranteeing Poland . . . she does not exclude the latter in the future'⁸⁸.

In the meantime, Potemkin's meeting with Beck had gone well. Both reported favourably on the discussion. Potemkin emphasized Beck's agreement with his proposition that Poland would need Soviet support in the event of aggression and Beck, the Soviet promise to aid Poland should the occasion arise⁸⁹.

These encounters in Moscow and Warsaw presaged a noticeable improvement in Polish-Soviet relations. Sharonov, the new Soviet Ambassador, arrived in Warsaw towards the end of May. Following

his first meeting with Beck on 25 May, Sharonov reported to Moscow⁹⁰:

After exchanging courtesies Beck said that people were tired of war and that securing peace was the task of Polish foreign policy and in that connection referred to the declaration in his 5 May speech that the Polish Government was determined to compromise only so far, i.e. not to compromise in the face of threats to its sovereignty and to accept, as he put it, only an honourable offer from Germany.

I told Beck that we had . . . read his speech with great interest and, referring to the example of Austria, said that it was not inconceivable that Poland would find itself in a similar position. Beck . . . several times emphasised that 'compromise only within certain limits – that is the firm position of the government'. In this connection . . . I noted we were, of course, prepared to give support but that in order to give support tomorrow it was necessary to be prepared today, i.e. to know beforehand about the support required.

A week later Molotov commented favourably on the development of Polish-Soviet relations in his speech to the Supreme Soviet, as did Sharonov in a conversation with the Polish Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs on 14 June⁹¹. According to Ambassador Grzybowski in Moscow, the Russians offered military supplies to Poland on a number of occasions during this period⁹².

The shift in Moscow's policy, from scarcely-veiled hostility to Poland towards conciliation, demonstrated the continuing Soviet commitment to Litvinov's triple alliance plan of 17 April. The spring of 1939 was a watershed in Soviet foreign policy. With the thaw in its international position, following the deterioration of relations between Germany and the Western powers, the USSR faced a choice between renewing its efforts for an alliance with the Western powers against aggression or entrenchment in isolation, opposed to the appeasers and hoping to avert any eastward drive of German expansionism. Within that broad choice there were, of course, a range of options. The Soviet decision to go for a comprehensive military and political treaty between the great powers opposed to German expansion was undoubtedly influenced by their experience before and at the time of Munich, and by their subsequent fears and suspicions concerning Anglo-French diplomacy. Moreover, the Soviets considered that the need for collective security had been

superseded by the need for collective defence. Any alliance with the 'democratic' states had to be capable of fighting and defeating aggression as well as opposing it diplomatically. If and when war came, the Russians had no intention of being left on their own to engage the Germans. Such resolve on their part hardened as the negotiations with Britain and France progressed and as Europe moved closer to the brink of war.

CHAPTER

7 *Failure of an Accord: The Triple Alliance Negotiations with Britain and France, 1939*

‘We formed the impression that the British and French Governments were not resolved to go to war if Poland were attacked, but that they hoped the diplomatic line-up of Britain, France and Russia would deter Hitler. We were sure it would not.’ *J.V. Stalin, 1942*

The negotiations begin

The negotiations for a trilateral security pact between Britain, France and the USSR began in earnest on 8 May when the British Ambassador in Moscow presented to Molotov London’s reply to the Soviet proposals of 17 April. As expected, the British rejected the idea of a mutual security pact and revived their earlier proposal that the USSR should make a declaration guaranteeing the security of Rumania, Poland and Greece and committing itself to supporting the Anglo-French guarantees to those states¹. ‘As you can see, the English and French are demanding of us unilateral and gratuitous assistance with no intention of rendering us equivalent assistance’, Molotov telegraphed to Maisky and Suritz. Both Ambassadors counselled rejection of the British demands².

On 11 May *Izvestiya* published an article spelling out that the Soviet Government would not accept anything less than a full treaty of mutual assistance based on the principles of reciprocity and joint obligations³. A Soviet aide-memoire of 14 May reiterated the arguments in *Izvestiya*, raising, in addition, two new points: that any system of guarantees to the countries of Eastern Europe would have to include the Baltic States; and that any political agreement between the three allies would have to detail the extent and forms of military assistance should it come into operation⁴. In short, the Baltic door to

German expansion in the East had to be locked and the practical commitments of the partners in alliance specified.

The Anglo-French reply to the Soviet aide-memoire of 14 May was received by Molotov on 27 May. It took the form of a draft agreement between the three states of a treaty of mutual assistance⁵. Britain and France had conceded the basic Soviet demand for formal military and political alliance. To the surprise of Seeds and Payart, Molotov angrily rejected their proposals. It did not contain, he argued, any plan for the organization of effective defence against aggression, offered no indication of serious intent on the part of Britain and France, and proposed consultation rather than immediate assistance in the event of hostilities⁶.

The Soviet reception of the Anglo-French draft had been coloured by advance information that mutual assistance, as in the case of the 1935 pact with France, was to be tied to the League of Nations procedures against aggression. In the Soviet view this transformed any pact into 'a mere scrap of paper' because⁷

in the event of hostilities, mutual assistance will not be rendered immediately . . . but only after deliberations in the League of Nations, with no one knowing what the results of such deliberations would be.

Seeds and Payart attempted to reassure Molotov that the articles referring to the League of Nations were a matter of public relations not practical policy, but Molotov was not convinced⁸. His scepticism was not entirely misplaced. In a letter to his sister on 28 May Neville Chamberlain explained his view of the Anglo-French provisos concerning the League of Nations⁹:

In substance it gives the Russians what they want but in form and presentation it avoids the idea of alliance and substitutes a declaration of intention . . . It is really a most ingenious idea for it is calculated to catch all the misgivings and at the same time . . . we give it a temporary character . . . and that should give us the opportunity to revise our relations with the Soviets if we want to.

Chamberlain's view of the projected alliance with the USSR was not wholly shared by the rest of the British Government. There were voices in London, particularly among the military, who were less equivocal about support from the Soviet Union. But

Chamberlain's attitude expressed the essence of the British approach to negotiations with Moscow. Alliance with Soviet Russia was a second-best alternative to a political settlement with Nazi Germany and even to maintaining good relations with Poland and Rumania¹⁰. The French were keener, but following London's example, they too dragged their feet¹¹. It was a recipe for failure.

The bargaining continues

In his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31 May, Molotov announced that the tripartite negotiations had advanced with the acceptance by Britain and France of a reciprocal defence treaty. Nevertheless, the reservations built around League of Nations procedures would have to go and Soviet demands for guarantees to states in the Baltic area, including Finland, would have to be conceded¹². A Soviet counter-draft, presented on 2 June, clarified these issues still further. The mutual assistance treaty would give effect to League principles but would not be tied to its procedures. Latvia, Estonia and Finland were named as countries to be guaranteed along with Poland, Rumania, Greece, etc.¹³.

During this first month of serious discussions several distinct features of the Soviet bargaining posture became apparent. Ever suspicious of Anglo-French designs, the USSR would accept nothing less than a completely watertight military and political agreement. But within a framework of acceptable terms of alliance the Soviets were prepared to accommodate the particular strategic interests of Britain and France, for example, a guarantee of Swiss sovereignty. Also, the speed with which the Soviet Government conducted the negotiations from its side suggested that they wanted and expected an early agreement. Indeed, according to Maisky, the Soviet Government was 'convinced that with goodwill on both sides the pact of mutual assistance would be concluded in a very short time, and at all events in the course of June'¹⁴. The desire to conclude an agreement as quickly as possible may also explain why at one stage in the negotiations (on 16 June) the Russians broached the idea of a mutual security treaty limited to aid in the event of a direct attack on the territory of the three signatories, i.e. excluding any notion of guarantees to other states¹⁵.

At about the same time Maisky was instructed to raise the

question of the British Foreign Secretary coming to Moscow to negotiate directly with Molotov¹⁶. Halifax's presence in Moscow would obviously have had great public impact and might have facilitated the resolution of a number of outstanding issues. But the British sent Strang, head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office and formerly attached to the British embassy in Moscow, to aid Seeds in the negotiations. He arrived in Moscow on 14 June.

At the beginning of June, the detailed negotiations had entered a new phase. The League issue lost its prominence and was replaced by the question of guarantees in the Baltic. Britain's position was that Finland, Estonia and Latvia did not want to be guaranteed¹⁷. An editorial in *Pravda* countered that the issue did not concern the whims of certain politicians but Soviet security and the general interests of peace which dictated that certain states, like it or not, had to be guaranteed¹⁸. Molotov warned that a satisfactory resolution of this difference was essential to the successful conclusion of negotiations¹⁹. In spite of this warning the British and French presented a new draft which attempted to circumvent the problem. They proposed to divide mutual assistance into three types²⁰:

- (a) assistance in the event of direct aggression against Britain, France or the USSR;
- (b) assistance in the event of aggression against states which accepted guarantees;
- (c) assistance in the event of indirect threats to the security of Britain, France or the USSR (i.e. attacks on countries which had not yet accepted guarantees).

Unfortunately, while in the first two instances mutual aid and support was automatic, in the third it was subject to consultation. By the time the British and French realized their mistake and had erased the difference²¹ it was too late. Molotov rejected the second proposal as curtly as the first²². Soviet counter-drafts argued that equality demanded either guarantees to all states in Europe whose defence was vital to collective security or none at all²³. In a communication to Maisky and Suritz, Molotov reported²⁴:

we are asked to render immediate assistance to the five countries [i.e. Poland, Rumania, Belgium, Greece and Turkey which had accepted

Anglo-French guarantees] but they are refusing to render immediate assistance to the three Baltic countries in view of the latter's alleged rejection of such assistance. This means that the French and English are putting the USSR in a humiliating and unequal position, something which under no circumstances would we accept. . . . We feel that the English and French want to conclude a treaty with us which would be advantageous to them and disadvantageous to us, that is, they do not want a serious treaty based on the principle of reciprocity and equality of obligations.

It is clear that we shall not accept such a treaty.

True, the British and French had ironed out this inequality in their redraft, but they had introduced a new problem – tying assistance in the case of attacks on states refusing guarantees to a ‘menace to the security’ of the USSR, Britain or France. Who, the Soviets wanted to know, would determine what constituted such a menace²⁵?

Soviet feeling over the Baltic States issue reached a climax with the publication in *Pravda* on 29 June of an article entitled: ‘The British and French Governments Do Not Want An Equal Agreement With The USSR’. The article appeared under the name of A.A. Zhdanov, Leningrad Party Secretary and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Supreme Soviet. Zhdanov used the refusal of the Western powers to agree to immediate and unconditional action in the event of aggression against Latvia, Estonia and Finland to demonstrate the contention contained in the title of his polemic²⁶.

What they want is a treaty in which the USSR would play the part of a hired labourer bearing the brunt of the obligations on his shoulders. No self-respecting country will accept such a treaty unless it wants to be a plaything in the hands of people who are used to having others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them.

Zhdanov's unequivocal statement of the Soviet position was followed by a rapid response from the British and French. On 1 July they broke the deadlock by proposing that guarantees to states which did not want them should be agreed in a secret protocol²⁷. The Soviets responded to this concession by demanding that the concept of ‘indirect aggression’, mentioned in the new Anglo-French draft, be made more explicit and broadened to include the notion of internal subversion in favour of potential aggressors²⁸. What they had in mind was the very real danger of ostensibly independent fascist coups in,

for instance, the Baltic States or Rumania which would serve as a prelude to a military attack on the USSR. This is, indeed, what had already happened after a fashion in Austria and Czechoslovakia and was destined to be the fate of Bulgaria and Rumania too in 1940–41. The Anglo-French negotiators accepted the need for a definition of 'indirect aggression' but wanted it restricted to cases of internal political changes forced by external threats of force²⁹.

Having come so far it was obvious that the difference over 'indirect aggression' would not constitute an insurmountable obstacle to the successful conclusion of talks. As Molotov later said, it was a 'secondary issue'³⁰. With the political bargaining drawing to a close in mid-July, a far more critical issue, which had been rumbling in the background since April, was coming to a head. The Russians had assumed all along that a military convention would be agreed simultaneously with a political treaty. It quickly became apparent that while Britain and France were prepared to begin military talks they could not see any reason why the political treaty should not be signed first.

At a meeting with Seeds and Naggiar (the French Ambassador) on 17 July Molotov stated that unless the principle of a single military-political treaty was agreed there was no point in continuing discussion of 'indirect aggression'³¹. To Suritz and Maisky, Molotov explained³²:

We are insisting that a military pact is an inseparable part of a military-political agreement, which is what the draft treaty under discussion is, 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. This dishonest Anglo-French proposal splits up what should be a single treaty into two separate treaties and contradicts our basic proposal to conclude the whole treaty simultaneously, including its military part, which is actually the most important and most political part of the treaty. You understand that if the overall agreement does not include as an integral part an absolutely concrete military agreement, the treaty will be nothing but an empty declaration, and this is something we cannot accept.

Only crooks and cheats such as the negotiators on the Anglo-French side have shown themselves to be all this time could pretend that our demands for the conclusion of a political and military agreement are

something new in the negotiations. . . It seems nothing will come of the endless negotiations.

Then they will have no one but themselves to blame.

Once again the British and French gave in. On 23 July Molotov was told that the Soviet proposal for a simultaneous military and political agreement had been accepted. According to Seeds' report of the meeting, Molotov was very pleased. He stressed the importance to the USSR of a military pact and the necessity of drawing it up without delay. Molotov suggested Moscow as the venue for military discussions which should start immediately³³.

The mere fact that the military conversations were starting would have a much greater effect in the world than any amount that could be made about political articles. It would be a powerful demonstration on the part of the three Governments.

Two days later Maisky telegraphed the British Government's acceptance of Molotov's proposals³⁴.

In three months Molotov had succeeded in extracting from Britain and France a commitment (at least on paper) to what Litvinov had failed to achieve in five years: a solid political alliance against Germany. As Strang later commented³⁵:

Nothing so comprehensive had been negotiated with the Soviet Union before; and not until the war-time conferences from 1943 onwards was anything of like scale to be negotiated in the future.

Failure to agree

If there were any celebrations of this achievement in the Kremlin, they must have been short-lived. Disturbing news was received from London and Paris about the nature of the forthcoming Anglo-French military delegation to Moscow. From London, Maisky reported the following on the British delegates³⁶:

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 kind

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 negotiations, particularly after the PM's reference yesterday in Parliament to precedent (negotiations for the Anglo-Japanese alliance lasted six months, for the Anglo-French entente – nine months, for the Anglo-Russian entente – 15 months and so forth).

And from Suritz in Paris³⁷:

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

All this was bad enough. Worse was to come. Instead of flying to Moscow, the joint delegation was despatched by sea, leaving Tilbury on 5 August aboard a slow merchant ship which arrived in Leningrad on 9 August. The ostensible reason for the delay was that no other suitable transport was available. But it was symptomatic of the Anglo-French approach to the forthcoming negotiations. They saw the delegation as a political exercise which would keep Moscow happy and apply pressure on Berlin. In line with this strategy Admiral Drax, the leader of the British delegation, was instructed to delay the conclusion of any detailed and specific military agreements³⁸.

When the military mission finally reached Moscow the Russians discovered that Admiral Drax had no written powers to negotiate and, although the French did have the power to negotiate on all military questions, they were not authorized to sign any agreement³⁹. By contrast Voroshilov, leader of the Soviet delegation, presented a written mandate to negotiate and sign a military convention⁴⁰. It was an inauspicious prelude to the military talks which began on 12 August. The crunch in the negotiations came very quickly. On 14 August Voroshilov asked whether or not Soviet forces would be allowed to cross Polish and Rumanian territory in order to make contact with the German enemy. The British and French had no answer to this question and seemed reluctant to concede the USSR a right of passage without Polish and Rumanian consent⁴¹. Discussions continued until the 17th and after a break were resumed on 21 August, but without the resolution of this critical issue, the talks

were doomed to failure. On 21 August the negotiations were adjourned indefinitely at Soviet request⁴². Two days later the USSR concluded a non-aggression treaty with Germany.

Essential though it was in military terms, the inability of the British and French to satisfy the Russians on the question of troop movements through Poland and Rumania does not fully account for the Soviet Union's decision to break off negotiations. Nor does it explain the positive act of concluding a non-aggression treaty with Germany. The collapse, from the Soviet point of view, of any immediate prospect of an effective pact of alliance with Britain and France was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the Russo-German rapprochement. Indispensable to any understanding of the circumstances in which Soviet Russia opted for the pact with Nazi Germany is a review of the evolution of relations between these two states in the spring and summer of 1939.

CHAPTER

8 *The Isolationist Alternative: Stalin's Pact with Hitler*

'The art of politics in the sphere of foreign relations does not consist in increasing the number of one's country's enemies. On the contrary, the art of politics in this sphere is to reduce the number of such enemies and make the enemies of yesterday good neighbours, maintaining peaceable relations one with the other.' *V.M. Molotov, 31 August 1939*

Towards the Nazi-Soviet pact

Any reconstruction of the development of Soviet policy towards Germany is far more difficult than that of the USSR's relations with Britain and France. The first problem is the lack of signposts. Quite simply, before the critical days of August 1939, Soviet-German relations were largely confined to minor diplomatic forays and trade talks. Interpretation of the course of Soviet policy depends largely on evaluating the reported statements and responses of Soviet diplomats and officials in their contacts with the Germans. These were far from straightforward, often contradictory and almost always ambiguous.

Secondly, evidence concerning the pattern of Soviet behaviour toward Germany is very imperfect. German diplomatic documents supply an invaluable record of formal relations between the two countries but their reliability as a source of Soviet attitudes is questionable. German reports and memoranda inevitably reflected German assessments of Soviet policy and German objectives in relation to the USSR. Soviet records, on the other hand, lack detail. Indeed, they mostly consist of fragments from the despatches of the Soviet representative in Berlin, Georgi Astakhov. They do indicate, however, that the Russians had a very different view from the Germans of their discussions with Berlin. In these records the restraint of Soviet diplomats in Berlin is counterposed to the Wilhemstrasse's mounting efforts to wean Moscow away from its projected alliance with Britain and France and to initiate a German-Soviet rapprochement.

Thirdly, there is the problem of hindsight. Overshadowing every facet of Soviet-German relations in 1939 is the conclusion of the August pact. But it is absolutely crucial to separate the contingencies in Soviet-German relations from the causal chain of events leading to the pact. By this strict measure Soviet-German contacts in May-July 1939 are of limited significance. What happened in these months paved the way for the accommodation of August but did not make it inevitable. The Soviet pact with Germany arose from a specific conjunction of political and diplomatic events. It was the coincidence in the early days in August of the Danzig crisis, the lackadaisical attitude of the British and French military delegations and renewed German efforts to secure Soviet neutrality that pushed the question of a deal with Hitler to the top of Moscow's foreign policy agenda. Before this the *operational* objective of Soviet policy had been to secure a suitable agreement with the Western powers.

But how did Moscow's relation with Berlin prior to August fit into that scenario? At one level the answer is simple. It fitted in as Moscow's dealings with the Nazi regime had always fitted into its general strategy: as a card to be played in its negotiations with London and Paris – the possibility of Soviet-German rapprochement was always a potent weapon in Moscow's diplomatic armoury – and an option to be retained as reinsurance against the failure of the collective security strategy.

At another level the answer is more complex. The contention that Moscow did not change its *policy* towards Berlin before August 1939 is not meant to imply that the *idea* of an agreement with Germany had not occurred much earlier. The prospect of such an agreement had been the subject of intense public speculation since the end of the Rapallo era – speculation which Moscow itself fed and encouraged.

How seriously the idea was considered it is difficult to say. Perhaps the answer lies in the as yet unpublished correspondence between Moscow and its Berlin embassy during this period. There is, however, at least one compelling reason for speculating that the transmutation of the idea of an agreement with Hitler into a definite policy occurred later rather than sooner. As Lewis' Namier pointed out forty years ago¹, Moscow knew all along that in the right circumstances it could come to an acceptable arrangement with Germany, and quickly. Those circumstances did not materialize until August 1939 when Berlin was convinced of the likelihood of the triple

alliance and already committed to an attack on Poland. Any move made by Moscow towards Germany before that conjuncture would have been hazardous for the obvious reason that Berlin was not to be trusted. Another Munich was perfectly possible and, although Moscow was intent on applying pressure on the British and French, it did not want to push them into Hitler's arms. Above all, while the possibility of a triple alliance remained, Moscow had no reason to respond to German overtures. In the long run, Moscow must have calculated, Soviet security would be best served by a combination against Nazi Germany rather than an accommodation of it. There were evident short-term advantages in allowing Hitler a free hand against Poland, but what if Britain and France chose not to fight on Poland's side? Where would that leave the USSR? Perhaps cast in the role of Hitler's next victim, possibly with the connivance of Britain and France.

Given the magnitude and hazardous nature of the change in Soviet policy towards Germany that occurred in August, it only made sense on the assumption that pursuit of a military alliance with Britain and France was now out of the question. Moscow's conviction that this was indeed the case, coupled with the hope that Britain and France would be forced to make some kind of stand over Poland, finally tipped the scales in favour of negotiations with Germany. But the balance of the evidence is that neither in May, June or July had the Soviets yet formed any such conviction. Nor were the circumstances propitious for such a decisive shift in the direction of Soviet foreign policy.

Keeping the door open: May-July 1939

The first Soviet-German meeting following Molotov's succession to the post of People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs was on 5 May. Schnurre called Astakhov in to inform him that Soviet contracts with the Skoda works in German-occupied Czechoslovakia would be honoured. Astakhov was gratified and asked whether the trade negotiations, broken off in February, would soon be resumed. Then, according to Schnurre²,

Astakhov touched upon the dismissal of Litvinov and tried without asking direct questions to learn whether this event would cause a change in our

position toward the Soviet Union. He stressed very much the great importance of the personality of Molotov. . . who would have all the greater importance for the future of Soviet foreign policy.

Later on 9 May, however, Astakhov in a meeting with Baron von Stumm, deputy head of the German Foreign Ministry's press department, conveyed quite a different impression. When asked whether Molotov's appointment augured a change in Soviet policy, Astakhov replied that it was not a question of personality but policy³:

For the time being one could not speak of a reorientation of policy, particularly since Soviet Russian policy depended on that of others and not least on Germany.

When introducing Filippov, the new Tass representative in Berlin, to Stumm, Astakhov commented favourably on the change in the tone of the German press toward the USSR. Stumm made the point that this had not been reciprocated by the USSR. Astakhov responded by arguing that it could still turn out to be a short-lived German manoeuvre.

Filippov's account of the same meeting does not differ substantially from Stumm's. He confirms that it was Stumm who raised the question of Molotov's appointment and that in reply Astakhov had played down the significance of Litvinov's departure, pointing out that Soviet foreign policy was determined and directed by the party and state, not by individuals⁴. Astakhov reported to Moscow that⁵:

As regards the symptoms of improvement which Baron von Stumm spoke about, dismissing or at least doubting the majority of them, I noted that we had not yet any ground to take them seriously, beyond the limits of a short-term tactical measure.

From this and a further despatch on 12 May it is clear that the Russians perceived that the change in German attitudes was a result of the improvement in Soviet relations with Britain and France⁶:

The Germans are endeavouring to create the impression of a forthcoming or already achieved thaw in Soviet-German relations. Throwing aside the preposterous rumours fabricated here by the Germans or by idle foreign correspondents, only one thing can be stated as certain fact – and that is

a noticeable change of attitude in the German Press toward us. . . But in taking account of this we cannot, of course, turn a blind eye to the incredible superficiality of it all, and to the fact that it does not commit the Germans to anything. . . The motives which lie behind this change in attitude in relation to us are only too obvious, and do not warrant any serious consideration on our part.

Whatever Astakhov's intention, he certainly impressed the Germans with his positive approach to Soviet-German relations. For example, Schnurre filed the following report on a meeting with Astakhov on 17 May⁷:

Astakhov stated in detail that there were no conflicts in foreign policy between Germany and the Soviet Union and that therefore there was no reason for any enmity between the two countries . . . he commented on the Anglo-Soviet negotiations to the effect that under the present circumstances the result desired by England could hardly be achieved.

To substantiate his opinion concerning the possibility of a change in German-Soviet relations, Astakhov repeatedly referred to Italy. . .

In my replies I was reserved and induced Astakhov, by means of incidental remarks only, to further elaborate his viewpoint.

However, according to Soviet historians, quite a different version of this meeting is filed in the Narkomindel archives, one in which it is Schnurre who made all the running in seeking an improvement in Soviet-German relations⁸.

Which account of that meeting is more accurate is less important than indications about Soviet policy provided in Molotov's response to a German proposal on 20 May that trade negotiations be resumed and that a German delegation be received in Moscow. 'The Soviet Government could only agree to a resumption of negotiations if the necessary "political bases" for them had been constructed', he told the German Ambassador⁹. The report in the Soviet archives on this meeting records a slightly different inflection of Molotov's remark. 'For the success of the economic negotiations it was necessary to create a corresponding political basis', Molotov is reported to have said¹⁰. Molotov's meaning was clarified by information which Astakhov relayed to Weizsäcker on 30 May¹¹:

The Chargé . . . interpreted it to the effect that in Moscow they wanted

to avoid repetition of what happened last January, i.e. they did not want to make preparations again for a trip of a German trade negotiator to Moscow only to receive a cancellation at the last moment, amidst the ridicule of the foreign press. Actually, Herr Molotov had stated that politics and economy could not be entirely separated in our relations: a certain connection between the two did actually exist. Apparently, Potemkin in his communication to the Chargé here expressed the matter this way: that the contemplated trade negotiations could not be treated lightly.

To Moscow Astakhov reported that Weizsäcker's aim in the meeting had been to explore 'the possibility of talks about improving relations with us and to restrain our rapprochement with England. It is typical, however, that they refrained from committing themselves to any agreement'¹².

On 31 May Molotov made a report to the Supreme Soviet on the international situation. After a long résumé of progress in the negotiations with Britain and France, he pointedly remarked that 'while conducting negotiations with England and France, we see no necessity for refusing to have commercial relations with such countries as Germany and Italy'. He went on to announce that negotiations for a new credit agreement with Germany were likely to resume¹³. The message to the British and French could hardly have been made clearer.

Following Molotov's speech, Foreign Trade Commissar Mikoyan had a number of meetings with staff of the German embassy in Moscow on the question of a new trade agreement. The discussions were confined to 'talks about talks' since Moscow's precondition for receiving a German trade delegation was prior acceptance of the original Soviet proposals, first put forward in February, on the terms of a new economic agreement. This the Germans refused to concede. By the middle of July little progress had been made¹⁴.

Meanwhile, in Berlin, Astakhov was busier than ever. On 17 June he met Schulenburg, who was on leave from Moscow. According to the standard Soviet history of Soviet foreign policy, at this meeting Schulenburg raised in a more definite form the question of improving Soviet-German political relations¹⁵. But the Soviet history make no reference to the content of his proposal. Schulenburg's own report contains no clues either¹⁶. It may be, if an Italian report is to be believed, that Schulenburg raised the possibility of a non-aggression

pact¹⁷. But, if he did, this was not typical of the German side's overtures during this period, which remained at the level of generalities. For example, at a meeting on 28 June, Astakhov told Schnurre that Moscow was not 'certain that the hinted changes in German policy are of a serious and non-conjunctural nature and are calculated for a long period'. In reply Schnurre asked, 'Tell me what proof you want. We are ready to demonstrate the possibility of reaching agreement on any question, to give any guarantees'¹⁸.

As these reports indicate, the general pattern of Soviet-German relations in May and June was determined by Moscow's extreme reluctance to enter any serious political negotiations with Berlin, a reluctance confirmed by Molotov's rebuff of a further effort by Schulenburg on 28 June to raise the issue of better Soviet-German political relations¹⁹.

The only hint that the USSR might be seriously interested in a rapprochement with Germany came indirectly via a Bulgarian diplomat's report of a conversation with Astakhov. According to the Bulgarian, Astakhov told him that among the many options being considered by the Soviet Union, the one favoured was a rapprochement with Germany²⁰. Moscow was presumably flying a kite to see what response it got from the Germans or, perhaps, from the British and French. The Bulgarian's report, which is not confirmed by any other source, may simply be inaccurate.

Astakhov had told a completely different story to the Polish Counsellor in Berlin just a week earlier. On that occasion Astakhov stressed the importance of Moscow's negotiations for a triple pact²¹:

It was difficult to see how the German Government could turn back from its expansionist aims. The only thing that could peacefully force the Germans to reconsider . . . is a united front of England, France, the Soviet Union and Turkey.

Astakhov expressed the belief that although the English Government is carrying on negotiations with the Soviet Union it has nevertheless not rejected the idea of reaching an understanding with Germany . . . Poland and the Soviet Union could find themselves in a war with Germany . . . the Soviet Government wants a clear-cut agreement with England and France, without loopholes.

Astakhov made other, similar statements in this period. Astakhov has gone down in history as Moscow's go-between in the

negotiations which led to the Nazi-Soviet pact. But there was another side to his role in Berlin. At the same time as probing German intentions, he was reassuring French and British diplomats of Soviet fidelity to the tripartite negotiations then in progress in Moscow²². By mid-July those negotiations had hit the stumbling block of the military convention which the Soviets wanted to accompany the more or less agreed political treaty. It was at this point that Astakhov's assiduous cultivation of the Germans began to pay off, for it paved the way for Moscow's first serious approach to Berlin.

On 18 July E.I. Babarin, Chief of the Soviet Trade Mission in Berlin, informed Schnurre that the USSR was prepared to give way to German demands on a number of points and that he was empowered to sign a new commercial treaty on the spot. The Germans did not welcome this proposal since it upset their own calculations of the disquieting effect on the Western powers of the presence of a high-powered German economic delegation in Moscow²³. They did, however, make yet another attempt to initiate discussions about normalizing Soviet-German relations. At a dinner with Astakhov and Babarin on 25 July, Schnurre proposed three stages in a process of normalization²⁴:

- (a) re-establishment of economic co-operation through the commercial treaty under discussion;
- (b) improvement of political relations;
- (c) negotiation of the political interests of the two states in the sphere of foreign policy.

In response:

Astakhov designated the way to rapprochement with Germany as the one that corresponded with the vital interests of the two countries. However, he emphasised that the tempo must probably be very slow and gradual . . . Moscow could not quite believe in a shift in German policy with respect to the Soviet Union. A change could only be expected gradually.

Throughout May, June and July 1939 the Soviets strove to keep the door open to the Germans, but without actually letting them in. From Astakhov's statement to Schnurre it is evident that at the end

of July this was still their position. However, as the negotiations with Britain and France approached their climax, it suited Moscow's purpose to allow the Germans a foot over the threshold. The events that followed inspired Moscow to invite them in for a long stay.

August 1939: the option of isolation

During the first two weeks of August 1939 Soviet foreign policy began to make an appreciable shift in favour of an accommodation with Germany. This was the consequence of three factors. The first was the outbreak of the Danzig crisis. Under the Treaty of Versailles Danzig (renamed Gdansk after the Second World War) was detached from Germany and designated a 'Free City' under Polish sovereignty. Together with an extra-territorial link to Danzig (the 'Polish Corridor') through East Prussia this gave Poland an important outlet to the Baltic Sea. Throughout the 1930s Poland resisted German claims for the return of Danzig and the corridor. It was this Polish resistance to German demands that led to Hitler's renunciation of the Polish-German non-aggression treaty. That Danzig's city senate had been controlled by the Nazis since 1933, further complicated the issue.

In the early days of August a clash over customs rights developed between Nazi-controlled Danzig and the Polish authorities²⁵. Tension increased as rumours spread that Hitler would intervene on behalf of the German population of Danzig. Astakhov in Berlin and Cherny, the Soviet Air Attaché in London, sent urgent telegrams reporting on preparations for a German attack on Poland²⁶. The looming prospect of a Soviet-German clash in the East became more distinct. The Soviets undoubtedly believed that German offers of an accommodation between their respective interests merited more serious consideration than previously.

The military negotiations with Britain and France, which were not going well, were the second factor in favour of a shift. The issue of passage across Rumanian and Polish territory has already been mentioned. It is clear from the records of the exchanges between the Anglo-French and Soviet military delegations that questions about this issue, posed by Voroshilov on 14 August, were neither idle nor obstructive. Soviet operational plans for war against Germany were contingent on sending troops across Poland and

Rumania to meet the enemy forces. In addition, the military plans presented by the British and French did not impress the Soviet delegation. Apart from the relatively small forces Britain and France proposed to mobilize, their operational plans were, in the opinion of the Soviets, too abstract. The Soviets detected more than a hint of the defensive 'Maginot mentality' about how they proposed to respond to enemy attacks in the early days of hostilities²⁷.

Finally, German diplomatic approaches to Soviet Russia became ever more ambitious. On 2 August Ribbentrop himself told Astakhov that between Germany and the Soviet Union 'there was no problem from the Baltic to the Black Sea' which could not be resolved²⁸. Astakhov informed Schnurre the next day that his report of the Reich Minister's statement had aroused great interest in Moscow. What Molotov wanted to hear, said Astakhov, were more concrete proposals. Schnurre replied that concrete talks required official confirmation that they were desired²⁹. At this juncture, however, the Soviet Union was not prepared to participate in such an initiative – only to continue general discussions. This was also the substance of Molotov's response to Schulenburg's visit on 3 August at which, under instructions, he took up the threads of Ribbentrop's discussion with Astakhov. Schulenburg assessed his meeting with Molotov as follows³⁰:

It was evident that the Soviet Government was more prepared for improvements in German-Soviet relations, but that the old mistrust of Germany persists. My overall impression is that the Soviet Government is at present determined to sign with England and France, if they fulfill all Soviet wishes. . . it will. . . take considerable effort on our part to cause the Soviet Government to swing about.

On 5 August Astakhov approached Schnurre to tell him that he had been instructed to say that the Soviet Government would continue talks about improving relations and that the credit agreement was seen as the first stage³¹. In a telegram to Moscow on 8 August Astakhov summed up the position reached in Soviet-German relations³². The Germans, he argued, did not intend

a serious and long-term observation of eventual commitments. I think that in the immediate future they consider it viable to come to a certain understanding . . . in order to neutralise us at this price . . . As regards

the future, then here the matter would depend, of course, not on those obligations but on the new situation which would be created.

In a meeting with Schnurre two days later, Astakhov said that 'once again' he had express instructions that his government desired an improvement in relations with Germany. Schnurre raised questions about Poland and the Anglo-Soviet-French talks but Astakhov had no mandate from Moscow to discuss them. His own view, summarized by Schnurre, was that the outcome of the negotiations with Britain and France was uncertain. As to Poland, Astakhov wanted to know of German intentions, particularly if any decisions could be expected in the next few days³³. On 12 August Astakhov met with Schnurre again, this time to propose official Soviet-German discussions in Moscow about 'the pending economic negotiations, questions of the press, cultural collaboration, the Polish Question, the matter of the old German-Soviet political agreements'. The only qualification was that such discussions had to take place 'by degrees'³⁴. On the same day Astakhov reported home³⁵:

The Germans are obviously worried by our negotiations with the British and French military. They have become unsparing in their arguments and promises to avert an agreement. I consider that today they are ready to make the kind of deal and gestures that would have been inconceivable six months ago.

Astakhov's assessment of the situation was fully vindicated three days later when Schulenburg, on instructions from Ribbentrop, met with Molotov to propose that the Reich Foreign Minister fly to Moscow for face-to-face negotiations about a political agreement between the USSR and Germany. 'Germany has no aggressive intentions against the USSR', Schulenburg was instructed to tell Molotov. 'The Reich Government is of the opinion that there is no question between the Baltic and the Black Sea which cannot be settled to the complete satisfaction of both countries.' In response, Molotov wanted to know:

How did things stand with the idea of a non-aggression pact? Was the German Government sympathetically inclined to the idea or would the matter have to be gone into more deeply?

As to a visit by Ribbentrop, that would require some preparation and

consideration. Molotov wanted more definite indications of German intentions, particularly with regard to a non-aggression pact³⁶.

In the event, the Russians did not wait for the German answer. On 17 August they came forward with their own proposals. Schulenburg was handed a *formal* communication from the Soviet Government proposing either a non-aggression pact or reaffirmation of the 1926 Berlin Treaty together with a special protocol defining Soviet and German foreign policy interests³⁷.

The 17 August was also an eventful day for the Anglo-Soviet-French military negotiations, which had been in progress for nearly a week. Ever since the beginning of the talks on 12 August Voroshilov had been badgering the British and French over the issue of Soviet rights of passage across Poland and Rumania. Without the resolution of this vital issue, he told the British and French representatives, the military negotiations had no meaning. Finally, on 17 August the Soviets proposed an indefinite adjournment of the talks pending a reply from London and Paris to the question of whether or not the Red Army would be allowed to enter Poland and Rumania in the event of German aggression. It was only after strenuous representations from the British and French that the Russians agreed to reconvene the talks on 21 August³⁸.

Voroshilov's adjournment of the military negotiations and Molotov's proposal of a non-aggression pact with Germany signified a decisive shift in Soviet operational objectives. Hitherto the aim had been a triple alliance with Britain and France. Now it was to strike a suitable bargain with Hitler.

The Soviet turn to Germany on 17 August was a gamble. The future of German-Soviet relations was still uncertain. Nothing had been agreed. The prospect of a German move against Poland must have been important in Soviet calculations. What would happen as a consequence of a German invasion of Poland was anyone's guess. But when the crisis came the Soviet Union had to know where it stood. Otherwise it could find itself trapped alone in a war with Germany and also, possibly, Japan. What Germany offered was the possibility of an immediate agreement which would give the USSR additional shelter in the coming storm. Fundamentally, the Soviets opted to stand alone – to secure their interests through independent action rather than collective security and defence. They would accept isolation but they would not allow themselves to become the victim of war. In return for giving Germany a free hand against Poland and

abandoning the alliance with the Western powers, the USSR would receive guarantees of security in the Baltic and the German eastward advance would be limited to western Poland.

Soviet-German political arrangements were enshrined in a secret protocol appended to the ostensibly innocuous non-aggression treaty of 23 August. The pact itself had materialized faster than the Russians anticipated, as the Germans, planning to attack Poland on 1 September, pressed for Ribbentrop to be received in Moscow. First Molotov insisted that the economic treaty be signed. This was done in Berlin on 19 August³⁹. Even then Molotov prevaricated but, after frantic representations by the Germans, including a direct appeal by Hitler to Stalin, he agreed to Ribbentrop's visit to Moscow⁴⁰.

Ribbentrop's trip was announced on 21 August and the Reich Minister flew in on the 23rd. The pact negotiations between Ribbentrop, Stalin and Molotov were conducted during two conversations – one in the afternoon and another in the evening, stretching into the early hours of the morning. Agreement on the text of the non-aggression treaty was reached very quickly. The key to the negotiations, however, was the secret agreements appended to the pact (see Appendix 3 for the text). These were finalized and signed sometime after midnight on 24 August⁴¹. The signatures were sealed by a toast on the new era in German-Soviet relations. As Ribbentrop was leaving Stalin told him that⁴²:

The Soviet Government takes the new pact very seriously. He could guarantee on his word of honour that the Soviet Union would not betray its partner.

It was a promise that Stalin kept.

CHAPTER

9 *From the Baltic to the Black Sea: Soviet Security Policy, 1939–40*

‘A German attack is also possible. For six years German fascists and the Communists cursed each other. Now an unexpected turn took place; that happens in the course of history. But one cannot rely upon it. We must be prepared in time. Others who were not paid the price.’ *J.V. Stalin, October 1939*

The partition of Poland

The conclusion of the non-aggression pact with Germany on 23 August 1939 marked Soviet Russia’s final abandonment of its quest for collective security and collective defence against aggression. It signified the USSR’s retreat into neutrality in the face of the prospect of war over Poland between Hitler and the Western powers. The direction of that new, neutralist course was charted by Molotov in a speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31 August¹:

The chief importance of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact lies in the fact that the two largest states of Europe have agreed to put an end to the enmity between them, to eliminate the menace of war and to live at peace with the other, making narrower thereby the zone of possible military conflicts in Europe.

Molotov made it clear that should war break out the USSR was ‘not obliged to involve itself in war either on the side of Great Britain against Germany or on the side of Germany against Great Britain’. The Soviet Union would not involve itself in any European war and would pursue, as Molotov put it, ‘new possibilities of increasing our strength, further consolidation of our positions, and the further growth of the influence of the Soviet Union on international developments’.

But Molotov's declaration of neutralist intent masked an underlying hesitancy and ambiguity in Soviet foreign policy in the days and weeks following the pact with Germany. A neutralist stance was one thing, an active foreign policy strategy to secure Soviet interests quite another.

Such hesitancy and ambiguity were reflected in the fact that on the very eve of Ribbentrop's arrival in Moscow, Voroshilov still held out the prospect of a resumption of military negotiations with Britain and France should satisfactory replies to his questions about the transit of Soviet forces through Poland and Rumania be received in time². More striking still was Moscow's attitude to Poland during the period immediately following the pact.

According to Polish sources, on 26 August Sharonov, the Soviet Ambassador in Warsaw, told Beck that the non-aggression treaty with Germany did not affect Soviet-Polish relations³. In a newspaper interview the next day Voroshilov indicated that the Soviet Union might be prepared to supply Poland with raw materials and military equipment in the event of a German attack⁴. The day after Poland was attacked Sharonov is reported to have asked Beck why no Polish request for aid had been forthcoming⁵. Moscow's indications of goodwill continued at a meeting between Molotov and the Polish Ambassador on 3 September⁶. At their next meeting on 8 September, however, Molotov withdrew previous offers of assistance on the grounds that the Anglo-French declaration of war on Germany had 'created an entirely new situation' and that 'the Soviet Union must care first and foremost for its own security'⁷.

The key to Moscow's initial indecision about the precise direction of its future foreign policy lay in Soviet uncertainties as to whether Britain and France would fulfill their obligations to Poland. Throughout July and August Maisky had been reporting to Moscow that the British appeasers were preparing another 'Munich'⁸. The signing of the Anglo-Polish mutual assistance treaty on 25 August must have alleviated these doubts, but from Moscow's point of view ditching Poland prematurely remained a dangerous course of action. Firstly, the possibility of an Anglo-French-German deal at the expense of Poland, perhaps of the USSR as well, remained until the British and French committed themselves to war. Secondly, with no support the Poles might surrender immediately. Or their rapid defeat was likely and this would leave the Soviet Union dangerously exposed to German attack, pact or no pact. Soviets hints and offers

of aid to Poland were, therefore, probably designed to bolster Warsaw's determination to resist the German onslaught and to avert or postpone an early Polish defeat should Britain and France fail to enter the war.

Soviet calculations were doubly wrong, however. Britain and France did enter the war, but Polish resistance proved short-lived anyway. It was in the context of Poland's rapid collapse and the passivity of Britain and France following the declaration of war that Molotov withdrew the offers of material aid to Poland. Also by 8 September there had been some significant developments in German-Soviet relations.

The accepted view of the Nazi-Soviet pact is that it contained a definite commitment on the part of Germany and the USSR to partition Poland. In September 1939 the two states did, of course, partition Poland, but this came later and is not evidence of a prior commitment to do so.

Support for the view that there was prior agreement to divide Poland rests on a textual interpretation of the second clause of the 'secret additional protocol' appended to the Soviet-German Treaty of Non-Aggression (whose only outward peculiarity was the absence of the usual clause allowing for its denunciation in the event of unprovoked aggression against third parties by either of the two signatories).

In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the area belonging to the Polish State the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula and San.

The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish state and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.

Crucial to the interpretation of this agreement are the references to 'spheres of influence' and to 'the course of further political developments'. On 23 August German-Soviet military partition was only one of a number of possible resolutions of the Danzig crisis. It was possible that the Nazis would be content with the seizure of Danzig and the re-establishment of a direct territorial link with East Prussia. It was also possible that Warsaw would sue for peace, leading to the emergence of some kind of rump Polish state. Or the

Poles, with British and French help, might have halted the German advance. (It is important to remember here that before September 1939 Poland had the reputation of being a potentially formidable military opponent.) Nor was it beyond the bounds of possibility that Hitler would postpone his attack or, even, secure a peaceful settlement of the dispute. The only thing the Russians knew for certain was that they had an agreement limiting German political and military expansion to western Poland. Only time and circumstances would determine how that would operate in practice.

That there was no specific agreement to partition Poland – it was only one of a number of options – is indicated by a telegram from Ribbentrop to Schulenburg on 3 September⁹:

We definitely expect to have beaten the Polish army decisively in a few weeks. We should keep the territory that was fixed at Moscow as a German sphere of interest under military occupation. We should naturally, however, for military reasons, have to continue to take action against such Polish military forces as are at that time located in the Polish territory belonging to the Russian sphere of influence.

Please discuss this at once with Molotov and see if the Soviet Union does not consider it desirable for Russian forces to move at the proper time against Polish forces in the Russian sphere of influence and, for their part, to occupy this territory. In our estimation this would not only be a relief for us, but also, in the sense of the Moscow agreements, in the Soviet interest as well.

Ribbentrop's evident need to interpret the 'sense' of the 'Moscow agreements' suggests that the meaning of the secret protocol agreed on 23 August was far from clear. Further evidence that this was indeed the case comes in a later despatch from Schulenburg in which he reported that 'the original inclination entertained by the Soviet Government and Stalin personally to permit the existence of a residual Poland has given way to the inclination to partition Poland along the Prussia-Narew-Vistula-San line'¹⁰.

On 5 September Molotov replied evasively to Ribbentrop's request, agreeing that Soviet action was necessary but arguing that premature intervention 'might injure our cause and promote unity among our opponents'¹¹.

Diplomatic circles in Moscow did not believe that the USSR would enter the war on the side of Germany. On 4 September Seeds

telegraphed London that 'my own opinion, shared by the Polish, Turkish and American ambassadors, is that the Soviet Government will not be lured into military assistance to Germany but will maintain an attitude of isolation for the time being at any rate'¹².

Seeds did not know, of course, the content of the secret addendum to the Nazi-Soviet pact and was not witness to Berlin's badgering of Moscow to join the attack on Poland. Molotov finally gave in to this pressure on 9 September when he announced to Schulenburg that Soviet forces would move into Poland in the next few days¹³. The critical decision to invade Poland had been taken.

A number of contradictory pressures must have borne down on the Soviet leadership. Obviously the occupation of eastern Poland was militarily a strategically desirable objective and, in view of German successes, perhaps a necessary one. There was a real possibility that if the USSR did not move into eastern Poland, Germany would; most certainly the spheres of influence agreement would favour the Germans if they controlled their part of Poland while the Russians did not control theirs. Failure to meet Ribbentrop's request could also seriously endanger the future of Soviet-German relations and upset Soviet calculations of avoiding conflict with Germany while a war of attrition raged in the West.

Entangled with these political-strategic factors was a 'national' question. The proposed Soviet zone of occupation corresponded roughly to the territories east of the 'Curzon line'. Thus a majority of the people of 'eastern Poland' were of Ukrainian or White Russian stock. An invasion of Poland, therefore, embodied a certain 'nationalistic' dynamic.

On the other hand, the Russians had to consider what role Britain and France would adopt should the Soviet Union join the attack on Poland. Would it occasion an Anglo-French declaration of war against the USSR? Another possibility was that the Soviet Union would march straight into the trap of a new 'Munich'. Britain and France had declared war on Germany but as yet had not aided Poland directly or launched an attack in the west. Could it be that the appeasers were plotting some kind of deal with Hitler which would be at the Soviet Union's expense?

Such cross-currents continued to operate even after the Soviet announcement to Germany of a move against Poland. Consequently, Soviet preparations for the invasion were relatively slow. It was not until 17 September that the Red Army actually crossed the border.

Practical factors also influenced the delay in Soviet military action. Firstly, like everyone else the Soviet leadership must have been surprised by the speed of the German advance and the rapid Polish collapse. Less time was available for mobilization than had been anticipated. Secondly, there was a danger that Japan might take advantage of Soviet military involvement in Europe to escalate the fighting along the Russian-Chinese frontier. This problem was resolved on 15 September by an agreement between the USSR and Japan to end the conflict and to establish a joint commission to negotiate a settlement of the territorial disputes¹⁴. Thirdly, the USSR needed a pretext for invading Poland. To attack as early as the Germans wanted would have appeared as an act of naked aggression, completely lacking in legal, political and ideological credibility. At one point Molotov even suggested to Schulenburg that he would issue a statement declaring that the Soviet Union had intervened to save the Ukrainians and White Russians from the Germans! The Germans protested strongly against any such proposal¹⁵.

Molotov's 17 September radio broadcast on the Soviet invasion omitted any reference to the German threat. It concentrated instead on the collapse of the Polish state and its abandonment of the Soviet people's Ukrainian and White Russian 'blood brothers'¹⁶. Before this, on 14 September, *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* had carried articles attacking Polish repression of the non-Polish population in eastern Poland and reporting growing resistance to Polish rule in that region¹⁷.

The Soviet invasion of eastern Poland was completed in less than a week¹⁸. As the Red Army mopped up what little resistance there was, the Soviet press carried glowing reports of the enthusiastic welcome the local populace had given to their 'liberators' from the East¹⁹. Following the invasion elections to people's assemblies were held. In November these voted unanimously for incorporation into the USSR. The degree of actual support for the Soviet occupation and for the subsequent Sovietization is difficult to assess. Support appears to have been greatest in Western Byelorussia (White Russia), where the local communists were well established. The Red Army was welcomed, too, in the Western Ukraine and in areas of Jewish settlement, at least initially. But this support was based more on resentment against the Poles and, in the case of the Ukrainians, on nationalist aspirations than on support for the Soviet regime. Whatever the real level of support it did not last long, for the Soviet

occupation of eastern Poland was no ordinary territorial annexation. The entry of Soviet forces into Western Byelorussia and Western Ukraine unleashed a revolution. A revolution from abroad utilizing the instruments of military conquest, political terror and inter-ethnic communal violence, but a revolution nonetheless – one in which the existing social order was razed to the ground and then reconstructed Soviet-style²⁰.

The partition of Poland marked a decisive turning point in Soviet foreign relations, on a par with that represented by the non-aggression treaty with Germany. On 23 August the Russians had opted, via rapprochement with Germany, to remain aloof from any European war and to manoeuvre independently to secure their own interests. On 17 September they embarked on a course of territorial expansion to meet the long-term threat to Soviet security posed by Germany's crushing defeat of Poland. They had forged the first link in a chain of defence stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

Security in the north-west: the Baltic States and Finland

The importance of the Baltic to Soviet security was enshrined in the very first clause of the secret additional protocol to the pact with Germany which assigned Finland, Estonia and Latvia to the Soviet sphere of influence. Again, the precise meaning attached to the agreement at the time when it was signed is unclear, except that it gave the Soviet Union a free hand in the region and precluded German military operations in the area. But whatever the original intentions in August 1939, by September and October the practical outcome of the agreement was already evident. For the Baltic States it meant being forced to sign mutual assistance treaties with the USSR and the establishment of Soviet military bases on their territory.

The Estonians were dealt with first. Towards the end of September the Estonian Foreign Minister arrived in Moscow, ostensibly to conclude a trade agreement with the USSR. He found himself confronted with an ultimatum from Molotov to sign a mutual assistance treaty²¹. Molotov reassured the Foreign Minister that²²:

We do not want to impair your sovereignty or form of government. We are not going to enforce Communism upon Estonia. We do not want to

hurt the economic system of Estonia. Estonia will retain her independence, her Government, Parliament, foreign and domestic policy.

But he added²³:

We cannot permit small states to be used against the USSR. Neutral Baltic States – that is too insecure. You can be sure that the Soviet Union in one way or another will see to its security. If you do not acquiesce in our proposals, the Soviet Union would carry out the safeguarding of its security in another way.

Molotov was not bluffing. Backing his threat was a steady build-up of Red Army strength along the Soviet-Estonian frontier²⁴. The Estonians duly acquiesced and signed the treaty on 28 September²⁵.

The Latvians were next. Talks between the Latvian Foreign Minister, Munters, and Stalin and Molotov took place in Moscow between 2 and 5 October, concluding with a treaty of mutual assistance between the two states.²⁶ This time it was Stalin's turn to be blunt. He informed Munters²⁷:

War is raging and we have to attend to our safety. I tell you frankly, a division of interest has already taken place . . . As far as Germany is concerned, we could occupy you. However, we want no abuses.

A treaty with Lithuania was signed on 10 October. This treaty was somewhat different from those with Estonia and Latvia. Lithuania was assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence only following a renegotiation of the terms of the Nazi-Soviet pact in Moscow at the end of September. Defence of the Lithuanian border under the terms of the treaty was a joint Soviet-Lithuanian responsibility and the two states agreed to mutual consultation in the event of threats to their common security. Included in the price of mutuality was the transfer of the former Polish city of Vilno to Lithuanian control²⁸. As David Kirby has pointed out, these provisions 'helped to produce a favourable response to the treaty in Lithuania'²⁹.

The policy of sweetening the pill of Soviet hegemony was applied to some extent to all the Baltic States. A series of trade agreements were signed, for example³⁰. More surprising was the degree of latitude Stalin and Molotov gave to the governments of the Baltic States. As one historian has put it³¹:

Despite the lack of freedom of decision in many a field of domestic and foreign policies, the Baltic States . . . outwardly remained independent. They could by no means be regarded as Soviet-occupied countries.

An interesting insight into Soviet policy towards the Baltic States during this early period is contained in an order by the People's Commissariat of Defence to Red Army units stationed in Estonia³²:

The treaty of mutual assistance with Estonia is bound to assure durable peace in the Baltic area . . . in conformity with the pact on mutual assistance, our units will be quartered and will live on the territory of a sovereign state, and they have . . . no right to interfere in its political affairs and social system.

All kinds of anti-Soviet provocateurs will try . . . to present the stationing of our units in Estonia as the beginning of its 'Sovietization'. These and similar sentiments and talk about 'Sovietization' of Estonia radically conflict with the policy of our Party and government.

In the autumn of 1939 Soviet security aims in relation to the Baltic States were limited. For the time being Moscow was content with mutual assistance treaties, military bases and a friendly disposition (albeit forced) on the part of the governments of the Baltic States.

Surprising though it may seem in the light of the Winter War of 1939–40, the limited nature of Soviet aims in the Baltic area was also apparent in Moscow's policy towards Finland.

The USSR had long been concerned to secure the defence of Leningrad – less than 20 miles from the Finnish border and vulnerable to attack from that direction or through the Gulf of Finland³³. On 5 October 1939 Moscow invited Helsinki to send a delegation to the Soviet Union to discuss Finnish-Soviet relations and the conclusion of a mutual assistance treaty along the lines of those recently completed between the USSR and the Baltic States³⁴. The Finnish delegation arrived in Moscow on the 11th and their first meeting with Stalin and Molotov was held the next day. The Soviets proposed that Finland should lease the Port of Hango to the USSR as a naval base, that the frontier with Leningrad should be adjusted to the north, and that several small islands in the Gulf of Finland should be ceded to the Soviet Union. In exchange they offered territorial compensation in the Karelia region and to withdraw their objections to Finnish fortification of the Åland Islands – an issue of long-

standing dispute between the two states. In the ensuing negotiations Moscow never varied from this position, although it was prepared to compromise over the details and nothing more was heard of its initial suggestion of a mutual assistance treaty. For their part the Finns were prepared to make some adjustments in their frontier with Leningrad and to concede some islands in the Gulf of Finland, but on no account were they prepared to lease Hango to the Soviet Union – a demand which they considered an affront to their national sovereignty³⁵.

Negotiations continued intermittently throughout October but the impasse was not broken. By early November negotiations had broken down completely. This was followed by increasing tension along the Finnish-Soviet frontier which had escalated by the end of the month into a full-scale border clash near the village of Mainila on the Karelian Isthmus. On 28 November Molotov renounced the 1932 non-aggression pact between the USSR and Finland. On 29 November Potemkin announced diplomatic relations with Finland were at an end³⁶. On 30 November the war began.

According to the Soviets war broke out as a result of 'armed provocations' by the Finns. According to the Finns the Red Army started the war by an unprovoked invasion. All the evidence points to the Finnish version of events being nearer the truth³⁷. More importantly, if Khrushchev's memoirs are to be believed, the Soviet leadership did not anticipate war with Finland over its demands concerning the security of Leningrad. They appear to have believed that the Finns would back down in the face of a threat of military action or, at worst, surrender when the first shots were fired³⁸. If this is what they believed, they blundered badly. The Finnish-Soviet war lasted more than three months. Soviet expectations of a quick and easy victory were confounded by difficult terrain, military incompetence and a spirited Finnish defence. The Red Army emerged from the war with its reputation badly battered and tens of thousands of dead and wounded³⁹.

The diplomatic cost of the war was high too – the humiliation of expulsion from the League of Nations for aggression; a 'moral embargo' by the United States on the shipment of war-related goods to the Soviet Union; the withdrawal of the Soviet Ambassador from Italy following popular anti-Soviet manifestations; almost universal condemnation of the Soviet action; and the despatch from a number of countries of volunteers to fight on the side of the Finns. But most

important was the impact of the war on Anglo-Soviet and Franco-Soviet relations. As the Winter War progressed, Soviet relations with the Western powers were heading for a gigantic crisis. In London and Paris plans were being drawn up to despatch an allied expeditionary force to help the Finns and to bomb the Baku oil fields. The former action would almost certainly have led to the spread of the war to the whole of Scandinavia as the Germans would have intervened to protect their strategic interests (primarily connected to Sweden's iron ore deposits) from Anglo-French encroachments. What had begun as almost a police operation to improve the defence of Leningrad increasingly threatened to drag the Soviet Union into full-scale involvement in the European war.

It is against this background of military miscalculation and diplomatic crisis that Moscow's reception of peace overtures from Finland has to be viewed. The first Finnish peace overture was made on 4 December 1939 via the Swedish envoy in Moscow. Molotov rebuffed this approach on the curious ground that the USSR no longer recognized the Helsinki Government and would only deal with the 'People's Government of Finland'⁴⁰. The 'People's Government of Finland' was headed by Otto Kuusinen, a leading Finnish communist and Comintern leader. It was purely of Soviet creation and its only effective acts were to conclude a mutual assistance treaty with the USSR and to accept Moscow's demands concerning the safety of Leningrad in exchange for 70,000 square kilometres of Soviet Karelia⁴¹.

It is tempting to dismiss the Kuusinen government as a mere propaganda ploy. That, however, would be to underestimate the political and ideological difficulties facing Moscow. For the first time in its history the Soviet State was waging war to secure territories to which it had no legitimate claim. It was an act which contradicted the central principles of foreign policy enunciated at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, principles which the Soviet leadership still proclaimed and to which they believed they adhered. In order to justify this action to themselves, to the Soviet people and to the outside world, it was necessary to create the Kuusinen government. To an extent also, the Soviets believed their own propaganda – that their invasion of Finland would be supported by the Finnish people and would lead to the overthrow of the 'bourgeois' government in Helsinki⁴².

Moscow eventually had to measure these 'idealistic' convictions

against reality. As the war dragged on the illusion of a pro-Soviet popular uprising in Finland dissipated. The 'People's Government' quickly disappeared from view and, with the diplomatic and political pressure growing, by early 1940 Moscow was prepared to enter into serious peace negotiations with the Finns.

Throughout January and February 1940 unofficial negotiations under the auspices of the Swedish Government were conducted in Stockholm. The breakthrough came when the Finns, faced with a deteriorating military situation and fearful, too, of being dragged into the European war, conceded the essential Soviet demands of a naval base on Hango and a substantial adjustment of the Finnish-Leningrad border. Finnish negotiators arrived in Moscow in early March. The peace treaty was signed on 12 March 1940⁴³.

Security in the south-west: Turkey and Bulgaria

There were no Soviet initiatives in South-Eastern Europe comparable to those undertaken in relation to Finland, the Baltic States and Poland – at least not until the summer of 1940. But the Soviets were not inactive during the preceding period. Although the main thrust of the Soviet security drive between September 1939 and April 1940 was in the Baltic area, efforts were made to strengthen Soviet security in the Balkans. These efforts focused on relations with two states: Turkey and Bulgaria. Moscow's strategy was simple: to prevent either state aligning itself in the European conflict and, ideally, to forge security alliances of its own with Sofia and Ankara. The antecedents of that strategy were, however, not quite so straightforward. It represented a complete break with the policy Moscow pursued before the pact with Nazi Germany. During that period – from April 1939 – the aim had been to integrate Bulgaria and Turkey into an anti-German collective security bloc led by Britain, France and the USSR. The abandonment of the collective security project in August 1939 changed Soviet policy towards Turkey and Bulgaria. To appreciate fully the character both of that change and of the new policy it is necessary to refer back to Potemkin's tour of the Balkans in April/May 1939.

Potemkin arrived in Ankara on 29 April, stayed until 5 May and returned to Moscow, via Sofia, Bucharest and Warsaw. His mission was to respond to Turkish questions about Soviet involvement in a

proposed mutual assistance treaty between Britain, France and Turkey and 'to obtain more information on Balkan questions and on the possibility of drawing Bulgaria into the anti-fascist bloc'⁴⁴.

While in Ankara, Potemkin probed Turkish attitudes on the prospect of a Soviet-Turkish mutual security pact linked to the projected triple alliance between the USSR, Britain and France. He also explored the idea of a 'Black Sea Pact' between the USSR, Bulgaria, Rumania and Turkey. It was this latter project that linked Potemkin's mission in Ankara with that in Sofia and Bucharest. But, as the Turks pointed out, the prerequisite of any such pact was the settlement of the territorial dispute between Rumania and Bulgaria over South Dobroudja (which Bulgaria had been forced to cede to Rumania under the 1919 Neuilly Treaty). Also, it would have to be concerted with the Balkan entente of Greece, Rumania, Turkey and Yugoslavia – an alliance directed primarily against Bulgarian revanchism. Both problems would be extremely difficult to resolve. Potemkin heard much the same story in Sofia and Bucharest⁴⁵.

In the face of these difficulties the Russians did not pursue seriously the idea of a Black Sea security pact. Prospects for a Soviet-Turkish mutual assistance treaty were brighter but it was clear that its key lay in the successful conclusion of the triple alliance negotiations with Britain and France. So, pending the outcome of those negotiations, Moscow suspended bilateral talks with Turkey. Significantly, when the political negotiations for the triple alliance were more or less complete, Moscow reactivated contacts with Ankara. In early August the Soviet Ambassador informed the Turks of the progress that had been made and invited them to Moscow to discuss a Soviet-Turkish mutual assistance treaty. The Turks hedged, saying that any Soviet-Turkish pact would have to follow on from the conclusion of the Anglo-French-Turkish pact then being negotiated⁴⁶.

The Soviet offer was repeated on 26 August⁴⁷, but by this time the context of Soviet-Turkish negotiations on mutual assistance was changing. As Molotov remarked to the Turkish Ambassador on 4 September, the international situation had changed and required careful study⁴⁸. Molotov might have added, but did not, that the new situation also required the Soviets to pay close attention to the demands of Berlin.

Two days before Molotov had told Schulenburg that, in line with German expectations, the USSR would work for the permanent

neutrality of Turkey in the war⁴⁹. On 5 September Schulenburg saw Molotov again and urged him to secure closure of the Dardanelles⁵⁰. At a further meeting, on 17 September, Stalin informed Schulenburg that any Soviet-Turkish mutual assistance pact would include a clause debarring Soviet involvement in a war with Germany and that the overall objective of such a pact would be Turkish neutrality, including the closure of the Straits to foreign warships⁵¹.

Saracoglu, the Turkish Foreign Minister, arrived in Moscow on 25 September. During his three-week stay he had only two meetings with Stalin and Molotov (on 1 and 16 October) – a fact which presumably reflected Moscow's pressing concerns in relation to the Baltic. The Turks were willing to conclude a mutual assistance treaty with the USSR but would not concede Moscow's demand that the proposed Turkish pact with Britain and France should be dropped. Such a pact would have forged a Soviet foreign policy link, albeit very indirect, with Britain and France. Nor was Ankara prepared to close the Straits, despite Molotov's insistence on 16 October that a protocol on closing the Dardanelles 'was an essential pre-condition of the conclusion of a mutual assistance pact' and that 'without this protocol the pact was impossible, it loses meaning if we are unable to agree on this question'⁵². The two sides were unable to agree and Saracoglu returned home and signed a mutual assistance pact with Britain and France⁵³.

Any prospect of a Moscow-led, neutral Balkan bloc died with the collapse of the Soviet-Turkish negotiations. But there was still the possibility of drawing Bulgaria into the Soviet orbit and considerable effort was expended on this task over the next few months.

Indispensable to any Soviet-Bulgarian rapprochement was Moscow's recognition of Bulgarian territorial claims on Rumania. Before the Nazi-Soviet pact Moscow had, in the interests of the wider collective security front, opposed Bulgarian revisionism. As early 25 August, however, Moscow was expressing support for the return of South Dobroudja⁵⁴. This conciliatory gesture was followed, in September, by a favourable response to Bulgaria's declaration of neutrality⁵⁵.

On 20 September Molotov proposed to the Bulgarian Ambassador a mutual assistance pact between the two states. This was raised again by Moscow at the end of September during the course of a visit by the chief of the Bulgarian Air Force⁵⁶. Sofia rejected these approaches on 16 October⁵⁷, but Moscow continued to pursue the

matter. A.I. Lavrentiev, head of the Narkomindel's East European section, together with a large staff, was despatched to Bulgaria as Ambassador⁵⁸. In a meeting with the Bulgarian Prime Minister on 3 November Lavrentiev quizzed him about the rejection of the Soviet offer. In reply, Kyoseivanov stressed that it was not clear just what support the Soviet Union could offer Bulgaria in the event of war⁵⁹. In response, Moscow instructed Lavrentiev to inform Sofia that 'if the Bulgarians find themselves in any trouble they can count on the Soviet Union not abandoning them and that, if they so desired, the Soviet Union would be prepared to render them effective assistance'⁶⁰.

The issue of a Soviet-Bulgarian mutual assistance treaty was not raised again formally by the Russians until the autumn of 1940. In the meantime Moscow concentrated on general improvements in Soviet-Bulgarian relations, particularly in the commercial and cultural spheres⁶¹.

The failure of Soviet diplomacy to strengthen materially the security of the USSR's south-western borders contrasts sharply with the successes achieved by force of arms in Poland, Finland and the Baltic States. But the power and influence of the Soviet Union in the Balkans had always been limited. It was at best an outsider in jockeying for position with Britain, France, Germany, even Italy. In that context the modest toehold established in relation to Bulgaria was of some significance. Besides, there were plenty of other gains to be made under the aegis of the pact with Germany – political, economic and military.

CHAPTER

10 *The Unholy Alliance: Soviet-German Economic, Military and Political Co-operation, 1939–40*

‘The friendship of the peoples of Germany and the Soviet Union, sealed in blood, has every reason to be lasting and firm.’ *J.V. Stalin, December 1939*

Soviet ‘neutrality’

Soviet Russia formally declared its neutrality in the European War on 17 September¹. On the same day the Red Army crossed into Eastern Poland. The juxtaposition of these two events, together with the absence in the August pact with Germany of any provision for denunciation of the agreement in event of aggression against third parties, exposed the true character of Soviet ‘neutrality’. ‘Friendly non-belligerent’ would be a more apposite description of the Soviet stance, which was similar to that adopted by Fascist Italy². But unlike Mussolini, Stalin was buying time to prepare for war against Hitler, not to enter it on the same side. Within this perspective, maintaining the non-aggression pact became critically important. In certain respects, however, the pact was unsatisfactorily vague, particularly given Poland’s rapid and complete capitulation – an event which the pact had presaged, but had not specifically anticipated in its text. Thus it was on 19 September that Molotov proposed to the German Ambassador that fresh negotiations on Poland be held in Moscow³.

The ensuing discussions with Schulenburg and with Ribbentrop (who arrived in Moscow on 27 September) revealed that the Russians had three main aims in the negotiations. Firstly, to settle the demarcation line in Poland. Secondly, to gain German consent to their dealings with the Baltic States. And, thirdly, to remove any potential sources of friction between the USSR and Germany⁴.

The negotiations culminated on 28 September with the signing of a German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty under which a new demarcation line in Poland, corresponding more closely to ethnic boundaries, was agreed. Germany gained more Polish territory from this new demarcation. In return the USSR secured the transfer of Lithuania into its sphere of influence. This latter agreement was enshrined in a secret protocol to the treaty (see the text in Appendix 4), as were provisions concerning the removal of German peoples from the Soviet zone and the suppression of any Polish agitation in the occupied territories⁵.

From Moscow's point of view the treaty was a resounding success, but it had a price: political and diplomatic support for Germany against the Western powers. Indeed, it was in Moscow that the Germans launched their so-called 'peace offensive' against Britain and France. Accompanying the 28 September friendship treaty was a joint Soviet-German declaration calling for an end to hostilities now that Poland had collapsed and blaming the Western powers for the continuation of the war⁶. Similar sentiments were expressed in the Soviet press following Hitler's peace offer to the British and French in early October⁷.

The theme of Anglo-French culpability for the continuance of the war was taken up with a vengeance by Molotov in his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31 October⁸:

. . . as far as the European great powers are concerned, Germany is in the position of a state which is striving for the earliest termination of war and for peace, while Britain and France . . . are in favour of continuing the war and are opposed to the conclusion of peace . . . they do not want war stopped and peace restored but are seeking new excuses for continuing the war with Germany.

Molotov characterized the war as imperialist, specifically as a struggle for colonial possessions and, more generally, as a contest for world supremacy. In other words, the war was nothing to do with Poland nor was it an ideological crusade, under the banner of democracy, against fascism.

Molotov's chastisement of Britain and France was in sharp contrast to his remarks on Germany. His speech was littered with favourable comments on the Germans, in particular on the rapprochement between Germany and the USSR.

The ideological garb in which the speech was clothed was its most notable feature. Not that it was particularly new: the Leninist analysis of imperialism, the anti-Versailles tenor, the identification of Britain and France as the main enemies of peace, the characterization of German foreign policy as essentially just and progressive, were all familiar fare for anyone cognizant of Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s and early 1930s.

The September treaty with Germany and Molotov's October speech have in recent years become the focus of critical comment by Soviet historians. A particularly virulent critic has been Dimitrii Volkogonov, author of a 'glasnost' biography of Stalin. Volkogonov argues that while the August pact with Germany may be defensible, the September 'Friendship' treaty is not. He accuses Stalin and Molotov of wrongly turning their backs on previous anti-fascist political positions and of declaring an unnecessary ideological truce between Nazism and Communism⁹.

Volkogonov and his supporters make an appealing and powerful case. But they fail to deal with one unpalatable fact: Moscow's ideological and political truce with Berlin did cement German-Soviet co-operation during the 'honeymoon' phase of 1939-40. To have abjured the truce would have jeopardized the not unsubstantial gains made in this period. The German concessions made under the September 1939 Boundary and Friendship Treaty have already been mentioned. Subsequent technical difficulties in implementing the treaty were resolved easily and amicably. Moscow was allowed a free hand in the Baltic. During the Finnish war, for example, German diplomats were instructed to defend Soviet actions and to brook no suggestion of German intercession¹⁰. Nor did Germany oppose Soviet initiatives in relation to Turkey and Bulgaria. Military and economic co-operation during this period is dealt with below.

A further, less tangible factor must be taken into account when assessing the effects of what Volkogonov calls Stalin and Molotov's whitewash of Nazi Germany: its impact on Hitler's perception of the USSR. For a period in 1939-1940 Hitler and Ribbentrop held the view that the Bolshevik regime was being subsumed by a modern, state form of Russia nationalism. On this basis Hitler was able seriously to contemplate the possibility of a long-term alliance with Soviet Russia (providing Moscow accepted German hegemony). It was only when the clash between German and Soviet interests in the Balkans developed in 1940-41 that Hitler reverted to his previous

determination to mount an anti-Bolshevik crusade for 'living space' in the east¹¹. It is impossible to know what exactly would have happened if Hitler had withdrawn his goodwill earlier. But at the very least it would have complicated the Soviet strategy of winning time and space in order to prepare for a future German attack.

The Comintern and the war

Even in the face of these considerations it is still possible to argue that the price of German co-operation and Hitler's goodwill was too high. This was certainly the position the Comintern was put in, since its member parties, particularly the communists of Western Europe, bore the main cost of the Nazi-Soviet ideological rapprochement.

The West European communist parties initially maintained a distinction between communist strategy in the capitalist countries and the tactics of Soviet foreign policy. The non-aggression treaty was welcomed and supported as the only recourse open to the USSR in the face of Anglo-French appeasement policies. In their own countries the communists would continue to pursue the popular front line and their efforts to secure a peace front against fascism and aggression. The seeming incongruity between communist policy and Soviet foreign policy was ameliorated somewhat by Molotov's straightforward, non-ideological defence of Soviet actions in his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31 August.

With the outbreak of war on 1 September the West European communist parties began to refashion popular frontism to suit the new circumstances. For a brief period in early to mid September the popular front strategy took on a new life as communists rallied to the banner of progressive national defence against Hitlerite aggression.

Four themes characterized communist policy statements during this period. Firstly, that the main responsibility for the war was Hitler's. Secondly, that Anglo-French appeasement policies had prepared the way for Hitler's attack on Poland. Thirdly, that, although the war against Hitler could not be deemed a democratic war against fascism, the communists would support it in the interests of national defence against aggression. Fourthly, that the USSR was the main force for peace and had to be supported¹².

The communists' political stance was summed up by the title of a pamphlet written by Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the British

party: *How to Win the War*. Pollitt's pamphlet was published on 12 September. By the time the party's central committee met on 24 September, however, there were signs that Moscow was formulating a quite different line. During that meeting a representative from the Comintern arrived with the news that Moscow believed the war to be imperialist. The working class had no interest in participating in the war and national defeatism rather than national defence was the order of the day. Despite Pollitt's opposition the central committee voted on 2 October to support the Comintern line¹³.

From the end of September through October a similar fate befell the other parties of the Comintern. The new line was sanctified by Molotov's 31 October speech and by a Comintern manifesto issued a week later¹⁴. For the next six months the Comintern followed the Soviet line and campaigned for an end to the war, thereby effectively undermining the Western war effort. After Hitler's conquest of Western Europe in 1940 the line began to change, but it was not until the German attack on the USSR in June 1941 that communist parties again adopted the line of anti-fascist unity¹⁵. By that time the damage had been done. As in the 'third period' of 1928–33 the communists isolated themselves from the rest of the left and the labour movement. Many of the gains of the popular front years were undone. While it is true that the communist parties did recover the lost ground after June 1941 the mistrust and suspicion generated reverberated for many years after the war.

Whether Stalin and Molotov gave much thought to the toll they exacted from the Comintern is not known. Presumably they believed that the goodwill bought by the Comintern and by their own panegyrics of Nazi Germany were well worth it.

Economic co-operation

Soviet-German trade during the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact was regulated by three economic agreements. The first, concluded on 19 August 1939, provided for a credit to the USSR of 200 million Reichsmarks at 5 per cent interest to buy German machinery, manufactured goods and armaments. In return, the Russians agreed to supply Germany with 180 million Reichsmarks worth of raw materials. A notable feature of this agreement was the time lag in reciprocal deliveries. Since the Soviets were supplying raw materials,

deliveries were to begin immediately, while the German goods would be manufactured on the basis of specific Soviet orders¹⁶.

The second agreement, concluded on 11 February 1940, grew out of a German desire to increase the time lag in their deliveries and the overall scale of transactions. The agreement, therefore, provided for Soviet deliveries over a period of 18 months and reciprocal German deliveries over a period of 27 months. The scale of deliveries envisaged was 600 million Reichsmarks worth of raw materials from the Soviet Union to Germany and equivalent German deliveries of manufactured goods over the longer period¹⁷.

The third economic agreement, concluded on 10 January 1941, was a consequence of the suspension in September 1940 of Soviet deliveries to Germany when the latter failed to keep the schedules of reciprocal deliveries agreed in February 1940. The January agreement laid down a new schedule of deliveries and trading resumed¹⁸.

What was the actual extent of commerce between the two states and how did it compare with previous years? In 1940, according to Soviet statistics, the USSR's exports to Germany were valued at 555.9 million Roubles (the highest since 1930), whereas imports amounted to 316.3 million Roubles (the highest since 1933). The total volume of trade, however, was considerably lower than the peak years of Soviet-German commerce in 1929–32¹⁹.

A more concrete picture of Soviet-German trade is given by the following figures of raw materials supplied to Germany between January 1940 and June 1941²⁰:

1.5 million	tons of grain
100,000	tons of cotton
2 million	tons of petroleum products
1.5 million	tons of timber
140,000	tons of manganese
26,000	tons of chromium

Compared with previous years the manganese exports were higher than in any except 1934 and 1935, the timber exports were comparable to most of the 1930s except 1934 and 1935 when they were higher, and the petroleum exports were four times as high as in the 1930s. Almost all Soviet exports of grain, timber and petroleum products went to Germany²¹.

On the Soviet side of the equation the picture is less clear, but the

following list of the top ten Soviet imports from Germany in 1940 gives some indication of the flow of goods and materials into the USSR²².

	<i>Tonnage</i>	<i>Rouble Value (000s)</i>
Machinery & Equipment	29,188	147,652
Oil Products & Raw Materials	3,519,692	139,366
Rolled Metals	9,426	43,407
Electrical Equipment	4,233	28,917
River and Sea-Related Equipment	8,791	27,129
Scientific Equipment and Accessories	536	14,600
Chemical Products	1,802	9,926
Construction Equipment	1,724	4,872
Forging Equipment etc.	1,457	4,463
Transport Goods	138	1,200

It is very difficult to draw up a balance sheet of which country gained most from the trading relationship. Many historians have pointed to the discrepancy between the value of Soviet exports to Germany and the value of German exports to the USSR and concluded that Germany was by far the greater beneficiary. Such a discrepancy, however, was not an unusual feature of a trading relationship in which one side supplied raw materials and the other manufactured goods. It is also very difficult to weigh up the economic value of raw materials relative to manufactures, particularly in the absence of any detailed inventory of the manufactures.

The importance of Soviet exports to the German war economy is stressed by some historians. In most cases, however, the raw materials supplied by the USSR represented only a small proportion of German needs. For example, the bulk of German oil needs were fulfilled by Rumania²³. The Soviet contribution can only be considered vital in chromium, manganese and other raw materials whose supply to Germany was hindered by the British naval blockade. Perhaps more important than direct Soviet supplies were the raw materials transported across the USSR from the Far East²⁴.

It is unlikely that the detailed balance-sheet of German-Soviet trade was a matter of vital importance to Moscow (although the Soviet negotiators were hard bargainers who attempted to extract as

much as possible from their partners)²⁵. What counted more was the contribution of economic relations to the overall political strategy of binding Hitler as closely as possible to the non-aggression and friendship treaties of August and September 1939. The same was true in the military sphere.

Military co-operation

While Soviet-German trade in 1939–41 approached levels comparable to those of the Rapallo era, military co-operation did not. The Russians made numerous demands of the Germans for armaments but very few were met. For example, they asked for the hulls of the cruisers *Seydlitz*, *Lutzow* and *Prince Eugen* and for the plans of the battleships *Bismark* and *Tirpitz*²⁶. All they got was the hull of the *Lutzow* which was towed into Leningrad harbour in the spring of 1940 and construction work began under the supervision of German engineers. Work was still in progress when Operation Barbarossa was launched. The *Lutzow* was disabled and lay in the harbour for the rest of the war²⁷.

They did no better on combat aircraft. All they had achieved by June 1940, despite the despatch to Germany of several high-powered purchasing delegations, was the receipt of 5 ME-109s, 2 J.88s, 2 Dornier 215s and 1-Heinkel 100²⁸. The Germans also appeared to have supplied some naval armaments, artillery equipment, tanks and ammunition, although in what quantities it is difficult to determine²⁹.

However, the Soviet-German military intercourse went beyond that of the 1920s in at least one respect: actual military operations. The Soviets' first assistance appears to have been providing a navigational aid for German bombers attacking Poland. Apparently the Germans asked the Russians to broadcast a call-sign from a radio near Minsk on 1 September. They refused to do this, but did agree to repeat the word 'Minsk' as often as possible and to extend broadcasting time on that day³⁰. The next instance of military co-operation occurred at the time of the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland and included the issuing of a joint communiqué³¹. But perhaps the most extensive co-operation occurred in the naval sphere. The Russians allowed German ships to use Murmansk as a refuge, even, it is claimed, as a base for equipping auxiliary cruisers to attack British shipping³².

Most important of all the Germans were allowed to establish a U-boat base on Soviet territory, at 'Basis Nord' in Zapadnaya Litza Bay near Murmansk. The base was operational until it became unnecessary after the invasion of Norway³³.

How significant was Soviet-German military co-operation? Certainly, Soviet assistance to the German military must have been of some value, particularly the facility of 'Basis Nord'. Whether or not German supplies of armaments, licences and technical information compensated the Soviets sufficiently it is difficult to say. However, as in the case of trade such calculations are unlikely to have been of major interest to the Soviet leadership. What they wanted was time and space and they were prepared to go to any lengths to get it. Their determination to postpone any German attack was most evident in their willingness to accept a near catastrophic deterioration in relations with Britain and France as part of the price of Hitler's continued co-operation and goodwill.

CHAPTER

11 *To the Brink of War: Anglo-Soviet-French Relations 1939–40*

'In the past few months such concepts as "aggression" and "aggressor" have acquired new concrete connotation, new meaning. It is not hard to understand that we can no longer employ these concepts in the sense that we did, say, three or four months ago. The roles you see are changing.' *V.M. Molotov, October 1939*

Appeasers and anti-appeasers

The dominant theme of Moscow's relations with London and Paris in the early months of the Second World War was the conviction that Anglo-French ruling circles still entertained the hope that German expansionism could be redirected against the USSR. From Paris on 18 October the Soviet Ambassador, Suritz, wrote to Moscow¹:

Official circles and those close to the government . . . still cherish the hope of inciting the USSR and Germany against each other. Hence the task of official propaganda to inflame in every way what can cause immediate differences between Germany and the USSR.

On 23 November Maisky filed a similar report from London, which said the British appeasers still held the view that 'Britain and France could somehow be reconciled with Germany and in the end Hitler could in some way be steered eastward against the Soviet Union'².

If Zhukov's recollections are to be believed, Stalin shared these assessments. In early May 1940 he told Zhukov³:

The French Government led by Daladier and Britain's Chamberlain Government do not want to be seriously involved in the war with Germany. They are still hoping to push Hitler into a war with the Soviet Union. Their refusal, in 1939, to form an anti-Hitler bloc with us, was due

to the fact that they did not wish to tie Hitler's hands in his aggression against the Soviet Union.

Stalin's conviction did not, it appears, waver after the end of the 'phoney war'. General Chuikov reports that in autumn 1940 Stalin told him⁴:

Do not imagine that after France's defeat the Western conciliators will depart from the scene. Even now, in this difficult time for the British people, appeasers of the aggressor are rushing back and forth between Berlin and London. They are prepared to make new concessions at any time, provided the aggressor turns his arms against the Soviet Union.

It is also apparent that the experience of the tripartite negotiations with Britain and France continued to rankle with Stalin. In December 1939 he complained to the chief of the Estonian armed forces that⁵:

In the world press at present is unfolding an orchestrated campaign of attack against the USSR which is accused of carrying out an imperialist expansion policy, especially in connection with the Finnish-Soviet conflict. Widespread rumours allege that the Soviet Union in its negotiations with Britain and France required for itself the right to seize Finland, Estonia and Latvia. . . It is typical that the English and French, who are spreading and fabricating rumours about us, have decided not to publish any confirmation of these 'rumours' in collections of official documents. The reason is very simple . . . stenographic records show that the French and English had no serious desire to achieve a fair and honest agreement with us, which could have averted war. All the time they only dodged.

On the other hand, Moscow could perceive countervailing tendencies in British and French policy to that of the 'Munichmen', particularly in the personages of Churchill and Eden. But however preferable the 'anti-appeasers' were to the 'Munichmen', they too wanted to involve the USSR in war with Germany, albeit as an ally. Moscow was determined this should not happen, for the time being at least. Hence, Moscow's instruction to Maisky in November 1939 to deliver a gentle rebuff to the courtship of anti-appeasement circles. Maisky was ordered to tell Churchill and Eden that although their desire to improve Anglo-Soviet relations was appreciated in Moscow, since

they 'did not decide British policy at the present, the USSR does not see favourable prospects'⁶.

This stance was wholly different from that taken by Moscow before the war when it had assiduously encouraged Churchill and other opponents of Chamberlain. Yet, as the quotation indicates, the door to future co-operation remained open, as it did in official relations with Britain and, to a lesser extent, with France. Moscow had no desire to break completely with Britain and France, nor to embrace the Germans completely.

It must have been a considerable relief to Moscow that the Soviet invasion of Poland did not result in an Anglo-French declaration of war in support of their Polish ally⁷. This left the way open to explore the future of Anglo-Soviet and Franco-Soviet relations in the aftermath of the events of 23 August and 17 September.

The politics of trade

The first meeting between the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, and Maisky after the outbreak of war was held on 23 September. Halifax was interested in the possibility of a wartime trade agreement and in the political significance of recent changes in Soviet foreign policy⁸. Moscow replied to these questions on 26 September. The next day Maisky told Halifax that trade talks were possible as long as any agreement did not infringe Soviet neutrality. Soviet foreign policy had not changed, but its policy towards Germany was 'determined by the non-aggression pact'. Suritz was instructed by Moscow to make a similar statement to the French⁹.

In early October Maisky had meetings with Churchill, Eden and Elliot (Minister of Health) at which questions of trade and a general improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations were discussed further¹⁰. On 16 October and again on 25 October, Maisky met Halifax who told him that Britain was prepared to enter trade negotiations if they were part of improved political relations¹¹.

For Moscow the prospective trade talks offered the possibility of a constructive dialogue with London which would undermine the anti-Soviet machinations of the appeasers, lessen Soviet dependence on trade with Germany and indicate to Berlin that Moscow had other bargaining options too. Halifax's stipulations on the political preconditions of trade were somewhat ominous (although expected), as was

the parallel lack of progress in contacts with the French¹². But these difficulties were as nothing compared to the storm-clouds gathering over Anglo-Soviet and Franco-Soviet relations over the Soviet-Finnish crisis. At the end of November the Soviet-Finnish war began and the storm broke. Anglo-Soviet trade negotiations disappeared from the diplomatic agenda for the duration.

The politics of war

Allied political and material support for Finland¹³ was a predictable consequence of the Soviet action. Nor was the popular clamour for a break in diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union particularly surprising¹⁴. But Moscow must have been shocked by reports from London and Paris that the allies were planning direct military intervention on the side of Finland and even considering attacking targets in the Caucasus and elsewhere¹⁵. Such action would threaten, at the very least, to involve the whole of Scandinavia in war (as the Germans would inevitably intervene) and, at worst, precipitate war between the USSR and Britain and France. Moscow found the reports confusing. After all, the main aim of the Munichmen was to embroil the Soviet Union in war with Germany. Yet now, side by side with the anti-appeasers, they seemed to be preparing to engage the USSR directly and to push it into alliance with Germany.

Maisky provided an answer of sorts to this conundrum in a despatch sent on 23 December. Soviet participation in the war on the German side was apparently considered a lesser evil in some British and French ministerial circles. They calculated, said Maisky, that the USSR would be weakened by war, diminishing its influence in international affairs. Moreover, these people believed that it was not beyond hope that the allies could strike a deal with Germany, leaving the Soviet Union alone to fight the whole capitalist world¹⁶.

The allies' real aims were much more prosaic than Maisky's nightmarish scenario. The main objective of the allied expedition being planned in London and Paris was to occupy, en passant, the Swedish iron ore fields which were vital to the German war economy. It was accepted that this tactic would extend the war to neutral Scandinavia and that it held the danger of provoking war with the Soviet Union¹⁷.

A.J.P. Taylor's verdict on the projected allied expedition was that 'the British and French governments had taken leave of their senses'¹⁸ – a not unfair assessment. In the event, the British and French were saved from their madness when the Russians, pre-empting an allied intervention, began peace negotiations with the Finns which ended the war in March 1940.

It is possible, however, to detect an element of insanity in Soviet actions too, for it was their actions which fuelled the drive to intervention in Britain and France. Molotov's October speech, the support for Hitler's peace offensive, the conclusion of the German-Soviet trade agreement in February 1940 – not to speak of the invasions of Poland and Finland, which could at least be presented as necessary defensive measures – were all actions which strengthened the hand of those in Britain and, especially, in France who argued that the USSR was a *de facto* ally of Germany and had to be treated as such. But the rationale for Soviet policy was the absolute priority of maintaining the German connexion – even at the risk of breaking relations with the Western powers and even at the risk of war.

At the end of the Winter War the question of an Anglo-Soviet trade agreement returned to the agenda as relations resumed their previous course¹⁹. Relations with France, however, continued to be strained. Indeed, on 26 March, Suritz was recalled to Moscow following French complaints about his statements on the Soviet-Finnish peace treaty²⁰. Further, allied circles were still discussing military action in the Caucasus as a way to cut off German oil supplies to the USSR²¹. Fortunately none of these discussions came to fruition because in the spring of 1940 certain events, which cast a completely different shadow over Soviet relations with Britain and France, were set in motion.

CHAPTER

12 *Strategic Crisis: The Breakdown of the Alliance with Germany, 1940*

'The first year of the European war is drawing to a close but the end is not yet in sight. It is more probable that we are now approaching a new stage in which the war . . . will become more intense. . . Far from reducing the significance of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, events in Europe have, on the contrary, emphasised the importance of its existence and further development.'

V.M. Molotov, August 1940

The war spreads

The record of Soviet foreign policy during the first few months of the Second World War was, in its own terms, one of considerable achievement. Soviet security along the north-western and central approaches to Leningrad and Moscow had been fortified by the partition of Poland, the treaties with the Baltic States, and the gains from the war with Finland. Economic and political relations with Germany had developed along favourable lines. Moscow had for the first time gained a foothold, albeit tenuous, in the Balkans, through its relations with Bulgaria. Most important, the USSR had managed to remain aloof from the war between the Western powers and Germany, despite the crisis in Anglo-Soviet and Franco-Soviet relations engendered by the conflict with Finland. The war with Finland had been costly and Turkey's refusal of Moscow's demands left the Soviet southern flank exposed. But it was with evident satisfaction that Molotov reported to the Supreme Soviet on 31 March 1940 that 'as regards safeguarding the security of our country we have achieved no mean success'¹. The scene seemed set for the Soviets to continue their 'neutralist' course: to stay out of the war for as long as possible; to consolidate and extend Soviet security measures; and to build up the USSR's defence capacity.

Hitler's conquest of Western Europe in the spring and summer of 1940 completely upset this prognosis and led to sharp turns in both Soviet domestic and foreign policy. When France fell in June, Soviet Russia found itself in a position more vulnerable to attack than it had been in 1939. German military might was unimpaired and had at its disposal the combined material resources of most of continental Europe. Britain, led by the new Churchill Government, was determined to fight on, but its capacity to resist Hitler for much longer seemed doubtful.

In domestic policy, the Soviets responded to the new danger with a series of measures to speed up the tempo of war preparations. A ukase of the Supreme Soviet on 26 June introduced eight-hour day, six-day week working and stiffened the discipline of the already harsh labour code. Behind the scenes, other initiatives were also in progress. The decade-long economic mobilization for war assumed a more urgent character as steps were taken to increase the production of tanks, aircraft, artillery, guns and ammunition and the crucial industrial inputs to manufacture these armaments. Various reorganizations were carried out, including that of the army, which found itself with a new disciplinary code too. Thousands of purged officers returned to the Red Army, and the core of commanders who were to win the great victories of 1942-5 began to occupy key positions in the army structure.

The efficacy of these and other measures remains open to question: indeed, it has been the subject of a long and intense debate both in the West and in the Soviet Union. The discussion has ranged over strategic planning and economic performance, questions of military doctrine and organization, policy-making structures and procedures, the impact of key procurement decisions and the role of particular individuals, not least that of Stalin and the core of the Soviet political and military leadership. In all these respects it is possible to detect major defects in the Soviet war preparations: targets unmet because of the astringent nature of the planning and economic system; miscalculations of the likely direction and targets of the coming German attack; wrong decisions on priorities and procurement policies in relation to key instruments of modern warfare (especially modern tanks and aircraft); an overconcentration of power in the hands of those least equipped with the specialist knowledge needed to make decisions². There is general agreement, however, on two issues. First, that the intent of Soviet war

preparations was clear and purposeful: to prepare as thoroughly as possible for the coming Nazi onslaught. Second, that the Soviet mobilization for war, if ill-judged in certain respects, was on a massive scale. One indication of the extent of the Soviet mobilization is the growth in the armed forces during 1939-41. Manpower grew from 2 million to over 5 million, from under 100 divisions to over 300. More than 7,000 tanks and 17,000 planes were delivered to the Red Army in this period, along with 30,000 field guns, 50,000 mortars and 100,000 machine guns³.

The bulk of this massive force was deployed along or near the USSR's western borders – hardly surprising given that in the summer of 1940 Nazi Germany was explicitly identified as the principal future foe. From this time on Soviet operational plans and war games proceeded on the assumption that defence against attack by Nazi Germany was the prime military objective. The details of Soviet military planning need not detain us, except for one aspect of Soviet 'war doctrine' that was to have a crucial effect on Soviet political calculations in 1941. The doctrine in question was the assumption that the Germans would not be able to conceal the deployment of their main force for a surprise attack of massive weight. The expectation was that war would begin with classic frontier battles in which the attacking side would attempt to gain the tactical initiative. This would be followed by a time interval of several days during which each side would mobilize and commit its main force with the aim of securing the offensive/defensive strategic initiative. Within this conception a strategic surprise attack of the kind actually launched by the Germans in June 1941 was militarily inconceivable. Its political effect was, as we shall see, to reinforce Stalin's determination to gamble everything on putting off the war for as long as possible. After all, what was the danger of a few minor tactical setbacks compared with the great strategic prize of delaying the war for a few more weeks, months, perhaps even until 1942 when Soviet defence preparations were scheduled for completion⁴?

But that sorry tale of military and political miscalculation lay a year away. What exercised Soviet attention in the summer of 1940 was the more immediate question of the foreign policy response to Hitler's stunning victories in the west.

The focus of Soviet action, as it had been the previous autumn, was in the Baltic and in the Balkans. In June the Baltic States were

annexed and in July the disputed Rumanian territories of Bessarabia and North Bukovina were occupied. The main impetus behind these actions was undoubtedly the strategic necessity of strengthening the Soviet buffer zone in Eastern Europe. However, expansion into the Baltic States and Rumania has also to be placed in the context of relations with these countries in the preceding period and, in the case of Rumania, of Moscow's abortive attempt to negotiate a spheres of influence agreement in South-Eastern Europe.

Bolting the Baltic door

In their accounts of the occupation of the Baltic States, many Soviet historians stress the anti-Soviet machinations of Baltic ruling circles. They point to the limited co-operation in implementing the mutual assistance treaties, the propaganda war waged against the Red Army, and the covert assistance given to Finland during the Winter War. They argue that the three States were involved in a military and political conspiracy to align their countries with Germany against the USSR. The Soviet military intervention is also placed in the context of a developing revolutionary situation which, had it been allowed to run its natural course, would anyway have led to the incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR⁵.

It is questionable whether, at the time, Moscow viewed developments in the Baltic States in such a way. Soviet historians cite very little direct evidence that this was the case. What evidence they do cite does indicate, however, that Moscow must have been concerned about the degree of independence the Baltic States exhibited in domestic and foreign policy. On 9 December, for example, the Soviet Ambassador in Latvia reported to Moscow⁶:

With the authorities' knowledge and on their initiative the most absurd and hostile rumours are circulating in Latvia concerning our Red Army. . . As soon as our troops arrived, the authorities themselves started creating a defamatory and malignant atmosphere. . . The Latvian Government has launched a campaign of terror against all who sincerely express sympathy with our Red Army and see it as a genuine support for Latvia's independence. The high-ranking officers and government circles are waging a cowardly and base war of propaganda against the Soviet Union.

Yet, until the late spring of 1940 Moscow did nothing to challenge the independence of the Baltic States. Indeed, in his report to the Supreme Soviet on 31 March 1940 Molotov emphasized the merits of Baltic-Soviet relations⁷:

Our experience during the six months that have elapsed since these Pacts of Mutual Assistance were concluded has enabled us to draw very definite positive conclusions concerning these treaties with the Baltic countries. . . . The Pacts with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are being carried out in a satisfactory manner and this creates premises for a further improvement in relations between the Soviet Union and these countries.

It was only after the German invasion of Norway, Denmark and the Low Countries in April and May that Moscow began to take a firmer line. On 25 May Molotov accused the Lithuanians of provocations against Soviet military bases, accusations which were subsequently made public. Soviet-Lithuanian discussions in Moscow in early June failed to resolve the problem. Lithuanian efforts to placate the Russians were cut short when Molotov delivered an ultimatum on 14 June, in which Moscow demanded the formation of a new, pro-Soviet government and freedom for Soviet troops to enter the country. Similar ultimatums were presented to Latvia and Estonia two days later. The three governments accepted the ultimatums. In the wake of this acceptance special emissaries were sent from Moscow to supervise the formation of new people's governments: Dekanozov in Lithuania, Vyshinsky in Latvia and Zhdanov in Estonia. These governments, which included communists in key posts, were established between 18 and 21 June. In July elections were held to new people's assemblies which voted on 21 July to seek incorporation into the USSR, a wish which was duly granted by the Supreme Soviet in early August⁸.

The incorporation of the Baltic States has the appearance of a carefully laid plan dictated by the requirements of Soviet foreign policy. Certainly, each stage of the escalating process can be mapped against Hitler's successive triumphs in the west. But some evidence indicates that Soviet plans were not as clear-cut⁹. Moreover, another dynamic influenced events in the Baltic States. There was a degree of popular support for the overthrow of the Baltic regimes, for the radical measures which were implemented by the new governments

and, to a lesser extent, for the union with Soviet Russia¹⁰. As in the case of Poland, the form of Soviet military occupation was influenced by interior as well as exterior political factors.

Moscow's concern for Soviet security in the Baltic extended beyond Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The first Soviet Baltic initiative in response to Germany's invasion of Denmark and Norway was to secure a commitment from Berlin that it had no designs on Sweden. Soviet support for Swedish independence and neutrality was subsequently reiterated in several statements in Berlin and Stockholm¹¹.

German military successes also sparked off renewed interest in the Finnish threat to Soviet security. In June Moscow precipitated a major crisis in Finnish-Soviet relations by demanding the withdrawal of Finnish troops from the Aaland Islands, the right of military transit across Finland and the concession of all nickel mining rights in the Petsamo area. Helsinki, with the support of Berlin, dug its heels in. As the crisis developed over the summer of 1940 rumours of an impending Soviet invasion of Finland gained ground. Whatever the truth of these rumours, they symbolized the note of desperation creeping into Moscow's foreign policy as the outer limits of Soviet security expansion were reached¹².

The annexation of Bessarabia and North Bukovina

The background to the annexation of the disputed Rumanian territories was somewhat different from that of the Baltic States. It was preceded by an explicit deterioration in Soviet-Rumanian relations over several months, which included a number of incidents on the Bessarabian frontier. The Soviet historian, Pavel Sevostyanov, cites a number of adverse reports from the Soviet embassy in Bucharest, including the following¹³:

At the close of 1939 and the beginning of 1940 Rumania was active in the anti-Soviet preparations for a meeting of the Council of the Balkan Entente. The Rumanian government was the principal conduit of the anti-Soviet combinations of Britain and France. It set great hopes on a military campaign against the Soviet Union when the war with Finland broke out.

Despite these and similar reports from Bucharest, Moscow remained quiescent towards Rumania and, in particular, on the question of Bessarabia. A brief reference by Molotov in his 31 March speech to the fact that since the USSR had 'never raised the question of recovering Bessarabia by military means' there were 'no grounds for any deterioration in Soviet-Rumanian relations' was the only important public statement¹⁴. But the picture changed sharply after the German thrust in the west. On 23 June Molotov told Schulenburg that the Soviet Union intended to demand the return of Bessarabia and to use force if the Rumanians refused. He also announced that the Soviet claim now included Bukovina as well. Berlin urged a peaceful negotiation of the issue, which Moscow refused. But in deference to German pressure the Soviets restricted their claim to the northern part of Bukovina¹⁵. The Soviet ultimatum to Rumania was delivered on 26 June and, on German advice, was accepted by Bucharest two days later¹⁶.

To the extent that it served to take the Soviet defensive line westward, the occupation of Bessarabia and North Bukovina was on a par with the takeover in the Baltic States. However, it was also part of a far more ambitious Soviet project: a general division of interest in the Balkans with Germany and Italy.

Spheres of influence in the Balkans

The first sign that the Kremlin was hatching such a plan came on 4 June when Molotov asked Schulenburg about reports from Rome that Italian entry into the war would pave the way for a tripartite agreement on the Balkans. The reply from Berlin ten days later coldly rebuffed the Soviet overture¹⁷. In the meantime, however, Italy had entered the war. On 13 June Molotov had a friendly conversation with the new Italian Ambassador, Rosso. During this and a further discussion on 20 June Molotov probed Italian policy towards South-Eastern Europe, particularly the content of any exchanges or agreement with Germany¹⁸. Rosso summarized his discussions with Molotov as follows¹⁹:

Molotov made it very clear that the USSR is very much interested in and wants to become involved in the Balkans. However, he also let me know that she had no pretensions of exercising a predominant influence, least

of all an exclusive one. Moreover, it is my feeling that he wants to reach agreement with Italy and Germany on the problems of the Danubian-Balkan Basin, or, at the very least, participate in eventual Italo-German consultations involving that part of Europe.

On 22 June the Italians and Russians had a further positive discussion, this time in Rome between Foreign Minister Ciano and the Soviet Ambassador²⁰. What the Russians concluded from these talks became evident three days later when Molotov made a formal declaration to Rosso which, in effect, proposed a division of the Balkans into Soviet and Italo-German spheres of influence. (The text of this statement is reproduced in Appendix 5.)

Having been spurned by the Germans, the Soviets had evidently decided to initiate negotiations for a tripartite accord through the more amenable Italians. Perhaps they also perceived some tactical advantage to be gained from dealing with Rome – the possibility of a separate accord or of a joint approach to Berlin, the sowing of dissension in the Axis camp, etc. But they could have been under no illusion that a major division of the Balkans could take place without the agreement of Berlin²¹.

A territorial and political squeeze on Rumania was at the heart of the Soviet prospectus for the Balkans. Hence the rush into Bessarabia in advance of any deal that might be concocted between Moscow, Berlin and Rome or, in the worst case scenario, of any agreement that might already have been arrived at by Rome and Berlin alone. This was also why the Soviets supported Hungary's claims on Transylvania and Bulgaria's on Dobroudja²² – both parts of Rumania.

The next move was in classic Moscow style: a proposal to Italy to re-establish trade relations on a 'new basis'. At a meeting with Rosso on 27 July Mikoyan made it clear that this new basis consisted of a 'clarification of political relations' together with a 'political accord' similar to the Soviet-German treaties of 1939²³.

Despite Rosso's enthusiasm for such a deal, Rome was not keen. Nor, more importantly, were the Germans. They too supported Hungarian and Bulgarian territorial claims, but with the aim of subordinating Rumania to their strategic purpose. In Vienna on 31 August Germany and Italy arbitrated the Hungarian-Rumanian dispute, awarding Transylvania to Hungary. Simultaneously the two states guaranteed the territorial integrity of what would be left of

Rumania after the settlement of pending Bulgarian claims to Dobroudja²⁴. In a single move Hitler had crushed Soviet hopes of a spheres of influence agreement in the Balkans. As *The Survey of International Relations* has put it²⁵:

This guarantee put the key positions in South-East Europe into Hitler's hands; for even within her new frontiers, Rumania still extended in an unbroken belt from the eastern frontier of Hungary to the west coast of the Black Sea in Northern [Dobroudja]; and the establishment of Germany's hegemony over Rumania within these frontiers far more than cancelled the advantage that Russia had gained by acquiring a narrow glacis in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. It was in vain that Russia had recovered her frontage along the north bank of the northernmost Danube Delta. She was still insulated from Bulgaria by a strip of Rumanian territory in Northern [Dobroudja] that was now covered by a German guarantee, and this meant that the whole of South-East Europe, south-west of the line of the Carpathian range and the River Pruth could now be dominated by Germany and Italy without the Soviet Union being able to interfere.

When informed by the Germans of the details of the Vienna Award, the Russians claimed that it was in violation of article 3 of the non-aggression pact which provided for consultation on problems affecting their common interests. A long wrangle followed about the interpretation of the relevant article and alleged violations of it by both sides. In the course of this exchange the Soviet side made it clear that its main objection to the Vienna Award concerned the guarantee of Rumania's territorial integrity which was 'primarily directed against the USSR'²⁶. The Vienna Award presaged a deterioration in Soviet-German relations which gave the lie to Molotov's claim in a speech on 1 August that 'the good neighbourly and friendly relations that have been established between the Soviet Union and Germany are not based on considerations of a transient nature, but on the fundamental interests of both the USSR and Germany'²⁷.

Assessment of the alliance

Under the aegis of the Nazi-Soviet pact the USSR gained time, space and resources in which to prepare for war. To that extent the

neutralist strategy inaugurated on 23 August 1939 was successful. But the strategy contained an irreconcilable contradiction. The Soviet Union was not the sole beneficiary of the pact. Germany also gained time, space and resources in which to prepare the very attack which Soviet policy sought to delay as long as possible. Until the spring of 1940 neither side had a decisive advantage. Moscow hoped the phoney war would not last and that eventually Germany would be drawn into a costly war of attrition with Britain and France. That hope was destroyed by the German Blitzkrieg in Western Europe. It now became vital for the Soviets to prepare to meet the threat posed by the new power and position of Germany. A number of steps were taken, but the most critical manoeuvre – a tripartite agreement on South-Eastern Europe – was unsuccessful. Its achievement had depended on German acceptance of a gratuitous extension of the Soviet presence in the Balkans. Hitler's rebuff presented the Soviet Union with a dilemma that it never quite resolved: how to oppose further German encroachments into the Balkans, whilst at the same time avoiding a confrontation which might provoke a pre-emptive German strike on the USSR. Effective resistance to the spread of German power inevitably carried the risk of a confrontation which might lead to war. Equally, failure to take the risk would leave the field to Germany, and the stronger Hitler became the sooner and more likely he was to attack the Soviet Union.

Prevarication was Moscow's response to this dilemma, as far as it can be gleaned from the available evidence. It neither opposed the expansion of German power outright, nor did it submit in the face of it. The result was, nevertheless, a precipitate deterioration in German-Soviet relations in the period September-December 1940, but more especially between January and April 1941 when Soviet resistance to the German advance became more overt. By then, however, it was too late. The German grip on the Balkan front had already been established.

CHAPTER

13 *Unequal Contest: The Soviet-German Struggle in the Balkans, 1940–41*

A diplomat's words have no relation to action, otherwise what kind of diplomacy is it? Words are one thing, actions another. . . Sincere diplomacy is no more possible than dry water or iron wood.'
J.V. Stalin

Molotov in Berlin

The Soviet-German contest in the Balkans began in earnest in September 1940 with the arrival in Rumania of a German military mission. As the Soviet embassy in Bucharest reported to Moscow¹:

The arrival of German troops in Rumania signifies Rumania's final political and economic subordination to Germany and further German penetration of the Balkans. The gaining of the foothold by the Germans on the Black Sea and the building of air bases are a direct threat to the interests of the Soviet Union.

To add to the Soviets' problems, German military units appeared on Finnish soil on 22 September. Five days later Germany, Italy and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact under which they pledged to assist one another should they be attacked by a power not at that time involved in the war. Rumanian and Hungarian affiliation to the pact was a predictable sequel. Then, on 28 October, Italy invaded Greece.

Against this background of rising tension, Ribbentrop invited Molotov to a meeting in Berlin²:

I should like to state that in the opinion of the Fuhrer . . . it appears to be the historic mission of the four powers – the Soviet Union, Italy, Japan and Germany – to adopt a long-range policy and to direct the future

development of their peoples into the right channels by delimitation of their interests on a worldwide scale.

After what seems to have been much discussion the Soviet leadership accepted the invitation³. Stalin, however, struck a more cautious note than Ribbentrop in his reply⁴:

I agree with you that a further improvement in relations between our countries is entirely possible on the permanent basis of a long-range delimitation of mutual interests . . . As to joint deliberation on some issues with Japanese and Italian participation, I am of the opinion that this question would have to be submitted to a previous examination.

Stalin's cautious response set the pattern for the Soviet stance throughout the forthcoming negotiations. General A.M. Vasilevsky, a member of the Soviet delegation, reported that on the way to Germany 'it became clear that the Berlin talks would be of a purely political nature and that our trip's basic purpose was connected with the Soviet Government's desire to define Hitler's intentions further and help hold off German aggression for as long as possible'⁵.

Molotov arrived in Berlin on 12 November and the talks began. Ribbentrop outlined three German proposals: Russia to have a formal connection with the Axis by joining the Tripartite Pact; a secret spheres of influence agreement to be concluded between Italy, Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union in which each would agree to direct their expansion southwards, in the case of Russia in the direction of the Indian Ocean; and the problem of Turkey and the Straits to be resolved in Russia's favour. What these proposals amounted to was a four-power pact aimed at the occupation of Britain's colonial empire – in Africa, the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent and South East Asia. Molotov replied that, while an exchange of views was useful, a definition of long-range interests on such a broad scale would take time. More immediate problems in German-Soviet relations had to be cleared up first. Recent events had made earlier agreements redundant⁶.

Similar exchanges took place between Molotov and Hitler. Hitler argued that 'the Soviet Union had to realize that in the framework of broader collaboration. . . advantages of quite a different scope were to be reached'. But Molotov wanted to know what the German attitude toward a Russian guarantee to Bulgaria would be. And about

German troops in Finland and Rumania. This provoked a heated discussion⁷.

According to the Soviet diplomat Valentin Berezhkov, after the first day Moscow sent a message with instructions for the rest of the negotiations⁸:

The Soviet Government categorically declined Hitler's attempt to involve us in discussions about the 'division of British property'. The instructions again stressed that we should press the German Government for explanations connected with matters of European security and questions which touched directly on the interests of the Soviet Union.

In line with these instructions, the impasse of the early conversations remained unbroken through to the final meeting between Ribbentrop and Molotov on 14 November⁹:

The question which interested the Soviet Union in the Near East concerned not only Turkey, but Bulgaria . . . the fate of Rumania was also of interest to the Soviet Union and could not be immaterial to her in any circumstances. It would further interest the Soviet Government to learn what the Axis contemplated with regard to Yugoslavia . . . Greece . . . and Poland . . . (Molotov)

He could only repeat again and again that the decisive question was whether the Soviet Union was prepared and in a position to co-operate with us in the great liquidation of the British Empire. (Ribbentrop)

Schulenburg was presented with a formal Soviet response to the German proposals in Moscow on 25 November. The Russians demanded the withdrawal of German troops from Finland; a Soviet-Bulgarian mutual assistance treaty, with provision for Soviet military bases; recognition of the area south of Batum and Baku as the focal point of 'the aspirations of the Soviet Union'; and Japanese renunciation of their rights to coal and oil in North Sakhalin¹⁰. As John Erickson has commented¹¹:

Stalin's response . . . was in every sense a test of Hitler's intentions: the Soviet terms for joining a four power pact amounted to giving Hitler full freedom in the west only at the price of foreclosing his option to wage a successful war against the Soviet Union.

No German reply to the Soviet terms was ever received. Hitler had already made up his mind to invade the USSR. On 18 December he signed the directive for Operation Barbarossa.¹²

What the Soviet leadership concluded from the Berlin discussions has yet to be revealed. The only documented hint of their overall assessment is contained in a message to Maisky from Molotov on his return to Moscow¹³:

The discussions revealed that the Germans want to appropriate Turkey under the guise of guaranteeing her security in the manner of Rumania and cajole us with the promise of revising the Montreux Convention in our favour and the offer of helping us in this matter. We did not consent to this because we think that, firstly, Turkey must remain independent and, secondly, the Straits regime can be improved through negotiations with Turkey and not behind her back. The Germans and Japanese are apparently very keen to push us in the direction of the Persian Gulf and India. We refused to discuss this question because we consider this sort of advice from Germany as out of place.

Contest in the Balkans

What Moscow decided to do in the wake of the colloquy in Berlin is better documented. The most important decision was to resist the German march into the Balkans by reviving the project of drawing Bulgaria into the Soviet orbit. A delegation headed by A.A. Sobolev, General Secretary of the Narkomindel, was despatched to Sofia. On 25 November Sobolev, in a meeting with King Boris, renewed the proposal of a Soviet-Bulgarian mutual assistance pact¹⁴. Sobolev emphasized the importance of a mutual assistance pact as opposed to a unilateral Soviet guarantee and proposed that the USSR be granted naval and air bases in Bulgaria. Hand in hand with this diplomatic initiative went a Comintern-inspired campaign in Bulgaria in support of an alliance with Soviet Russia¹⁵.

This combined offensive produced no results. 'On 30 November the Bulgarians told the Soviet Ambassador of their decision to decline the offer of a mutual assistance pact¹⁶. Moscow did not give up hope, however, and the Comintern campaign inside Bulgaria continued¹⁷.

Soviet resistance to the Germans in the Balkans extended to Yugoslavia as well. Yugoslavia entered the picture for the first time in April 1940 with the opening in Moscow of negotiations for a trade agreement, following political contacts between Soviet and Yugoslav diplomats in the Turkish capital, Ankara. By May a number of bilateral economic agreements had been signed, and by the end of June diplomatic relations had been established¹⁸.

In the autumn, the Soviet-Yugoslav relationship shifted to a higher gear. On 17 October Moscow instructed its Belgrade embassy to inform the Yugoslav Government that the Soviet Union 'shows understanding for Yugoslavia and for the struggle of the Yugoslav people for their political' and economic independence'. On 5 November Gavrilovic, the Yugoslav Ambassador, told Vyshinsky that 'the interests of the USSR coincide with the interests of all Balkan states, and with the interest of Yugoslavia in particular'¹⁹. As in Bulgaria, Soviet diplomatic gestures were buttressed by an internal Yugoslav Communist campaign for rapprochement with the USSR²⁰.

Soviet overtures to Yugoslavia gained sustenance from the war raging in Greece. In November the first British military units arrived on the Greek mainland. Italian military setbacks made German intervention inevitable. Taking its cue from these events, the Soviet embassy in Belgrade counselled Moscow that it²¹

can and should oppose the shift of the flames of war to this part of Europe. But the success of Soviet actions presupposes active Bulgarian and Yugoslav opposition to British and German intentions to move the war to the Balkans. Only sincere rapprochement by these countries can give the Soviet Government effective instruments for preserving peace in the Balkans.

On 7 February 1941 the Soviet Ambassador in Belgrade informed the Yugoslavs that the USSR 'stands for peace in the Balkans'²².

But would the Bulgarians and Yugoslavs resist Germany? In the case of Bulgaria, the answer was soon apparent. In early January there were reports that it had agreed, in principle, to adhere to the Tripartite Pact and that German troops would be allowed into the country²³.

On 13 January 1941 Tass issued a statement denying Soviet consent to the passage of German troops through Bulgaria²⁴. Four days later the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin handed the Germans a

note protesting against any occupation of Bulgaria by foreign powers²⁵:

The Soviet Government has on several occasions stated to the German Government that it considers the region of Bulgaria . . . to be a security zone of the USSR and therefore it cannot remain indifferent to events which threaten the security interests of the USSR. In view of all this, the Soviet Government deems it its duty to give warning that it will consider the appearance of any foreign armed forces in the region of Bulgaria . . . to be a violation of the security interests of the USSR.

Nevertheless, on 28 February Bulgaria informed the Soviet Government that it did indeed intend to adhere to the Tripartite Pact. The next day Lavrentiev was told that Bulgaria had agreed to allow German troops in²⁶. Soviet protests at this action were extremely muted. 'The German Government must understand' stated the Soviet *démarche*, 'that it cannot count on support from the USSR for its acts in Bulgaria'²⁷. A similarly restrained protest was delivered to the Bulgarians on 3 March²⁸. Moscow, it seemed, had given up in Bulgaria and decided that it had no recourse except the niceties of formal diplomatic protest.

The fall of Bulgaria was the turning-point in the Soviet-German contest in the Balkans. With its powerful domestic movement in favour of friendship with the Soviet Union, Bulgaria had represented Moscow's best hope of stemming the German tide in the region. Yugoslavia, the last independent state in the whole of Eastern Europe, remained. But Moscow regarded the anti-German forces in Yugoslavia as far weaker than those in Bulgaria. It must have been somewhat surprised, therefore, when Yugoslavia's decision of 25 March to join the Axis was overturned two days later by a popular-backed coup²⁹. Moscow responded quickly. According to Yugoslav sources, on 31 March the Soviet *Chargé d'Affaires* in Belgrade proposed that Yugoslavia should send a delegation to Moscow to sign a treaty of alliance. His message from Molotov was, apparently, that 'every hour counts'³⁰.

The next day Gavrilovic met with Vyshinsky 'to tell him that Yugoslavia was standing by its decision not to join the Tripartite Pact. In response, Vyshinsky stated that Yugoslavia could not do otherwise and that it was right 'not to demoblize its army and to be prepared to defend its independence'³¹.

On 2 April Gavrilovic and Vyshinsky met again. According to Soviet sources, at this meeting Gavrilovic raised the question of a mutual assistance pact between the USSR and Yugoslavia. Vyshinsky consulted Molotov about this proposal and replied on 4 April. The USSR was not prepared to conclude a military alliance with Yugoslavia, only a treaty of friendship and neutrality. Vyshinsky made it clear that Moscow was not prepared to disturb its relations with Berlin, although it was prepared to supply war materials and to declare to the Germans its support for an independent Yugoslavia³².

In the event, the Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression was signed in Moscow in the early hours of 6 April. Clause 2 specified that the two countries would undertake 'to observe a policy of friendship toward each other, if attacked by a third power'³³. This declaration was put to the test a few hours later when Germany invaded Yugoslavia.

According to Gavrilovic, Stalin indicated that if the Yugoslavs had held out against the Germans, Soviet aid would have been forthcoming, although not to the extent of military assistance³⁴. Even within those limitations, a breach with the Germans would have developed very rapidly, perhaps leading to an early declaration of war. Soviet determination to support Yugoslavia, short of all-out military aid, was never tested, however. Within a fortnight of the German attack, Belgrade sued for peace.

The Soviet-Yugoslav treaty was Moscow's last gesture of defiance to Berlin. It was succeeded by a series of conciliatory moves designed to revitalize the Germans' flagging commitment to the German-Soviet non-aggression and friendship treaties. Hitler's devastating campaign in Yugoslavia and the equally effective intervention on behalf of the Italians in Greece had, it appears, convinced Stalin that the time for resistance was over³⁵.

CHAPTER

14 *Diplomacy on the Periphery: Soviet Policy Towards Turkey, Japan and Britain, 1940–41*

'In any event we must remain friends with you.' J.V. Stalin to the
German Military Attaché in Moscow, April 1941

While Moscow's attention was firmly fixed on Germany and Eastern Europe in 1940–41, all other areas of foreign policy were relegated to secondary importance. The only other countries of any significance in Soviet diplomacy during this period were Turkey, Japan and Britain.

Turkey

Any major diplomatic initiative towards Turkey had been foreclosed by the failure of the Soviet-Turkish negotiations in September–October 1939 and the conclusion of the Anglo-French-Turkish mutual assistance treaty. But Moscow's objectives concerning Turkey – continued neutrality, closure of the Straits to foreign warships, and, in the longer term, the establishment of military bases in the Dardanelles – remained on the foreign policy agenda. It is surprising to find, therefore, that Moscow did virtually nothing about them until March 1941.

The reasons for this inaction remain obscure, but they seem to have been partly because of the complexity of making any intervention, given Ankara's entanglements with London and Paris and those of Moscow with Berlin, and partly because of the demands of other priorities. Soviet policy towards Turkey in 1940–41 was essentially reactive – a response to the initiatives and actions of others rather than of its own making. This helps to explain its, at times, contradictory nature.

The first such Soviet reaction to events came in response to Italy's entry into the war on 10 June 1940. In the context of a broader initiative designed to secure a tripartite agreement on the Balkans with Germany and Italy, Moscow raised with Rome the question of control of the Black Sea Straits and of the pre-eminence of Soviet interests in the Black Sea. It is likely that this initiative was occasioned by Soviet concern that Turkey might enter the war – as it was obliged to do under the treaty with Britain and France – and/or the possibility of the Axis powers concluding a deal over Turkey¹. However, the broader initiative came to nothing and Moscow did not actively pursue those questions relating to Turkey.

Around the same time Moscow responded positively to a quite different set of pressures regarding Turkey. In a conversation in Moscow on 1 July with the recently appointed British Ambassador, Sir Stafford Cripps, Stalin agreed to accept London's good offices in bringing about an improvement of Soviet-Turkish relations².

The British made approaches to Ankara but with no success. For their part, the Russians made some encouraging noises but did nothing else³. Even these gestures were negated in early November by Moscow's response to overtures from Ankara about the implications of the Italian-Greek war for Soviet-Turkish relations. Asked what aid might be extended to Turkey in the event of its involvement in the war, the Soviets replied that since no mutual assistance treaty existed between the two countries this was a puzzling question⁴.

By this time, also, Moscow was again pursuing a deal with the Axis powers, now in the context of Molotov's negotiations in Berlin for a four-power pact with Italy, Germany and Japan. But the contradictory pattern of Soviet policy was still in evidence. In his discussions with Hitler and Ribbentrop, Molotov refused all efforts to induce the USSR into a deal over Turkey, insisting that Soviet interests in the Straits and the Black Sea would be accommodated through direct negotiations with Ankara⁵. However, in their formal response to the proposed four-power pact, the Soviets accepted this very principle and, in addition, put forward the extraordinary proposal that if Turkey refused to accept Soviet military bases in the Dardanelles the four powers (the USSR, Germany, Japan and Italy) would 'carry through the required military and diplomatic measures' to force the Turks to accede⁶.

The explanation for this *volte-face* is not obvious. One possibility is

that Moscow had not really changed its view at all and, as it did not expect any agreement with Berlin, its proposals were simply a riposte to the meaningless German proposition to revise the Montreux Convention (under which Turkey had gained control of the Straits). On the other hand, Moscow may have believed that there was a real prospect of an agreement with Germany and its proposals constituted a bargaining position. Finally, it may be that Moscow's Bulgarian policy was the impetus behind its proposals on Turkey. At the centre of Soviet counter-proposals on a four-power pact with Germany, Italy and Japan, was Bulgaria, not Turkey. Moscow's proposals for a mutual security pact with Bulgaria included a promise of territory in Eastern Thrace up to the Midia-Enos line, i.e. the cession to Bulgaria of Turkish territory⁷. Hence Soviet proposals on Turkey in November 1940 may have been a spin-off from the project of securing a mutual assistance treaty with Bulgaria.

Whatever the precise rationale of Moscow's policy towards Turkey, Soviet apprehension concerning Turkish involvement in the Greek-Italian war certainly played an important part in shaping their perceptions. These apprehensions grew in the next two months as British military intervention in the conflict escalated. Molotov was quite explicit about this in two meetings with the Italian Ambassador, Rosso – at the end of December 1940 and the end of January 1941. In these meetings Molotov pressed Rosso for information on the attitude of the Axis powers to an agreement with the USSR over Turkey and the Straits⁸. As Rosso reported back to Rome, 'there is no question that the nerve centre of the Soviet program is the Straits problem'⁹. However, a month later the Soviet position had changed. Molotov, as Rosso reported home at the end of February, was 'no longer particularly interested in pursuing these conversations because he no longer has any hope that these can lead to the concrete and positive solution which the USSR hopes to impose in the Straits matter'¹⁰. Rosso, however, was only partly correct in his analysis. As well as giving up hope of a deal with Germany and Italy, Moscow had once again shifted the co-ordinates of its policy towards Turkey. Now that the danger of Turkish involvement in the Greek war had faded, Moscow was more concerned about the possibility that Turkey might follow Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria into the Tripartite Pact. But it took a British initiative to spur Moscow into action.

At the beginning of March 1941 Cripps was in Ankara to meet

Eden. He called on Vinogradov, the Soviet Ambassador, with a proposal to revive Soviet-Turkish contacts. He also approached the Turks. After these meetings the Turks proposed a joint declaration of neutrality to the Soviets. On his return to Moscow, Cripps approached Vyshinsky (Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs). Then, on 9 March, Vyshinsky told the Turkish Ambassador that Turkey could 'count on the full understanding and neutrality of the Soviet Union' in the event that it was attacked by a foreign power. Vyshinsky's statement paved the way for a joint Soviet-Turkish declaration on neutrality of 25 March 1941¹¹.

In the face of German advances in the Balkans, the USSR opted to shelve its dreams of controlling the Straits in return for a reassurance that Turkey would not threaten the Soviet southern flank.

Japan

Soviet policy towards Japan during 1940–41 was much more proactive and purposeful, particularly following the deterioration in relations with Germany in the autumn of 1940. This is not surprising since Japan posed a far greater threat to Soviet security than Turkey – not least because it was more likely to participate in a German attack on the USSR. But the Nazi-Soviet pact had strengthened the hand of those in Japan arguing for expansion in the Pacific and South-East Asia against the advocates of expansion northward into Siberia, thereby laying the basis for an improvement in Soviet-Japanese relations¹².

The first sign of that improvement was the conclusion on 15 September 1939 of a Soviet-Japanese agreement to establish a joint commission to resolve the conflict on the Mongolian-Manchurian border. This was followed by a series of negotiations on outstanding Soviet-Japanese disputes, notably Tokyo's payment of the last instalment for the purchase of the Chinese Eastern Railway, and a new fishing convention. These were settled by the signature of new agreements on 31 December 1939. Settlement of the Mongolian-Manchurian dispute took a little longer, but an agreement delimiting the frontier was finally signed in June 1940¹³.

Tokyo's proposal the following month for a neutrality pact with Moscow signalled a new phase in Soviet-Japanese relations¹⁴. This

proposal coincided with Moscow's perception that the thrust of Japanese foreign policy was shifting towards a clash with United States interests in the Pacific and South-East Asia; it must therefore have been viewed by the Soviets as a significant development¹⁵. Moscow agreed to open negotiations on a neutrality pact, but the Japanese postponed the discussion until the autumn¹⁶. When negotiations did begin, at the end of October, Japan had changed its position and now suggested the conclusion of a non-aggression treaty rather than a neutrality pact¹⁷.

Moscow responded to the Japanese on 18 November with a proposal to return to the original idea of a neutrality pact. Japan's proposal for a non-aggression pact implied a division of the Far East into Soviet and Japanese spheres of influence. This the Soviet leadership was not prepared to contemplate. In addition, the Japanese proposal must have been linked in the Russians' minds with the German plan put to Molotov a week earlier for a division of the world into four spheres of influence – German, Italian, Japanese and Soviet. As Molotov had insisted to the Germans in Berlin so Moscow insisted to Tokyo – that outstanding issues had to be settled first, which in this case required Japanese concessions over North Sakhalin (the Soviet island on which Japan retained important mining and oil concessions¹⁸).

Moscow's rejection of the Japanese proposals prolonged the negotiations, but not for long. Japan broke the deadlock in April when Foreign Minister, Matsuoka, arrived in Moscow, en route from Berlin. Agreement on a neutrality pact was reached a week later and a treaty was signed on 13 April 1941. The concession in North Sakhalin did not figure in the treaty, but the Japanese did promise to settle the issue within a few months¹⁹.

By the spring of 1941 the USSR's position in Europe was perilous. A German attack in the near future was a definite possibility. Moscow now considered it imperative to alleviate the danger of a two-front war involving Japan. Hence, the neutrality pact and, also, Moscow's willingness to compromise over Japanese mining and oil concessions in North Sakhalin. That did not, however, rule out a Japanese attack. Until the attack on Pearl Harbour, Moscow continued to demand information from the Sorge spy ring in Tokyo on whether Japan's intentions regarding the USSR were honourable²⁰. The Soviets' continued supply of military aid to China was one consequence of Moscow's belief that the danger of a Japanese attack

had not passed, even though the cessation of aid would have contributed considerably to an improvement in Soviet-Japanese relations²¹.

Britain

The fear that the British were manoeuvring to direct German expansion eastwards and involve the USSR in a war with Hitler continued to dominate Soviet policy towards Britain. The formation of the Churchill Government in May 1940 and the fall of France a month later eased the Soviets' concern about British appeasers redirecting German expansion, but it also prompted new fears. With the anti-appeasers in power in Britain the new danger was London's efforts to entice the Soviet Union into the war on the British side against Germany or, failing that, to provoke a separate conflict between the USSR and Germany. These fears were reinforced by a series of ill-considered British diplomatic initiatives. This combination of Soviet paranoia and British blunder contributed directly to the disaster of 22 June 1941.

The first British mistake was a relatively minor one. In May 1940 London decided to send Sir Stafford Cripps to Moscow on a special mission. The mistake was to attempt to secure the status of special envoy for Cripps. Moscow, with an eye to the reaction in Berlin, was unwilling to concede this, insisting instead that Cripps, if he came at all, would have to be appointed British Ambassador in place of Seeds, who had returned home in January 1940. The Foreign Office agreed to this on 2 June²².

Cripps arrived in Moscow in the middle of June, bearing a personal message from Churchill which he delivered to Stalin at a meeting on 1 July. The substance of Churchill's message concerned the threat which German hegemony in Europe posed to British and Soviet interests and the need for joint discussions on how to defeat that threat. Moscow was not interested – its whole foreign policy strategy hinged on co-operation with Germany, not Britain – and Stalin, although friendly, did not respond positively²³. Soviet priorities were demonstrated by the relatively frank résumé of the conversation supplied to the Germans on 13 July²⁴.

Moscow did not intend to jeopardize its relations with Berlin by entering political discussions with Britain, but it did want to keep the door open to a more general rapprochement if circumstances

warranted. Hence, the Soviets were willing to discuss trade and to resolve a number of practical issues which had arisen from the occupation of the Baltic States (diplomatic recognition, release of assets, etc.)²⁵. But Britain met Moscow's low key-efforts with attempts to extend the discussion into the political sphere.

In a meeting with Molotov on 7 August, Cripps raised the question of a Soviet-British non-aggression treaty²⁶. This was followed, on 22 October, by a formal proposal for an Anglo-Soviet agreement. Under this proposal, presented by Cripps to Vyshinsky, the USSR would assume a position of benevolent neutrality towards Britain in return for a promise of consultation on any postwar settlement and of assistance to Soviet defence preparations²⁷. No progress was made in further discussions between Cripps and Vyshinsky on the British proposals, held on 26 October and 2 November²⁸. Finally, on 11 November Vyshinsky indicated that the British proposals were unacceptable²⁹. That the content of the British proposal was leaked on the eve of Molotov's trip to Berlin intensified Moscow's hostility toward it³⁰.

No further high-level Anglo-Soviet meetings took place in Moscow until 1 February 1941 when Molotov delivered a definitive rejection of the 22 October proposal to Cripps and went on to complain about unfriendly British actions over the Soviet incorporation of the Baltic States. Cripps in response tried, unsuccessfully, to generate a discussion about the merits of the British proposals³¹.

The deleterious effects of two further British initiatives have to be viewed against this background. The first was from Cripps on 18 April. In a (well-meaning) memorandum to Molotov he raised the possibility that, in the long run, Britain might opt for a peace settlement with Germany, thereby leaving the Soviet Union even more vulnerable to attack than it was now³². The second initiative came from Churchill who sent a message to Stalin through Cripps warning him of the danger of a German attack. Cripps passed on the message on 19 April³³.

The unfortunate coincidence of the Cripps memorandum and Churchill's message reinforced Moscow's already strong belief that the British were trying to provoke a war between Germany and the USSR³⁴. This belief grew into an unshakeable conviction as 22 June approached. It is the key to understanding Moscow's disavowal of the mounting evidence in the spring and early summer of 1941 that the German invasion was coming.

CHAPTER

15 *The Road to Disaster:* *22 June 1941*

'You can't believe everything you read in intelligence reports.'
J.V. Stalin 1941

Appeasement – Soviet style

Soviet foreign policy in the three months before the German invasion of the USSR has often been likened to the prewar appeasement of Hitler by Britain and France. The analogy, although striking, is not strictly accurate. Anglo-French appeasement before the Second World War was primarily aimed at averting war by concessions to German demands. Soviet policy in April-June 1941 consisted not so much of concessions – Hitler made no demands of the USSR – as of unsolicited gestures designed to delay an inevitable conflagration.

The character of these gestures is personified in Stalin's ostentatious display on the occasion of the Japanese Foreign Minister's departure from Moscow on 13 April 1941. After the Japanese party's train had left the station, Stalin sought out Schulenburg, threw his arms around him and said 'we must remain friends and you must now do everything to that end'. A similar *mise en scene* was enacted with Colonel Krebs, the German Military Attaché¹.

What Stalin hoped to achieve by this display is difficult to understand. Perhaps it was simply intended to create a good impression on Schulenburg – a known Russophile. This explanation at least fits in with Stalin's next public gesture of goodwill towards Germany. On 7 May he took over the premiership from Molotov. Moscow had long cultivated Stalin's image as a peacemaker and a conciliator. Sure enough, Schulenburg cabled home that he was 'convinced that Stalin will use his new position in order to take part personally in the maintenance and development of good relations between the Soviets and Germany'².

Stalin's appointment as premier presaged a series of conciliatory

moves towards Germany. On 8 May Tass issued a denial of rumours of troop concentrations along the Soviet border. The next day the Soviet Government withdrew diplomatic recognition from the legations of the governments-in-exile of German-occupied Belgium, Norway and Yugoslavia. On 12 May the Soviet Union recognized an anti-British regime in Iraq³. The fall of Crete in early June was followed by a rapid withdrawal of Soviet recognition of Greek sovereignty⁴. All the while Soviet goods and materials continued to flow into Germany⁵ and Soviet anti-aircraft batteries refrained from firing on the increasingly numerous German reconnaissance flights⁶. Schulenburg's impression of all this on 24 May was that Soviet policy was 'above all directed at the avoidance of a conflict with Germany'⁷.

A lot has been made of these and similar gestures towards the Germans, but they did not add up to much – certainly not enough on their own to avert war with Germany. They only make sense in the context of a belief that war with Germany in the summer of 1941, although a distinct possibility, was not inevitable. This, it appears, is what Stalin believed. As he later told Churchill, 'I thought I might gain another six months or so'⁸. In January 1941, according to General Meretskov, Stalin had said⁹:

We shall of course be unable to stay out of the war until 1943. We can't help being involved. But it is quite possible that we shall manage to stay out until 1942.

From recent writings by Soviet historians on the disaster of 22 June 1941 we learn that Stalin believed that Hitler would not dare to risk a two-front war. German military operations against Britain would be completed first and an invasion of the Middle East would be the prelude to an attack on the USSR – in order to seize the oil Hitler needed for his 'big war' against Bolshevism¹⁰. This fitted in with Stalin's conviction that modern warfare was a 'war of engines'¹¹ and his expectation that the main thrust of the coming German attack would be in the south-west – in the direction of the Ukrainian wheat fields, the Donets coal basin and the oil of the Caucasus. 'Nazi Germany will not be able to wage a major lengthy war without these vital resources', he told Zhukov¹².

Further evidence of Stalin's thinking can be gleaned from a private speech in the Kremlin on 5 May to the graduates of Soviet military academies. Stalin's main points were that a German attack in the

near future could not be ruled out; that diplomatic efforts were being made to delay the attack, at least until the autumn; and that war in 1942 was almost inevitable and that under certain conditions the Soviet Union might have to take the initiative and attack Germany first¹³.

Stalin believed that a German attack was inevitable in the medium term but that in the short run it could be avoided. But what was the basis of his conviction in this respect? It surely could not have been a belief that his effusions of goodwill towards the Germans would dissuade Hitler from taking the path of war. Stalin appeared to maintain this conviction in the face of the growing evidence from political, diplomatic, military and intelligence sources that a German attack on the Soviet Union was being prepared.

The most popular explanation for Stalin's catastrophic misreading of the situation is that it was a combination of psychological and institutional factors. In relation to Stalin's psychology, Deutscher's is a typical statement. Stalin, he argued¹⁴,

committed one of those errors to which the cunning are sometimes liable. He dismissed all ill omens and was confident that he . . . with his tactical skill and flair for sharp political turns, could retrieve the situation.

Harrison Salisbury places these flaws in Stalin's psyche in an institutional context¹⁵:

. . . the Soviet experience reveals that neither the quantity nor the quality of intelligence reporting and analysis determines whether a national leadership acts in timely and resolute fashion. It is the ability of the leadership to comprehend what is reported, to assimilate the findings of spies and the warnings of diplomats. Unless there is a clear channel from lower to top levels, unless the leadership insists upon honest and objective reporting and is prepared to act upon such reports, regardless of preconceptions, prejudices, past commitments and personal politics, the best intelligence in the world goes to waste – or, even worse, is turned into an instrument of self-deceit. This was clearly the case with Stalin. Nothing in the Bolshevik experience so plainly exposed the fatal defects of the Soviet power monopoly when the man who held that power was ruled by his own internal obsessions.

While there is some merit in these comments, they are based on a

defect common to most historical writing on the reasons for the 'great surprise' of 22 June 1941: an exaggeration of just how clear was the intelligence available to Stalin on German plans to launch an attack on the USSR in the summer of 1941.

Before elaborating on this point in detail, it is worth considering another case of successful surprise attack: the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. Prior to the Pearl Harbour attack the American intelligence community had collected a mass of evidence that the Japanese were about to strike. Much of this evidence was 'harder' than that available to Stalin. Having broken top-level Japanese codes, the Americans had direct access to Japanese signals and messages. In the six months before Pearl Harbour, for example, the Americans intercepted and decoded 7,000 high-level diplomatic transmissions. Why, then, was Washington taken by surprise? A failure of individual perception? Defects in decision-making and institutional structures and processes? Both of these factors were operative in the American case, as in the Soviet. More important was the fundamental flaw that afflicts all intelligence: it is far easier to interpret after the event than before it. Only when an event augured by intelligence reports actually happens do the final, vital parts of the jigsaw fall into place.

The analogy between 22 June 1941 and Pearl Harbour should not be pushed too far, however. Pearl Harbour was a much more straightforward case of intelligence failure. The pieces of the intelligence jigsaw were placed in the right framework or square – a sudden Japanese attack – but incorrectly assembled. Hence the failure to anticipate fully or quickly enough the actual attack on Pearl Harbour. In the case of 22 June 1941, although the intelligence was deficient there was just enough of it to draw the right conclusions, provided it was placed in the correct framework. The fact that it was not was a function of a disastrously defective set of political and military doctrines and calculations¹⁶.

A failure of intelligence

The most thorough study of the warnings of a coming German attack on the USSR is *Codeword 'Barbarossa'* by the American intelligence analyst, Barton Whaley. His conclusion is that the known intelligence

on German intentions was susceptible to a number of different interpretations, of which the two most credible were (a) that Hitler was planning to launch a surprise attack and (b) that Hitler intended to issue an ultimatum to the Soviet Union demanding political and territorial concessions. According to Whaley, Stalin accepted the ultimatum hypothesis and, moreover, 'it may well be that this particular hypothesis best fits the potpourri of then available data'. Further, Whaley points out that¹⁷:

the strategic surprise visited upon Stalin was not his alone. Aside from *some* of the Germans, only a handful of the world's many intelligence chiefs, national policy-makers, or press pundits unambiguously foresaw the denouement . . . The great failure was . . . a general failure.

Whaley's focus on Stalin's acceptance of the ultimatum hypothesis provides the vital clue as to why Stalin believed his political and diplomatic gestures could delay the onset of war. Stalin's projected scenario for the outbreak of war was the opening of hostilities following the Soviet refusal of a German ultimatum. The gestures of goodwill toward Germany were designed not to stave off a surprise German attack but to delay the delivery of that ultimatum. Stalin presumably believed that Hitler might be persuaded to delay his ultimatum if he could be convinced, first, that the USSR posed no immediate threat to German interests and, second, that when it was delivered it would be acceded to.

Stalin's conviction that the prelude to war would be an ultimatum must also have been reinforced by the military doctrine (discussed in Chapter 12) that a surprise attack by the German main force was very unlikely if not impossible. Within that frame of reference intelligence which suggested that this was precisely what the Germans were planning could be discounted. The ultimatum hypothesis, on the other hand, meshed with the preconceived doctrine of a time-lag between an initial attack and the deployment of strategic forces. Would Hitler, Stalin may have reasoned, forgo the possibility of Soviet concessions in the face of an ultimatum for the sake of winning a few minor frontier battles?¹⁸

That Stalin accepted the ultimatum hypothesis cannot be explicitly and conclusively demonstrated. However, an examination of the most important data warning of a German attack does indicate that

such an explanation is highly plausible. For convenience, this information can be classified under two headings: political/diplomatic and military/intelligence.

Political/Diplomatic. *1 March 1941:* Sumner Welles, US Under-Secretary of State warned the Soviet Ambassador in Washington of German intention to attack the USSR. Information confirmed at a further meeting on 20 March. *16 April:* Eden relayed to Maisky a reported statement by Hitler to Prince Paul of Yugoslavia that he intended to invade the USSR by the end of June. *19 April:* Churchill's message to Stalin about German troop movements on the eastern front which indicated that an invasion of the USSR was being prepared. *End of April:* Berezhev reports to Moscow information from Luftwaffe officer that air force units were being transferred east. This is one of a number of items of interest transmitted from the Soviet embassy in Berlin. *End of May:* collective report from Soviet embassy in Berlin indicating that Germany was ready to attack the USSR at any time. *End of May/early June:* Schulenburg warned Dekanozov of danger of Germany attack. *2, 10 and 13 June:* Eden passed information to Maisky on German troop concentrations in east. *16 June:* Cadogan recited to Maisky detailed military intelligence evidence of an impending German invasion of the USSR¹⁹.

Military/Intelligence. *25 December 1940:* report from Soviet Military Attaché in Berlin on information received concerning preparations for an invasion of the USSR in the spring. *January 1941 onwards:* military intelligence reports on escalating border incidents, including espionage, sabotage and air space violations. *February:* intelligence report that German invasion of Britain postponed until after war with the USSR. *February onwards:* stream of reports from Soviet espionage ring in Switzerland about German concentrations in the east, culminating in June with accurate prediction of date of German attack. *March 1941:* beginning of numerous reports from Sorge in Tokyo on German preparations for invasion of the USSR, including date of the attack. *10 April:* intelligence report on Hitler's statement to Prince Paul of Yugoslavia that he intended to invade the USSR at the end of June. *April-May:* reports from Soviet military attachés in Paris and Berlin warning of coming German attack. *June:* further reports on German troop concentrations along the border²⁰.

This litany of warnings has convinced most observers, in the words of John Erickson, 'that . . . Stalin possessed continuous and accurate

intelligence of German intentions'²¹. Why, then, did he reject this evidence and convince himself that the prelude to war with Germany would be an ultimatum?

Stalin's and the Soviet leadership's interpretation of the information received was coloured by the manner of its presentation. Golikov, the chief of Soviet military intelligence, is reported to have presented his information under two headings: 'from reliable sources' and 'from doubtful sources'. Under the former heading, it is reputed, was information reinforcing Stalin's prejudice that Germany was planning to invade Britain; under the second heading was transmitted the intelligence concerning Hitler's true intention to attack the USSR²².

In his memoirs, Zhukov, at the time Chief of the Soviet General Staff, recalls a specific instance of Golikov's presentational skills. On 20 March 1941, Golikov submitted a report on German military preparations for an attack on the USSR. The report, according to Zhukov, contained a very accurate summary of the Barbarossa Plan. Its conclusion, however, read as follows²³:

1. On the basis of all the aforesaid . . . I consider that the most probable time operations will begin against the USSR is after the victory over England or the conclusion with her of an honourable peace treaty.
2. Rumours and documents to the effect that war against the USSR is inevitable this spring should be regarded as misinformation coming from the English or perhaps even the German intelligence service.

A further example cited by Zhukov concerns Kuznetsov, the Naval Commissar, who on 6 May forwarded a report from his attaché in Berlin that the Germans were preparing to invade the USSR. But in a memorandum accompanying the report Kuznetsov stated: 'I consider this information is false and was specially sent through this channel so that the Germans could see how the USSR would react'²⁴.

A similar fate befell the Berlin embassy's report warning of a German attack – its conclusion being toned down by Soviet Ambassador Dekanozov²⁵. There is also reason to believe that until the very last moment Maisky disparaged the information being passed to him by the British.

The second point to note concerns the information received from Soviet espionage rings in Tokyo and Switzerland. Much has been

made of the fact that these sources furnished more or less accurate data on German plans and preparations for 22 June 1941. Once again, the accuracy of intelligence of this sort is always easier to judge after the event than at the time. Neither the Tokyo nor the Swiss rings had direct access to Berlin's military secrets. Both were dependent on what their informants told them and on their own evaluations of reports received. As it turned out, the intelligence from these sources was of a very high calibre indeed, but at the time it had to be weighed against contrary information coming from other quarters. Moscow's evaluation of the respective merits of the Swiss and Japanese information as against other sources was also complicated by a further set of factors.

In the case of the Swiss ring, the problem was that the source of the most critical information was never identified. Indeed, to this day, we do not know who was the informant of the famous agent 'Lucy'. Two British authors, David Fisher and Anthony Read, have speculated that the ultimate source of the information was British Intelligence who used the Lucy spy ring to pass material from the Enigma decrypts to Moscow²⁶. However, Philip Knightley has argued that it would have been logistically impossible for the kind of information supplied via Lucy to have originated from Bletchley Park (the site of the British operation which broke the codes of the German Enigma encoding machine)²⁷. Whatever the truth, had Stalin thought the British were the source of Lucy's intelligence he would have been even less likely to believe it!

In the case of Sorge and his associates in Japan, the complication was that in the period leading up to the German invasion his radio operator, Clausen, sabotaged the transmission of vital information. As a result, much of the material collected by Sorge was never relayed to Moscow and much of what was transmitted was garbled and incoherent. This may explain why only fragments of Sorge's reports to Moscow have so far been released by the Soviet authorities. Also, Sorge's initial warnings about a German attack predicted an invasion in May 1941 – reports which turned out to be false²⁸. Perhaps, Stalin may have thought, the warnings about a June invasion would also prove to be false.

Despite their limitations, the Swiss and Tokyo groups did confirm what Moscow knew already from military intelligence reports from the border: huge concentrations of German forces were being deployed along the front with the USSR. But the third point the

Soviets had to untangle was the meaning of the German mobilization in the east. Sorge and his counterparts in Switzerland said that it was the prelude to an invasion. The answer which emerged from an elaborate German deception programme was, variously, that it was a cover for an attack on Britain; that it was a precautionary measure to deter a Soviet attack on Germany; that it was part of a war of nerves designed to extract political and economic concessions from the USSR; or that rumours of a German invasion of the USSR were intended to deceive the British and/or frighten the Russians.

German deception measures included 'false radio traffic, rumour-mongering, phoney army orders, fictitious preparations for state visits to Germany, and misleading press releases'²⁹. All this generated a flood of disinformation, some of which must have made its way to Moscow.

With hindsight, the German deception operation seems an obvious ruse but, as Whaley observes, techniques of disinformation were not as well understood then as they are now. The disinformation campaign preceding Barbarossa was the largest in military history, except for the Anglo-American deception operation to convince Hitler (successfully) that the D-Day landings would be in the Pas-de-Calais region. Both operations aimed to create doubt and confusion through disinformation, but also to deceive the enemy into thinking that they knew what was going to happen³⁰.

Barton Whaley rightly describes the German cover-up of Operation Barbarossa as one of the great triumphs of twentieth-century deception strategy. But he pays insufficient attention to a vital element in the ultimate success of the German deception programme: Stalin himself. It was Stalin's conviction that the warnings of a coming surprise attack were part of a British plot to provoke a crisis in Soviet-German relations that must have tipped the balance in favour of his acceptance of the ultimatum hypothesis.

Stalin's suspicions of Britain

The scene was set for Stalin's hardening conviction in this respect by the receipt of Churchill's message and the Cripps memorandum in April. Shortly afterwards an even more disturbing incident occurred. On the night of 10-11 May 1941 Rudolph Hess, Hitler's deputy, flew to Britain. London's silence on the purpose of Hess's private mission

served to strengthen Soviet suspicions that an Anglo-German deal was in the air. Even today Soviet commentators continue to harp on the sinister implications of the 'Hess affair'. The extent of the paranoia that it must have aroused in Moscow is indicated by an extraordinary telegram from Stalin to Maisky on 19 October 1942³¹:

All of us here in Moscow have the impression that Churchill wants the USSR defeated so as to come to terms with Germany afterwards . . . But for this supposition one would find it difficult to explain Churchill's handling of the issue of the Second Front in Europe and of arms supplied to the USSR . . . *of the question of Hess whom Churchill appears to be keeping in reserve.* (Emphasis added)

But what was the assessment of the Soviet embassy in London of the Hess mission and what reports were submitted to Moscow at the time? The correspondence has yet to be published, but a diary entry of Maisky's for 1 June indicates that the general thrust of the reports was that the Hess mission had led to a renewal of the struggle between those who favoured a compromise peace with Germany and those who did not. The anti-appeasement faction, led by Churchill, had won in the end, but the Soviets believed the possibility of an Anglo-German deal still remained³².

While Maisky's reports on the Hess affair may have assuaged Moscow's nightmare of an Anglo-German peace, his other communications – judging from British records – served to reinforce the belief that rumours of an imminent German attack were being fostered by the British as part of a strategy to provoke conflict in Soviet-German relations. At meetings with Eden on 2, 10 and 13 June, Maisky displayed little concern about information on German troop concentrations in the east, insisting that they were exaggerated and, at worst, were part of Hitler's war of nerves³³. At the first of these meetings, for example, he told Eden that he 'found it hard to believe that offensive action was contemplated' by Germany³⁴. That this was also the essential content of Maisky's message to Moscow is evident from the circumstances surrounding the publication of the infamous Tass communiqué of 14 June 1941. The Tass statement was issued ostensibly to deny British press rumours of an imminent Soviet-German war³⁵; its contents were divulged to the Germans the day before publication³⁶. From this circumstance and the actual text of

the Tass statement it seems fairly clear that the source of the reports on press rumours was Maisky in London³⁷.

The blame for the Tass communiqué cannot be laid entirely at Maisky's door. Moscow needed very little encouragement to be suspicious of the British. However, Moscow's scepticism must have been shaken by Maisky's next report. This came in the wake of a meeting with Cadogan (Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office) on 16 June. Cadogan's recital of detailed intelligence on German troop movements in the east struck at the very heart of the perceptions which had hitherto governed Soviet policy³⁸. In Moscow the response was a series of precautionary military moves, which did not culminate in a full-scale alert directive until just after midnight on 21-22 June. That directive took several hours to percolate to the front line, by which time the German attack was already in progress. A similar fate befell subsequent mobilization and defence directives³⁹.

On the diplomatic side there was also a flurry of activity. The Tass communiqué had not drawn the anticipated response from the Germans who made no comments. Faced with this silence, Moscow oscillated between a hard and a soft line towards Berlin.

On 18 June Dekanozov asked to see Weizsäcker. From the German report of the meeting nothing of any consequence was discussed and it is likely that the point of the meeting was to elicit some response to the Tass statement⁴⁰. According to Stalin's 'glasnost' biographer, Dimitrii Volkogonov, the Soviets hoped for new negotiations with the Germans. If the talks could be dragged out for a few weeks a German attack in the summer would be precluded and hence for the rest of 1941⁴¹.

On 20 June Moscow instructed Dekanozov to lodge a protest about German violations of Soviet air space⁴². It was not possible to arrange a meeting at the Wilhelmstrasse until 9.30 p.m. the next day, and then only with Weizsäcker, not Ribbentrop as requested⁴³. In the meantime, Moscow had embarked on a different tack. Molotov summoned Schulenburg and delivered what was effectively a plea for negotiations to repair German-Soviet relations⁴⁴. Three hours later (about 12.30 p.m. Moscow time, 22 June 1941) Moscow telegraphed Dekanozov with instructions to arrange a meeting with Ribbentrop to relay a similar request⁴⁵. These instructions were never carried out. By the time the meeting took place, the German invasion had begun and Dekanozov found himself listening to a declaration of war⁴⁶. At about the same time (5.30 a.m. in Moscow) Schulenburg called on

Molotov to deliver the same declaration. A few hours later Molotov broadcast news of the attack to the Soviet people⁴⁷.

The most controversial period in the history of Soviet foreign policy was over. The great ordeal of war was just beginning.

CHAPTER

16 Conclusion

'History has to be seen as it is.' *M.S. Gorbachev, January 1987*

The German invasion of the USSR in June 1941 was followed by four years of warfare of unequalled scale and ferocity. Between 1941 and 1945 the German Wehrmacht committed between a half and three-quarters of its total forces to the Eastern front. In the battles for Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Kursk and, finally, Berlin more than 10 million German military personnel were killed, wounded or captured. The Red Army destroyed over 600 German divisions (including 167,000 pieces of artillery, 70,000 aircraft and 48,000 tanks¹).

The cost of the Soviet victory in that war was equally staggering. Twenty million Soviet citizens lost their lives. Seventy thousand Soviet cities, towns and villages were laid waste. Six million houses, 98,000 farms, 32,000 factories, 82,000 schools, 43,000 libraries, 6,000 hospitals, thousands of miles of road and railway track were destroyed. Soviet territories occupied by the Germans lost two-thirds of their prewar national wealth. In all, the USSR lost nearly 30 per cent of its national wealth².

The meaning of these statistics in human terms is incalculable.

Despite the devastation wreaked by its war with Nazi Germany, the USSR emerged from battle as a world military power of the first rank. The Red Army occupied half of Europe in 1945. Germany lay in ruins and Britain was weak and exhausted from war. France was still suffering from the ignominy of defeat in 1940 and five years of Nazi occupation. Poland's illusions of grandeur had been dashed for ever by its collapse in the face of the German Blitzkrieg. Only the United States stood in the way of complete Soviet political and military hegemony over continental Europe.

The USSR was exhausted by war too, but within four years a Soviet atomic bomb had been exploded, marking the beginning of its rise to the status of a global superpower. One of the supreme ironies of the Nazi-Soviet pact is that an essentially isolationist retreat into 'neutrality' set in motion a chain of events through which the USSR

achieved the status, recognition and centrality in world politics it had sought, without success, during the 'internationalist' collective security period.

The pact left an indelible mark on the subsequent history of Soviet foreign policy. With the signature of the pact in 1939 the USSR finally left behind the innocence and idealism of 1917. One of the battle cries of the Bolsheviks then was 'No' to secret diplomacy. In 1939 the Soviet Government concluded the most notorious secret deal in diplomatic history. The territorial expansion of 1939–40 was a far cry from Trotsky's demand for no annexations at Brest-Litovsk in 1918. Lenin's tortured efforts to reconcile the interests of world revolution with the needs of national security bore no comparison with the naked realpolitik of Stalin.

The pact had an enduring impact, too, on the political landscape of the postwar world. One of the lessons of the pact for the Soviet leadership was the danger of the countries of Eastern Europe being used as a launch-pad for a surprise attack on the USSR. In their determination and resolution that this should never happen again lay the seeds of the postwar political division of Europe and of the cold war.

The Nazi-Soviet pact lies at the heart of that great series of events and processes in the 1930s and 1940s that helped shape the world we live in today: the rise and fall of fascism, the expansion of Soviet power into Eastern Europe, the decline of Britain and France, the emergence of the United States from isolationism, the division of Germany, the world war and the cold war. For that reason alone it is likely to remain the subject of fierce debate.

There is also another reason for expecting further controversy about the Nazi-Soviet pact: the continuing debate about whether or not the Soviet decision to conclude the non-aggression treaty with Germany was a wise one. Critics of the Soviet action focus on its strategic consequence – that in the long-run the main beneficiary of the pact was Hitler, not Stalin. Curiously enough one of the most powerful statements in support of this case is to be found in an official Soviet history of the CPSU published in 1960³:

1. Germany attacked the USSR after having seized almost the whole of Western Europe with its economic resources. Her war industry, consequently, had a more powerful material and technological basis at the beginning of the war than the Soviet war industry. . .

2. Fascist Germany attacked the Soviet Union at a time when her land forces in Europe were no longer involved in hostilities and she was engaged only in naval and air operations against Britain. She was thus able to fling the bulk of her land and air forces against the USSR. Furthermore, she had the direct support of Italy, Finland, Rumania and Hungary. . . As for the Soviet Union, it had to fight single-handed at first. . .

3. Before attacking the Soviet Union, Germany had massed . . . a huge invasion army totalling 190 divisions, including 153 German divisions that had almost two years' experience in modern warfare, involving the use of large masses of tanks, aircraft and other arms. The Red Army . . . lacked adequate experience in modern warfare. Its re-equipment had not been completed.

The above assessment was not meant as a criticism of the Nazi-Soviet pact; it was more by way of an explanation of the initial successes achieved by the German invasion of the USSR. Critics, however, would point out that almost all the German advantages listed by the CPSU history were a direct result of the Nazi-Soviet pact.

What would be the response of defenders of the pact? In the first instance, that the critics overlook the crucial benefits which the USSR derived from the pact: the shifting of the Soviet defensive line several hundred miles to the west and the gaining of almost two years in which to strengthen Soviet defensive and industrial capacities. Without this additional time and space the initial impact of the German invasion could have been even more disastrous. In the long run the pact paved the way for the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany.

The clinching arguments of supporters of the Soviet action relate to the political causes of the pact. In August 1939, they contend, Stalin had a choice: war with Hitler or a bargain with him which would give the Soviet Union a breathing-space in which to prepare for war. The refusal of Britain and France seriously to negotiate an effective military alliance against Germany left Stalin no choice but the pact with Hitler. The alternative was war with Germany, possibly also with Japan, at a time when the USSR was far from prepared and with no guarantee of meaningful Anglo-French support. Subsequent events showed that this perception was accurate for

while Britain and France did declare war in support of Poland what followed was the phoney war, not a Second Front against Germany in the west.

Was there a feasible alternative to the pact? This is a question that has long exercised Western historians and, more recently, has come to dominate *glasnost* debates in the USSR about the pact. In both West and East it has been strenuously argued that there was indeed an alternative. That alternative was to continue the triple alliance negotiations with Britain and France with the aim of deterring Hitler from attacking Poland and, if necessary, to stand and fight.

The resolution of this debate about alternatives would require consideration of a number of speculative questions. Would Hitler have attacked Poland on 1 September 1939 without the guarantees against a two-front war afforded by the Nazi-Soviet pact? What were the prospects for eventually arriving at an acceptable agreement with Britain and France? Could the Poles and Rumanians have been persuaded to allow Soviet forces passage across their territory? What would have been the outcome of a Soviet-German military clash in 1939 as compared with June 1941? Would Britain and France have lent effective support to the USSR in the event of a Soviet-German war in 1939? How valuable was the 'second front' Stalin threw away by allowing Hitler a free hand to conquer Western Europe? To what extent was the disaster of 22 June 1941 a consequence of the surprise factor and to what extent was it the inevitable outcome of the strategy the Soviet leadership embarked upon in August 1939?

It is not proposed here to delve any further into this debate since it would necessarily entail a detailed examination of French, British and German intentions and capabilities in 1939, not to speak of Polish, Rumanian and other states' foreign policies. The purpose of this book has been to explore why the USSR entered into an unholy alliance with Nazi Germany, not to speculate about what might have happened had it done something else. Moreover, it would not in the end prove to be a very fruitful exercise for it would involve contriving answers to questions that are essentially unanswerable. No one knows or can know what would have happened had the Soviet Union taken a different course in 1939.

To abstain from speculation about what might have happened does not preclude a historical and political critique of Soviet foreign policy.

But it is far more productive to pose that critique in terms of what actually happened and the extent to which Soviet decisions and actions were based on accurate information, adequate analyses, and realistic perceptions of the situation⁴. In all these respects Soviet foreign policy can be found wanting. Information from Soviet embassies was often based more on views prevalent in sympathetic opposition circles than on what government policy actually was⁵. The analysis of Anglo-French policy in terms of a conspiracy to direct German expansionism eastwards was far too oversimplified. There were such tendencies in British and French policy, but they were far from predominant. Similarly, the perception that British and French leaders were mainly motivated by anti-Bolshevism was completely off-beam. Their aim was to defend British and French interests as they conceived them and in accordance with their analysis of the threats facing their countries. In 1939 the British and French feared war as much as the Soviet leadership. They perceived weaknesses in their own position compared to that of Germany and were not over-impressed by what an alliance with the USSR offered. They thought that a political and diplomatic front against Hitler would be sufficient to deter him from war⁶.

Within their own terms, Britain and France acted in good faith in 1939. This is not to say that the positions they adopted were right. It is to imply, however, that a more informed and sophisticated appreciation of British and French policy might have served the Soviet leadership better. In particular, it would have equipped them to make judgements and take actions which might have broken the logjam in the triple alliance negotiations, which, after all, were initiated by the USSR and formed the main focus of its foreign policy in 1939. As it was, the Soviet leadership allowed their fear of Anglo-French intentions to dominate their policy decisions, rather than addressing more forcefully how the Western powers' objections to Soviet proposals could be overcome.

Looking back after fifty years, the most striking quality of Soviet policy in the triple alliance negotiations is its political passivity. In April 1939 the Soviet leadership opted for a war alliance against Germany, made their proposals known, and then sat back and waited to see what would happen. They set the British and French a not unreasonable test of their intentions, but failed to intervene actively to shape the outcome⁷. The result was that they found themselves faced with the choice of an uncertain alliance with the West or a

desperate gamble on a deal with Hitler. This outcome was not entirely, or even mainly, of their own making. Perhaps no other outcome was possible. All we can be certain of is that, blinded by their own dogma, the Stalin leadership failed to make the most of an historic opportunity to forge an anti-fascist alliance with the West.

Notes

Chapter 1 Introduction

1. W.S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1964) p.346.
2. *Ciano's Diary 1939–1943* (London: Heinemann, 1947), pp.131 and 132.
3. See D. Bergamini, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy* (London: Panther Books, 1971) pp.707–8.
4. See A. Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985) pp.211–14.
5. W.L. Shirer, *The Nightmare Years 1930–1940* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985) pp.425 and 430.
6. New York: Didier Publishers, 1948.
7. B. Whaley, *Codeword Barbarossa* (Boston, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974) p.343.
8. On the relationship between historical debates about Soviet foreign policy and contemporary political perceptions of the Soviet Union see B.R. Posen, 'Competing Images of the Soviet Union', *World Politics*, July 1987.
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Chapter 2 History and Politics in the USSR: The Case of the Nazi-Soviet Pact

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4. *ibid.*, pp.363–7.
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6. See the translation of Stalin's speech appended to J.P. Morray, *From Yalta to Disarmament* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961).
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12. See G. Katkov, 'Soviet Historical Sources in the Post-Stalin Era' in Keep,

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33. *SSSR v Borbe za Mir Nakanune Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny* (Moscow, 1971). A two-volume English edition was published by Novosti Press in 1973 (*Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II*) and an abridged edition in one volume under the same title by Progress Publishers in 1976. See also the review of these documents by John Herman in *Journal of Contemporary History*, July 1980.
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41. *Druzhba Narodov*, No.3 1988 and *Moskovskaya Pravda*, 18 and 19 May 1988. Both items were published under the pseudonym of Ernst Henry.
42. 'Closing the Gaps', *International Affairs* (Moscow), June 1988.
43. *International Affairs* (Moscow), November 1988, p.45. See also Chubaryan's article in *Kommunist*, no.14, September 1988 ('V Predverii Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny' especially pp.108–9).
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Chapter 3 From World Revolution to Collective Security: Foundations of Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–33

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2. E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol.3 (London: Pelican, 1972) p.3.
3. *First Decrees of Soviet Power* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970) doc.3.
4. *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1945* 4th edn (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981) pp.35–7 and 48.
5. Cited E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol.3 (London: Pelican, 1966) p.41.
6. *The Soviet Union and Peace* (London: Martin Lawrence, no date) doc.6.
7. *Soviet Foreign Policy*, p.49.
8. *The Soviet Union and Peace*, doc.7.
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10. See Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution* p.18.
11. Among the best short accounts of the debate within the Bolshevik Party around Brest-Litovsk are ibid. pp.46–68 and I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1917–1921* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) pp.373–404.
12. *The Bolsheviks and the October Revolution: Central Committee Minutes of the Russian-Social Democratic Party (Bolsheviks), August 1917–February 1918*, (London: Pluto Press, 1974) pp.171–80.
13. *The Soviet Union and Peace*, doc.8.
14. For an explanation of Trotsky's position see Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*.
15. *The Bolsheviks and the October Revolution*, pp.206–12. For details of the German peace terms see *Soviet Foreign Policy* pp.64–5.
16. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, p.60.
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18. On the foreign intervention and civil war see, e.g., A. Rothstein, *A History of the USSR* (London: Penguin, 1950) chap.3 and J. Elleinstein, *Histoire De L'U.R.S.S.*, vol.1 (Paris, 1975) part 3.
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 22. See e.g. Lenin's speech to the 7th All-Russian Congress of Soviets in his *Selected Works*, vol.8 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, no date).
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 24. E. Hobsbawm, writing in *Marxism Today*, July 1976, p.222.
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 39. On the 1927 war scare episode see E.H. Carr, *Foundations of a Planned Economy 1926–1929*, vol.3 part 1 (London: Macmillan, 1976) pp.8–11 and M. Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987) pp.12–18, 26–7 and 76–7.

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55. Stalin, *Works* vol.9 p.333.
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79. The two main protagonists of this view are Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security* and P.D. Raymond, *Conflict and Consensus in Soviet Foreign Policy 1933–1939* (Ph.D thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1979). See also D. Ogden, 'Appeasement: The View From Moscow', paper presented to the Appeasement Symposium at the Polytechnic of Central London, November 1978; R.C. Tucker, 'The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy', *Slavic Review* vol.36, 1977; R.M. Slusser, 'The Role of the Foreign Ministry' in I.J. Lederer (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); and G.F. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1960) chaps. 20 and 21.
80. Raymond, *Conflict and Consensus* p.219.
81. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p.104.
82. R. Medvedev, *Nikolai Bukharin: The Last Years* (New York: Norton & Co., 1980) p.117. The letter itself is reprinted in B.I. Nicolaevsky, *Power and the Soviet Elite* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975). The book also carries an interview with Nicolaevsky which explores the origins and nature of the letter (pp.221–2). On this point see also Medvedev pp.112–18 and J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp.214–16.
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84. On the purge of the Narkomindel see Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security* chap.8; Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology* chap.7; Raymond,

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85. Cited by D. Ogden, 'Finding a Bitter Truth', *7 Days*, 22 August 1987. See also V. Borodin who argues that 'on the whole, the officers' corps of the Red Army on the eve of war was up to the mark'. Borodin utilizes Soviet military archives to show that by June 1941 the bulk of officers purged in the 1930s had been reinstated. He does concede, however, that 'the 1937–1938 purges hit hardest top military commanders' and that 'as regards the damage done to the army's top command, it was truly irreparable'. ('Stalinist Repressions in the Thirties and the Number of Officers in the Red Army on the Eve of World War Two', *Military Bulletin*, No.20, October 1988).
 86. On this point see Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology* pp.181–4 and Raymond, *Conflict and Consensus* pp.387–8.
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 88. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p.311.

Chapter 4 The Rise and Fall of Collective Security 1933–8

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3. *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR* (hereafter DVPS) vol. 16, n.321, pp.876-7.
4. Degras *Soviet Documents*, p.45.
5. *ibid.* p.48.
6. *ibid.* pp.48-61.
7. *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (hereafter DGFP), series C, vol. 1, docs. 6, 10 and 29.
8. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by I.F. Maximychev, *Diplomatiya Mira protiv Diplomatii Voyny: Ocherk Sovetsko-Germanskikh Diplomatcheskikh Otnoshenii v 1933–1939* (Moscow, 1981) p.28.
9. DVPS, vol. 16, doc. 51 and DGFP, series C, vol. 1, doc. 41.
10. See DVPS, vol. 16, docs. 51, 54 and 424 and DGFP, series C, vol. 1, docs. 41, 43 and 73 and vol. 2, doc. 127.
11. DVPS, vol. 16, doc. 54. Cited by Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p.7.
12. DGFP, series C, vol. 1, doc. 73.
13. Carr, *Twilight of Comintern*, p.95.
14. Maximychev, *Diplomatiya Mira*, p.25.
15. Eudin and Slusser, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, doc. 96.
16. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Maximychev, *Diplomatiya Mira*, p.41.
17. *ibid.* pp.41-2.
18. Eudin and Slusser, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, doc. 97.

19. For Soviet statements on the Hugenberg Memorandum see Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp.21–3.
20. DVPS, vol. 16, doc. 189 and DGFP, series C, vol. 1, doc. 331.
21. DGFP, series C, vol. 1, doc. 338.
22. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Maximychev, *Diplomatiya Mira*, p.42.
23. See DGFP, series C, vol. 1, docs. 339, 409, 439, 460 and 470 and vol. 2, doc. 47.
24. DGFP, series C, vol. 1, doc. 284.
25. Carr, *Twilight of Comintern*, p.97.
26. Eudin and Slusser, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, doc. 103.
27. See A. Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985) chaps. 3 and 4.
28. See I. Maximychev, 'First Years of the Struggle for Checking Fascist Aggression', *International Affairs* (Moscow), July 1975, p.125. Also, Alexandrovsky's letter to Krestinsky (20 March 1933) in DVPS, vol. 16, doc. 86.
29. See Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp.24–5.
30. See L. Radice, *Prelude to Appeasement: East Central European Diplomacy in the Early 1930s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981) p.9 and Litvinov, *Against Aggression* pp.170–2.
31. Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, vol. 1, p.52.
32. Radice, *Prelude to Appeasement*, p.10.
33. Cited by M. Chernousov, *The Soviet Ambassador Reports Back* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983) p.25.
34. Cited by Radice, *Prelude to Appeasement*, p.7.
35. On the four-power pact episode see *ibid.* chap. 1.
36. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p.30.
37. *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (hereafter DDF), First Series, vol. 4, doc. 20 and vol. 6, doc. 200.
38. Radice, *Prelude to Appeasement*, p.16.
39. For reports on Soviet friendliness towards France see DDF First Series, vol. 6, docs. 195, 204, 249, 251 and 252.
40. DVPS, vol. 16, doc. 322.
41. *ibid.*, doc. 332.
42. 'Documents: The Struggle for Collective Security in Europe' (hereafter 'The Struggle. . .'), *International Affairs* (Moscow), June [July, August and October] 1963 p.111 and DVPS, doc.390.
43. 'The Struggle' p. 111.
44. DVPS, vol. 16, doc. 390.
45. *ibid.*, doc. 396.
46. *ibid.*, docs. 397 and 413. See also DDF, First Series, vol. 5, doc. 1939.
47. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p.28.
48. 'The Struggle', p.110.
49. DVPS, vol. 16, doc. 444 and n.321, p.876.
50. DDF, First Series, vol. 5, doc. 193 and DVPS, vol. 16, p.773.
51. DVPS, vol. 16, p. 773.
52. On this point see Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p.33.

53. J. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 13, (Moscow, 1955) pp.308–9.
54. DVPS, vol. 17, doc. 151.
55. 'The Struggle'. p.112.
56. DVPS, vol. 17, docs. 168 and 186 and DDF, First Series, vol. 6, doc. 221.
57. 'The Struggle'. pp.113–14.
58. *ibid.* p.114.
59. See DVPS, vol. 17, doc. 197 and DGFP, Series C, vol. 2, doc. 504.
60. DVPS, vol. 17, doc. 217.
61. *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (hereafter DBFP), 2nd Series, vol. 6, doc. 468 and 'The Struggle', p.114.
62. 'The Struggle', p.115.
63. *ibid.* p.116.
64. See Radice, *Prelude to Appeasement*, chaps. 3 and 4 for details of German and Polish tactics in the negotiations.
65. 'The Struggle', July 1963 p. 117.
66. On Soviet admission to the League see DDF, First Series, vol. 7, chap. 3.
67. DGFP, Series C, vol. 3, doc. 200.
68. 'The Struggle', July 1963, p.119.
69. *ibid.* p.120. The conversation referred to is documented in DVPS, vol. 17, doc. 365.
70. 'The Struggle', July 1963, p.120.
71. DVPS, docs. 379 and 387.
72. *ibid.* doc. 417.
73. 'The Struggle', August 1963, p.132.
74. *ibid.* See also the report from the Soviet embassy in Berlin (DVPS, vol. 18, doc. 38) that French diplomats there were already talking about the Eastern Pact as a 'detail' among many other issues.
75. 'The Struggle', p.133.
76. *ibid.* pp.133–5.
77. *ibid.* pp.135–6 and DBFP, Second Series, vol. 12, doc. 475.
78. 'The Struggle', August 1963, p. 136.
79. DVPS, vol. 18, doc. 148.
80. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p.44.
81. Cited by *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1945* (4th edn., 1981) p.228.
82. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p.84.
83. 'The Struggle', October 1963, p.112.
84. DVPS, vol. 18, doc. 149.
85. *ibid.*, docs. 152 and 154.
86. *ibid.*, doc. 157.
87. *ibid.*, doc. 166.
88. 'The Struggle', October 1963, p.113.
89. DVPS, vol. 18, doc. 173.
90. *ibid.*, doc. 177.
91. 'The Struggle', October 1963, p.113.
92. DVPS, vol. 18, doc. 177.
93. 'The Struggle', October 1963, p.114.
94. *ibid.* pp.115–16 for details of the various drafts discussed in Geneva.
95. DVPS, vol.18, doc. 187.

96. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sipols, *Vneshnyaya Politika*, p.277.
97. See 'The Struggle', October 1963, pp.116–18 and Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p.50. For the text of the pact see Radice *Prelude to Appeasement*, Appendix 2.
98. *Dokumenty i Materialy po Istorii Sovetsko-Chekhoslovatskikh Otnoshenii*, vol. 3 docs. 63 and 65.
99. See Radice, *Prelude to Appeasement*, chap. 7.
100. DVPS, vol. 18, doc. 253.
101. See Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp.62–3 and Plettenberg, 'The Soviet Union and the League of Nations' pp. 160–161.
102. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sipols, *Vneshnyaya Politika*, p.364.
103. *ibid.* p.370 and Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp.70–72.
104. See L. R. Tillett, 'The Soviet Role in League Sanctions Against Italy, 1935–1936', *The American Slavic and East European Review*, July 1956.
105. See F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960) pp.709–19 and 771–81 and Plettenberg 'The Soviet Union and the League' *passim*.
106. See e.g. Suritz's letter to Krestinsky on 27 January 1936 (DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 29).
107. See G. M. Gathorne-Hardy, *A Short History of International Affairs 1920–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944) pp.424–6.
108. DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 227. Letter dated 19 July 1936.
109. See W.P. and Z. Coates, *World Affairs and the USSR* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1939) chap.5.
110. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp.73–5.
111. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp.126–7 contains the text of the communiqué.
112. See R. Manne, 'The Foreign Office and the Failure of Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 16 1981, pp.744–5.
113. DBFP, Second Series, vol. 15, docs. 468, 488, and 511; DVPS, vol. 19, docs. 32 and 42; and Manne 'The Foreign Office' pp.746–7.
114. DBFP, Second Series, vol. 15, doc. 488 and DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 36.
115. Manne, 'The Foreign Office', p.750.
116. See S. Marks, *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe 1918–1933* (London: Macmillan, 1976) *passim*.
117. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by V. Ya. Sipols, *Sovetskii Souz v Borbe za Mir i Bezopasnost 1933–1939* (Moscow, 1974) p.111.
118. See DBFP, Second Series, vol. 16, docs. 71 and 169; DVPS, vol. 19, docs. 71, 76, and 102; DDF, Second Series, vol. 1, docs. 22 and 50; and Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp.170–85.
119. *Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sipols, Sovetskii Souz v Borbe*, pp.108–9.
120. See A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War* (London: Frank Cass, 1977) pp.47–9.
121. *Dokumenty i Materialy Kanuna Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny 1937–1939*, (Moscow, 1981) n.87 pp.397–8 and DDF, Second Series, vol. 4, doc. 457.
122. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of Second World War*, pp.49–50.
123. DDF, Second Series, vol. 5, doc. 480.
124. DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 249.

125. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p.114.
126. See E. H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1984) p.17.
127. See Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp.110–15.
128. DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 296.
129. A. H. Landis, *Spain: The Unfinished Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1975) p.241.
130. DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 327.
131. On the Soviet role in the Non-Intervention Committee see I. Maisky, *Spanish Notebooks*.
132. See *Solidarnost Narodov c Ispanskoi Respublikoi 1936–1939*, (Moscow, 1972) pp.225–58 and Haslam *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p.146.
133. On the International Brigades see V. Brome, *The International Brigades, Spain 1936–1937*, (London: Mayflower-Dell, 1967).
134. On Britain, see J. Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain: The Aid Spain Movement in Britain 1936–1939* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986) chap. 1.
135. See e.g. H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Pelican, 1968) pp.283–5.
136. On this point see Haslam *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp. 120–5.
137. On Soviet-Comintern-Spanish Communist Party strategy see Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*; J. Sandoval and M. Azcarate, *Spain 1936–1939* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1960); and H. Graham, 'The Spanish Popular Front and the Civil War' in H. Graham and P. Preston (eds), *The Popular Front in Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1987).
138. Table from M. T. Meshcheryakov, 'Sovetskii Souz i Antifashistskaya Voina Ispanskogo Naroda (1936–1939)', *Istoriya SSSR*, January 1988, p.31.
139. Sipols, *Vneshnyaya Politika*, Sovetskogo Souza 1936–1939 (Moscow, 1987). p.48.
140. See Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* and Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, chaps 7 and 9.
141. For Litvinov's speeches see his *Against Aggression*, pp.46–113.
142. DDF, Second Series, vol. 7, doc. 390.
143. Cited by Chernousov, *The Soviet Ambassador Reports Back*, p.94.
144. On Comintern politics in the third period see H. Gruber (ed.), *Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974).
145. See Carr, *Twilight of Comintern*, chaps. 1–5.
146. On the origins of the popular front policy see G. Roberts, 'Collective Security and the Origins of the People's Front' in J. Fyrth (ed.), *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985).
147. Togliatti's report (under the name of Ercoli) is reproduced in *Report of the Seventh World Congress*.
148. See Haslam *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp.84–5, 87–89 and 102–3.
149. See J.F. Dreifort, 'The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936–1937', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.11, 1976.
150. On the background to Soviet-Japanese relations and Moscow's response to the

- Manchurian crisis see H.L. Moore, *Soviet Far Eastern Policy, 1931–1945*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945) chaps. 1–4; G. A. Lensen, *The Damned Inheritance: The Soviet Union and the Manchurian Crisis 1924–1935* (Tallahassee, Fla.: Diplomatic Press, 1974) chaps. 6–7; and B. Bridges, 'Mongolia in Soviet-Japanese Relations, 1933–1936' in I. Nish (ed.), *Some Aspects of Soviet-Japanese Relations in the 1930s* (London: London School of Economics, 1982).
151. See Lensen, *The Damned Inheritance*, pp.337–8 and 223–4.
152. See *ibid.* chaps. 8–10.
153. See J. Kovalio, 'Japan's Perception of Stalinist Foreign Policy in the Early 1930s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, April 1984, pp.328–31. See also J. Erickson, 'Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1940–1941' in E.R. May (ed.) *Knowing One's Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). pp.400–1 which summarizes Soviet military reports on the strength of the Japanese forces.
- 154 See Moore, *Soviet Far Eastern Policy*, chap. 5.
- 155 See J. Haslam, 'Soviet Aid to China and Japan's Place in Moscow's Foreign Policy, 1937–1939' in Nish, *Some Aspects of Soviet-Japanese relations*.
156. On Soviet military aid to China see A.M. Dubinski, *Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniya v Period Yapon-Kitaiskoi Voiny 1937–1939* (Moscow, 1980) chap.2.
157. See SSSR *v Borbe za Mir Nakanune Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny*, (Moscow, 1971) docs. 274, 342 and 420 and T.G.W. Prange et al. *Target Tokyo: The Story of the Sorge Spy Ring* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984) chap.31.
158. Beloff, *Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, vol. 2, p.121.
159. DVPS, vol.19., doc. 227.
160. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sipols, *Sovetskii Souz v Borbe*. . . pp.173–4.
161. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–1945*, 4th edn p.328.
162. For Soviet press comment on the Austrian events see Koblyakov, *USSR: For Peace*, pp.85–6. A recent Soviet study of the Anschluss is A.A. Akhtamzyan, 'Annexiya Avstrii Reikhom', *Voprosy Istorii*, September 1988.
163. *New Documents on the History of Munich* (hereafter New Documents), (Prague 1958) doc. 4.
164. *ibid.* doc. 5.
165. *Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War* (hereafter Documents and Materials), vol. 1 (Moscow, 1948) doc. 7.
166. Cited by Sipols, *Sovetskii Souz v Borbe*, p.202.
167. New Documents, docs. 7 and 9.
168. *ibid.* doc. 14.
169. *ibid.* and DVPS, vol.21, n.72, p.715.
170. On the 'May Crisis' see W.L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic* (London: Pan Books, 1972) pp.380–5.
171. See Degras *Soviet Documents* pp.282–94 for Litvinov's speech.
172. On the Runciman Mission see A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 1964) pp.210–12.
173. See the reports in DDF, Second Series, vol.10, docs. 5, 6, and 289; DVPS, vol.

- 21, doc. 300; DBFP, Third Series, vol. 2, doc. 637; DGFP, Series D, vol. 2, docs. 381, 396 and 397; and Chernousov, *The Soviet Ambassador Reports Back*, pp.124–5.
174. DDF, Second Series, vol. 11, doc. 511.
175. *ibid.*, doc. 534 and New Documents, doc. 25.
176. New Documents, doc. 26.
177. DVPS, vol. 21, doc. 325. Cited by J. Haslam, 'The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovakian Crisis of 1938', *Journal of Contemporary History*, July 1979, n.44 pp.459–60.
178. DVPS, vol. 21, doc. 330. Cited by Haslam, 'The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovakian Crisis'.
179. New Documents doc. 27.
180. *ibid.*, doc. 30.
181. DVPS, vol. 21, doc. 343.
182. *ibid.*, doc. 348 cited by Haslam, 'The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovakian Crisis', p.451.
183. New Documents, doc. 33.
184. See Shirer, *Collapse of the Third Republic*, pp.402–5.
185. Documents and Materials, doc. 22.
186. New Documents, doc. 36.
187. *ibid.*, docs. 38 and 39 and *Dokumenty i Materialy po Istorii Sovetsko-Chekhsoslovatskikh Otnoshenii*, vol. 3, doc. 344 n.1.
188. Documents and Materials, doc. 24.
189. *ibid.*, doc. 27 and Shirer *Collapse of the Third Republic*, p.410.
190. I. Maisky, 'The Munich Drama', *New Times* no.44 1966, p.27.
191. *Dokumenty i Materialy po Istorii Sovetsko-Chekhsoslovatskikh Otnoshenii*, vol. 3 docs. 352, 354, and 374 n.1.
192. See Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p.189.
193. DVPS, vol. 21, doc. 366.
194. *ibid.*, doc. 370 and DBFP, Third Series, vol.2, doc. 1071.
195. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sipols, *Diplomatic Battles*, p.181.
196. DVPS, vol. 21 doc. 369.
197. Maisky, 'The Munich Drama', p.28.
198. On the Soviet side see e.g. V.K. Volkov, *Munkhenskii Sgovor i Balkanskiye Strany* (Moscow, 1978) who ignores the negotiations with Rumania in Geneva completely and A.A. Shevyakov, *Sovetsko-Rumynskiye Otnosheniya i Problema Evropeiskoi Bezopasnost 1932–1939* (Moscow, 1977) who does refer to them but only in passing (p.275). Interestingly, the leading Soviet historian, O.A. Rzheshesky, made great play of the negotiations with Rumania in a letter of 11 October 1988 to *The Independent* on the Munich crisis, so perhaps this episode is on the verge of 'rehabilitation'.
199. See Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security*, pp.73–5 and Appendix C for the text of the Rumanian proposal on Soviet rights of passage. For the background to these negotiations see Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp.169–79. There appears to have been no Soviet reply to the Rumanian proposals.
200. On this point see B.R. Posen, 'Competing Images of the Soviet Union', *World*

Politics, July 1987, pp.586–8.

201. On Godesberg see L. Mosley, *On Borrowed Time* (London: Pan Books, 1971) pp.46–55.
202. New Documents, doc. 55.
203. DVPS, vol. 21, doc. 386.
204. See B. Mendel Cohen, 'Moscow at Munich: Did the Soviet Union Offer Unilateral Aid to Czechoslovakia', *East European Quarterly*, vol. XII, no.3.
205. See 'Notes on Events in Czechoslovakia in Late September and Early October 1938', *International Affairs* (Moscow), December 1988 pp. 125–32.
206. T. Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979) pp.452–6.

Chapter 5 Bridge-Building in Berlin: Soviet-German Relations in the Collective Security Era

1. See E. Varga's reports of 22 August and 31 December 1935 in *International Press Correspondence* on the German economy and his 'Dva Goda Fashizma Germanii', *Bolshevik*, No. 1, 1935 and 'Vooruzheniya i Dorogovizna' in *Mirovoye Khozyaistvo i Mirovaya Politika*, No.1, 1936. Also the articles by E.Korn ('Economicheskkiye Problemy Germanii v 1935'), R. Zhukovskaya ('Kreditnaya Politika Germanskogo Fashizma') and D. Bukhartsev ('O Polozhenii v Germanii') in the same Soviet journal (Nos. 10 and 11–12, 1935, 10, 1935 and 6, 1936, respectively) and K. Radek, 'What is Happening in Germany', *International Press Correspondence*, 24 August 1935. For further details and references see J. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp.80–81. For a discussion of the theoretical background to Soviet prognostications on the German economy see R. B. Day, *The 'Crisis' and the 'Crash'*, (London: New Left Books, 1981) chap. 8.
2. Three modern exponents of this line are Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security* chap. 5 and M. Heller and A. Nekrich, *Utopia in Power* (London: Hutchinson, 1986) pp. 322–7. See also Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, which presents a more subtle and nuanced interpretation along similar lines.
3. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Maximychev, *Diplomatiya Mira*, p. 84.
4. See Degras *Soviet Documents*, p.155.
5. See Hilger and Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies* p.279.
6. *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR* (hereafter DVPS) vol. 17, docs. 94 and 95; and *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (hereafter DGFP) series C, vol. 2, docs. 362 and 364.
7. DVPS, vol. 17, doc. 126. See also Neurath's comments to Khinchuk on 11 April 1934 in DVPS, vol. 17, doc. 122. The official German reply and the Soviet response to it are reproduced in Coates, *World Affairs and the USSR*, pp. 15–18.
8. Sipols, *Diplomatic Battles*, pp.161–3.
9. *Official Documents Concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations 1933–1939* (London: Hutchinson, 1940) doc. 10.
10. Cited by Maximychev, *Diplomatiya Mira*, p.71. The official concerned was Stomonyakov, writing on 4 February.
11. *Dokumenty i Materialy po Istorii Sovetsko-Polskikh Otnoshenii*, vol. 6, doc. 106.
12. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sipols, *Sovetskii Souz v Borbe*, p.55.

13. See the Polish documents cited in *Official Documents Concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations*, doc. 157.
14. On Polish-Soviet relations see I.V. Mikhutina, *Sovetsko-Polskiye Otnosheniya 1931-1935* (Moscow, 1977) especially chap. 4 and Budurowycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations* chaps. 2–5.
15. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p. 104 and 111–112.
16. Cited by M. Andreyeva and K. Dimitrieva, 'From the Prehistory of the Second World War', *International Affairs* (Moscow), May 1961, p.75.
17. DVPS, vol. 18, doc. 253.
18. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp.153–5.
19. DVPS, vol. 19 doc. 12. The letter is dated 11 January 1936.
20. See Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp. 49, 82 and 103.
21. For figures on Soviet-German trade in the 1930s see R.A. Clarke, *Soviet Economic Facts 1917-1970* (London: Macmillan, 1972), S.P. Turin, *The USSR: An Economic and Social Survey* (London: Methuen, 1944) and *Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1918–1940*, (Moscow, 1960). For some details of the economic negotiations, see Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security*, pp. 98–103.
22. E. Gnedin, *Iz Istorii Otnoshenii Mezhdru SSSR i Fashistskoi Germaniei* (New York, 1977) pp. 34–5. See also 'V Narkomindele, 1922-1939: Intervu c E.A. Gnedinym', *Pamyat: Istoricheskii Sbornik*, No. 5 Moscow 1981/Paris 1982, p. 377. For critical assessments of the value of Gnedin's memoirs see P.D. Raymond, 'Witness and Chronicler of Nazi-Soviet Relations: The Testimony of Evgeny Gnedin (Parvus)', *The Russian Review*, No. 44, 1985 and T.J. Uldricks 'A.J.P. Taylor and the Russians' in G. Martel (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986) pp. 178–9.
23. See e.g. Krestinsky's letter to Suritz on 11 January 1936 where he refers to the fact that Pyatakov was expecting reports from Kandelaki about the trade negotiations (DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 12).
24. See, inter alia, DVPS, vol. 17, doc. 128; DVPS, vol. 18, docs. 38, 119, 424; DVPS, vol. 19, docs. 12 and 239.
25. DGFP, series C, vol. 4., doc. 211.
26. *ibid.* doc. 386. Curiously, for all the fuss made by some historians about the Kandelaki-Schacht discussions, the latter makes no mention of them in his memoirs published in 1948. This point was brought to my attention by Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security*, p. 106.
27. See Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p.90.
28. DVPS, vol. 18, doc. 424.
29. DGFP, series C, vol. 4, doc. 439.
30. *ibid.*, doc. 453.
31. DVPS, vol. 18, p. 672, n. 261.
32. *ibid.*
33. *ibid.*, doc. 449.
34. *ibid.*, p.672, n.261.
35. *ibid.*, doc. 450.
36. *ibid.*, vol. 19, doc. 12.
37. *ibid.*, vol. 18, doc. 450.

38. DGFP, series C, vol. 4, doc. 472.
39. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p.184. Haslam (*The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security* p.100), like many other historians, cites this statement of Molotov's as evidence of divisions in the Soviet leadership over policy towards Germany. Why Molotov would choose to make such a revelation to a French journalist has never been explained. In the absence of definite evidence to the contrary, the interpretation in the present text, that this statement contained a message to the Germans rather than evidence of splits in the Soviet leadership, seems preferable.
40. DVPS, vol. 19, docs. 119 and 125.
41. DGFP, series C, vol. 5, doc. 312.
42. *ibid.*, doc. 342. The economic negotiations had concluded with a trade agreement signed on 29 April 1936. See DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 143.
43. See Raymond, *Conflict and Consensus*, pp. 228–9.
44. *ibid.*, p. 229.
45. See Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp. 127–8.
46. Readers interested in experiencing the full flavour of the Show Trials should consult the trial transcripts published in *Report of the Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre*, (Moscow, 1937) and *Report of the Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites* (Moscow, 1938).
47. DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 239.
48. The phrase is from Suritz's report on Nuremberg of 13 September 1936 in DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 266.
49. *ibid.*, p. 762, n. 160.
50. See Andreyeva and Dmitrieva 'From the Prehistory' and DVPS, vol. 18, doc. 83 and vol. 19, docs. 266 and 305.
51. DVPS, vol. 19, doc. 305.
52. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp. 144–5 and *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 2nd series, vol. 19, doc. 467.
53. On Gnedin's fate see Raymond, 'Witness and Chronicler'.

Chapter 6 Alliance versus Isolation: Soviet Foreign Policy after Munich

1. *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II*, (hereafter SPE) (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1976) doc. 7.
2. *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, (hereafter DVPS), vol. 21, doc. 402.
3. SPE, docs. 6 and 9.
4. DVPS, vol. 21, doc. 408.
5. Sipols, *Diplomatic Battles*, p.192.
6. SPE, doc. 25.
7. See, for example, *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (hereafter DGFP), Series D, vol. 4, p. 609 and *Foreign Relations of the United States*, (hereafter FRUS): *The Soviet Union 1933–39*, pp. 592–3.
8. In this connection John Erickson's comment on an interview with Maisky, during which he probed 'the question of how these diplomats and attachés actually

reported given the nature of the Stalinist regime', is relevant: 'I talked at length with Maisk[y]. . . and, even allowing for Maisk[y's] foibles and all retrospective justifications, I concluded that the *ideological* stress was genuine and deeply ingrained . . .' See his 'Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1930-1941' in May *Knowing One's Enemies* p.404, n.46.

9. SPE, doc. 85.
10. *ibid.* doc. 12.
11. *ibid.* doc. 13.
12. *SSSR v Borbe za Mir Nakanune Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny* (hereafter *Borbe za Mir*), (Moscow, 1971) doc 40.
13. SPE, doc. 54.
14. *Borbe za Mir*, docs. 40, 82 and 90.
15. SPE, doc. 82. For Maisky's letter see *ibid.* doc. 90.
16. *ibid.*, doc. 100; *Borbe za Mir*, docs. 46, 68 and 81.
17. An account of the origins and development of this agitation is given in Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, vol. 2 pp. 212–16. See also A. Rothstein, *The Munich Conspiracy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1958) pp.282–95.
18. *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (hereafter *DBFP*), 3rd series, vol. 3, pp. 541–2.
19. SPE, doc. 100.
20. On the Polish occupation of Teschen see A. Cienciala's article in *Purnell's History of the 20th Century*, issue 60.
21. *Dokumenty i Materialy po Istorii Sovetsko-Polskikh Otnoshenii*, vol. 6, doc. 263.
22. *ibid.*, docs. 264 and 265.
23. *ibid.*, doc. 266.
24. *ibid.*, doc. 267.
25. *DVPS*, vol. 21, doc. 466.
26. SPE, doc. 49.
27. *ibid.*, doc. 54.
28. *ibid.*, doc. 34.
29. *ibid.*, doc. 37.
30. *Borbe za Mir*, doc. 82.
31. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp.308–11.
32. Stalin, *Leninism*, pp. 619–30.
33. An alternative, more flowery, interpretation is 'to make a cat's paw of other people'. Interestingly, this was not the first time Stalin had used this metaphor. In 1927 he said 'the British bourgeoisie is not fond of doing its own fighting. It has always preferred to make war through the hands of others. And it has indeed succeeded at times in finding fools willing to serve as a cat's paw for it.' (*Works*, vol. 9 (Moscow, 1954), p. 330).
34. On the German annexation of Czechoslovakia see W.L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (London: Pan Books, 1964) pp. 537–49.
35. The originator of the rumours concerning Rumania, which turned out to be unsubstantiated, was Tilea, the Rumanian Ambassador in London. See L. Mosley, *On Borrowed Time* (London: Pan Books, 1971) pp. 185–8.
36. SPE, doc. 108.
37. *ibid.*, doc. 109.
38. *ibid.*, doc. 111.

39. *ibid.*, doc. 113.
40. *ibid.*, doc. 120.
41. *ibid.*, docs. 122 and 123.
42. *ibid.*, doc. 137.
43. *ibid.*, doc. 139.
44. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sipols, *Diplomatic Battles*, p.216.
45. SPE, docs. 131, 135, 136, 140 and 141.
46. *ibid.*, doc. 132.
47. *ibid.*, doc. 145.
48. *ibid.*, doc. 150; *Documents Diplomatiques Francais* (hereafter DDF), second series, vol. 15, docs. 263 and 318, Borbe za Mir, p.684, n.102.
49. SPE, doc. 155; DDF vol. 15, docs. 343 and 349.
50. SPE, doc. 164, DDF, vol. 15, doc. 387.
51. SPE, doc. 157.
52. Borbe za Mir, doc. 222.
53. SPE, doc. 149.
54. *ibid.*, docs. 160, 161, 162 and 163.
55. *ibid.*, docs. 163, 165 and 169.
56. *ibid.*, docs. 170 and 171.
57. Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler?* pp. 120–1.
58. Borbe za Mir, docs. 268 and 284.
59. For example, Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p. 212.
60. See for example, Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War*, pp. 92–3.
61. DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 215.
62. DVPS, vol. 21, doc. 251. This point was brought to my attention by Maximychev, *Diplomatiya Mira*, p. 28b, n. 228.
63. See e.g. DBFP, 3rd series, vol. 4 p. 34.
64. DGFP, series D, vol. 4, doc. 483.
65. *ibid.*, doc. 485.
66. *ibid.*, docs. 486, 487 and 489.
67. Schulenburg handed the German draft of a new credit agreement to Mikoyan (Commissar for Foreign Trade) in Moscow on 10 February. On the same day Mikoyan presented a series of Soviet counter-proposals. Nothing more was heard of the projected credit agreement until the following May. (DGFP, series D, vol. 4, docs. 490 and 491; *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941* (hereafter NSR) (New York: Didier, 1948) pp. 5–7.)
68. DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 215.
69. See Read and Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace*, pp. 70–1.
70. DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 217.
71. See Maximychev, *Diplomatiya Mira*, p. 239 and DDF, second series, vol. 16, doc.119. The latter reference is to a report of a conversation between Coulondre, the French Ambassador in Berlin, and Astakhov. From this report it appears that Astakhov accompanied Merekalov to the Wilhelmstrasse on 17 April, although it is not clear whether he was present at the meeting. Astakhov stressed to Coulondre that the purpose of the meeting was strictly to do with economic and financial issues arising out of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia.
72. DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 215.

73. Read and Fisher, *The Deady Embrace*, p. 111 report that Merekalov was spotted in Moscow on the diplomatic stand on the occasion of a summer sports and physical culture parade.
74. As far as I can tell Merekalov first re-emerged with the publication of the 21st volume in the DVPS series in 1978. This was followed by the publication in 1981 of Maximychev's *Diplomatiya Mira* on German-Soviet relations which contained the first treatment by a Soviet historian of the Merekalov-Weizsäcker encounter (and so far the only detailed one). In 1985 *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya* carried an article by M.I. Pankrashova ('V Kanun Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny 1939g') which contained a reference to a report in the Soviet archives on the Merekalov-Weizsäcker meeting (p. 116).
75. *Diplomaticheskii Slovar*, vol. 3, (Moscow, 1986) p. 619. The 4th edition of the dictionary also marks the formal rehabilitation of Astakhov, who receives an entry for the first time (vol. 1 (Moscow, 1984) p. 100). Astakhov was recalled from Berlin in September 1939. He died in a Soviet labour camp during the war.
76. Borbe za Mir, doc. 267.
77. For Soviet denials that Molotov's succession represented a change of policy see: DBFP, 2nd series, vol. 5, pp. 429, 453 and 472; FRUS, *The Soviet Union 1933–39*, p. 505; SPE, doc. 204 and Beloff, *Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia* pp. 239–41. Note also Suritz's statement to the US Ambassador in Paris that Litvinov's dismissal was the result of 'internal politics', not foreign policy (FRUS: 1939, vol. 1, p. 248) and Astakhov's statement to Coulondre in Berlin that it was a sign of Moscow's displeasure with the Western powers' response to Soviet collective security proposals (DDF, 2nd series, vol. 16, doc. 71).
78. On the purge of the Narkomindel and its aftermath see FRUS, *The Soviet Union 1933–1939*, pp. 770–73. E.A. Gnedin, *Katastrofa i Vtoroye Rozhdeniye* (Amsterdam, 1977) passim; R. Slusser, 'The Role of the Foreign Ministry' in Lederer, *Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 230; Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp. 214 and 282, n. 76 and 77. *Survey of the Foreign Press* (London: RIIA, 1940) vol. 2, no. 16; A.A. Gromyko, *Only for Peace* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979), p. 6; Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, pp. 176–81.
79. A. Roshchin, 'People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs Before World War II', *International Affairs*, (Moscow), May 1988, pp. 113–14.
80. SPE, docs. 184 and 185.
81. *ibid.*, doc. 187.
82. *ibid.*, doc. 188.
83. Borbe za Mir, p. 684, no. 106. The 'original proposal' Litvinov referred to was the one made by Bonnet on 14 April. See SPE, doc. 164.
84. SPE doc. 193; DDF vol. 15, doc. 523.
85. A formal British response was not received until 8 May (SPE, doc. 205).
86. Roshchin, 'People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs', p. 113.
87. SPE, docs. 203 and 212.
88. *ibid.*, doc. 212.
89. *ibid.*, doc. 210 and *The Polish White Book* (London: Hutchinson, 1940) doc. 163.
90. *Dokumenty i Materialy po Istории Sovetsko-Polskikh Otnoshenii*, vol. 7, doc. 66. Sharonov presented his credentials on 2 June (*Polish White Book*, docs. 164 and 165).

91. SPE, doc. 232 and *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations 1939–1945*, vol. 1 (London: Heinemann 1961) p. 30.
92. *Polish White Book*, pp. 208–9.

Chapter 7 Failure of an Accord: The Triple Alliance Negotiations with Britain and France, 1939

1. *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II* (hereafter SPE) doc. 205.
2. *ibid.*, docs. 206, 207 and 209.
3. *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (hereafter DBFP) 3rd series, vol. 5, pp. 520–21.
4. SPE, doc. 213.
5. *ibid.*, doc. 230.
6. *ibid.*, doc. 229. DBFP, 3rd series, vol. 5, pp. 710–12 and *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (hereafter DDF) second series, vol. 16, doc. 295.
7. SPE, doc. 227.
8. *ibid.*, doc. 229.
9. Cited by A. Prazmowska, *Britain, Poland and the Eastern Front, 1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p.140.
10. See *ibid.* espec. chap. 6 and R. Manne, 'Some British Light on the Nazi-Soviet Pact', *European Studies Review*, vol. 11, no. 1, January 1981.
11. On the French position during the negotiations see A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War* (London: Frank Cass, 1977) Chapters 17–18.
12. SPE, doc. 232.
13. *ibid.*, doc. 233.
14. Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler?* p. 133.
15. SPE, doc. 246.
16. *ibid.*, docs. 238 and 239.
17. SPE, doc. 238.
18. DBFP, 3rd series, vol. 6, pp. 54–6.
19. SPE, doc. 239.
20. *ibid.*, doc. 245.
21. *ibid.*, doc. 254.
22. *ibid.*, doc. 255.
23. *ibid.*, doc. 246.
24. *ibid.*, doc. 247.
25. DBFP, 3rd series, vol. 6, pp. 140–2.
26. SPE, doc. 269.
27. SPE, doc. 271.
28. *ibid.*, docs. 273 and 274.
29. *ibid.*, docs. 278 and 286.
30. DDF, 2nd series, vol. 17, doc. 282.
31. DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 456–60; DDF, 2nd series, vol. 17, docs. 223 and 224. There is no Soviet record of this meeting nor of Molotov's next meeting with Seeds on 23 July. The explanation for this omission may be quite mundane. According to Strang, Molotov might have been taping their conversations since no one from the Soviet side ever took notes. (See Mosley, *On Borrowed Time* p. 253.) Did the tape recorder break down?(!)

32. SPE, doc. 287.
33. DBFP, 2nd series, vol. 7, pp. 115–20. See also DDF, 2nd series, vol. 17, doc. 282.
34. SPE, doc. 294.
35. Lord Strang, 'The Moscow Negotiations 1939', in D. Dilkes (ed.), *Retreat from Power*, vol. 1 (London: MacDonald, 1981) p. 176.
36. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by M. Pankrashova and V. Sipols (eds), 'Soviet-British-French Talks in Moscow in 1939: A Documentary Survey', *International Affairs* (Moscow), November 1969, p. 78.
37. *ibid.* p. 79. The caustic comment of the Soviet historian Vilnis Sipols is also worth recording for posterity: 'One cannot fail to note that having dispatched their military mission off to Moscow with an instruction that doomed talks to failure, all British ministers (that is, the British government as a whole) went on holiday, by tradition, in early August. And that at a time when London knew that Nazi Germany contemplated an attack on Poland before they would be back from their holiday! Just as there is a notion of "diplomatic sickness" in historical vocabulary, so there is ample reason to speak of the British government's "diplomatic holiday".' (Sipols, *Diplomatic Battles*, p.241.
38. See Mosley, *On Borrowed Time*, chap. 12 ('Slow Boat to Leningrad'), pp. 286–8.
39. *ibid.*, pp. 303–4.
40. SPE, doc. 306.
41. *ibid.*, doc. 317.
42. *ibid.*, doc. 339.

Chapter 8 The Isolationist Alternative: Stalin's Pact with Hitler

1. L. Namier, *Europe in Decay* (London: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 247–8.
2. *Nazi-Soviet Relations* (hereafter NSR) p. 3.
3. *ibid.*, p. 4.
4. Filippov, *Zapiski o Tretiyem Reikhe* pp. 30–31.
5. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Koblyakov, *USSR: For Peace*, p. 160.
6. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sipols, *Sovetskii Souz v Borbe*, p. 394. Among the rumours referred to by Astakhov was an AP report on 8 May 1939 that a Russo-German pact was imminent: See *Documents Diplomatiques Francais* (hereafter DDF), 2nd series, vol. 16, doc. 105.
7. NSR, p. 4.
8. Koblyakov, *USSR: For Peace*.
9. NSR, pp. 5–7.
10. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by M.I. Pankrashova, 'V Kanun Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny 1939', p.117.
11. NSR, pp. 12–15.
12. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Pankrashova, 'V Kanun', p.118.
13. *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II* (hereafter SPE) doc.232.
14. *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (hereafter DGFP) series D, vol. 6, *passim*. Additional information on the economic negotiations is contained in the reports of the Italian Ambassador in Moscow cited by M. Toscano, 'Italy and the Nazi-Soviet Accords of August 1939' in his *Designs in Diplomacy: Pages from European*

Diplomatic History in the Twentieth Century, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970).

15. *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1945* p. 375.
16. DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 540.
17. See Toscano, *Designs in Diplomacy*, p. 91.
18. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Koblyakov, *USSR: For Peace*, pp. 28–30.
19. NSR, pp. 28–30.
20. *ibid.*, pp. 20–21.
21. *Dokumenty i Materialy po Istorii Sovetsko-Polskikh Otnoshenii*, vol. 7, doc. 74.
22. See e.g. reports by Coulondre, French Ambassador in Berlin, in DDF, 2nd series, vol. 16, docs. 71, 119, 201, 257 and 408.
23. DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 685.
24. NSR, pp. 32–6.
25. On the Danzig Crisis, see Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* chap. 11.
26. *SSSR v Borbe za Mir Nakanune Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny*, docs. 394, 403, 405, 408, 414, and 416.
27. SPE, docs. 315, 316, 327, 328 and 497.
28. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by *Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voyny Sovetskogo Souza*, vol. 1, p. 174.
29. DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 761.
30. NSR, pp. 39–41.
31. DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 772.
32. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by *Istoriya Velikoi.*, pp. 174–5.
33. NSR, pp. 44–46.
34. *ibid.*, pp. 48–9.
35. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by *Istoriya Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny 1939–1945*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1973), p.281.
36. NSR, pp. 53–6.
37. *ibid.*, pp. 59–63.
38. See the records of the discussion in SPE and R.P. Drax, 'Mission to Moscow, August 1939', *The Naval Review*, November 1952 and February 1953.
39. NSR, pp. 64–5 and 83–5.
40. *ibid.*, pp. 67–8.
41. The information on the conduct of the negotiations is derived principally from Hilger and Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, pp. 300–3 and from the testimony of Ribbentrop and Gaus (attached to the German embassy in Moscow) at the Nuremberg trials (*Trials of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal*, vol. 10, pp. 268–9 and 310–13). See also NSR, pp. 71–6 and the Italian Ambassador's report on a meeting with Ribbentrop prior to the latter's departure for Berlin on 24 August in Toscano, *Designs in Diplomacy*, pp. 118–19. For a more lively account of these negotiations see Read and Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace* pp. 248–59.
42. NSR, p. 76.

Chapter 9 From the Baltic to the Black Sea: Soviet Security Policy 1939–40

1. V. Molotov, *Soviet Peace Policy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1941) pp.20–23.
2. *Soviet Peace Efforts* (hereafter SPE), doc. 342.

3. Telegram from Beck to Grzybowski 26 August 1939 in W. Jedrzejewicz (ed.), *Diplomat in Berlin 1933–1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). See also *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, 2nd series, vol. 18, doc. 374.
4. SPE, doc. 348.
5. *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*, vol. 1 doc. 36; *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 3rd series, vol. 7 doc. 694; and *Foreign Relations of the United States 1939*, vol. 1 pp. 348–9.
6. *The Polish White Book*, p. 209.
7. *ibid.*, doc. 172.
8. SPE, doc. 291, 310, 343 and 346.
9. *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (hereafter DGFP), series D, vol. 7, doc. 567.
10. *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939–1941* (hereafter NSR), p. 101.
11. *ibid.*, p. 87.
12. Cited by N. Bethell, *The War Hitler Won* (London: Allen Lane, 1972) pp. 302–3.
13. DGFP, series D, vol. 8 doc. 37.
14. See L.N. Kutakov, *Japanese Foreign Policy on the Eve of the Pacific War* (Tallahassee, Fl.: Diplomatic Press, 1972) pp. 151–3. The Soviet-Japanese agreement is reproduced in Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp. 373–4.
15. NSR, pp. 91–6.
16. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp. 374–6.
17. Bethell, *The War Hitler Won*, pp. 306–7 and A. Werth, *Russia at War 1941–1945* (London: Pan Books, 1965) pp. 74–6.
18. Bethell, *The War Hitler Won*, pp. 311 ff.
19. Werth, *Russia at War*, pp. 76–8.
20. On the occupation, incorporation and Sovietization of the Polish territories see J.T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
21. D. Kirby, 'The Baltic States, 1940–1950', in M. McCauley (ed.), *Communist Power in Europe 1944–1949* (London: Macmillan, 1977) p. 24.
22. Cited by A.N. Tarulis, *Soviet Policy Toward the Baltic States 1918–1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959) p. 150.
23. *ibid.*, p. 155 and 150.
24. *ibid.*, p. 155.
25. The text of the treaty is reproduced in W.P. and Z.K. Coates, *Russia, Finland and the Baltic* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1940) pp. 50–2.
26. P. Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984) p. 99. For the text of the treaty see *ibid.* pp. 64–6.
27. Cited by E. Tomsun, 'The Annexation of the Baltic States', in T.T. Hammond (ed.), *Anatomy of Communist Takeovers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 219.
28. For the text of the pact see Coates, *Russia, Finland and the Baltic*, pp. 74–6.
29. Kirby, 'The Baltic States', p. 25.
30. Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 100 and Coates, *Russia, Finland and the Baltic*, pp. 48 ff.
31. Tarulis, *Soviet Policy*, p. 166.
32. 'Order No. 0162, People's Commissar of Defence of the USSR', *Military Bulletin*, No. 22, November 1988.
33. On the background to Soviet-Finnish relations see Haslam, *The Soviet Union and*

- the Struggle for Collective Security*, pp. 207–9, 236–8 and appendix 2.
34. *Istoriya Diplomatii*, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1975) p. 26.
35. On the Soviet-Finnish negotiations see V. Tanner, *The Winter War* (Stanford Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1957) especially chapters 2–5 and *The Development of Finnish-Soviet Relations* (London: Harrap, 1940).
36. See Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp. 410–13.
37. On the outbreak of the Soviet-Finnish war see D.W. Spring, 'The Soviet Decision for War Against Finland, 30 November 1939', *Soviet Studies*, April 1986.
38. *Khrushchev Remembers* pp. 135–6.
39. For an account of the military aspects of the Soviet-Finnish conflict see Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, pp. 542–52.
40. See Degras, *Soviet Documents* p. 411 and W.M. Carlgren, *Swedish Foreign Policy During the Second World War* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977) p. 29.
41. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp. 407–10.
42. On this issue see T. Vihavainen, 'The Soviet Decision for War Against Finland, 30 November 1939: A Comment', *Soviet Studies*, April 1987.
43. On the negotiations to end the war see Tanner, *The Winter War*, chaps 7–11 and the appendix for the text of the peace treaty.
44. SPE, doc. 185.
45. On Potemkin's tour see A. Gasratyan and P.P. Moiseev, *SSSR i Tyrtsiya 1917–1979* (Moscow, 1981) pp. 151–2; *SSR v Borbe za Mir Nakanune Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny* (Moscow, 1971) docs. 264, 265, 269, 271, 271 and 273; and G. Gafencu, *The Last Days of Europe* (London: Muller, 1947) pp. 238–41.
46. See Gasratyan and Moiseev, *SSSR i Tyrtsiya*, pp. 153–5.
47. *ibid.*, p. 158.
48. Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 197.
49. NSR, pp. 85–6.
50. *ibid.*, p. 87.
51. *ibid.*, pp. 97 and 120.
52. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by P.P. Sevostyanov, *Pered Velikim Ispytaniem* (Moscow, 1981) p. 199. For more details of the Soviet-Turkish negotiations see also Gasratyan and Moiseev, *SSSR i Tyrtsiya*, pp. 157–60 and F.C. Erkin, *Les Relations Turco-Soviétiques et La Question Des Détroits* (Ankara, 1968) pp. 160–70.
53. On the Anglo-Turkish-French negotiations see L. Zhiyko, *Anglo-Turkish Relations 1933–1939* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976).
54. A.L. Zapantis, *Greek-Soviet Relations 1917–1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 382.
55. *Sovetsko-Bolgarskiye Otnosheniya i Svyezi 1917–1944* (Moscow, 1976) docs. 504 and 505.
56. *ibid.*, doc. 506 and S. Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations During the Second World War* (Sofia, 1981) p. 19.
57. *Istoriya Diplomatii* p. 153.
58. Zapantis *Greek-Soviet Relations* p. 384 n. 27 and RIIA, *Survey of the Foreign Press 1939–1941*, vol. 2, no. 14.
59. *Sovetsko-Bolgarskiye*, doc. 510.
60. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Pered Velikim Ispytaniem*, p. 173.
61. See the documents in *Sovetsko-Bolgarskiye*.

Chapter 10 The Unholy Alliance: Soviet-German Economic, Military and Political Co-operation 1939–40

1. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p. 37.
2. On Soviet neutrality see G. Ginsburgs, 'The Soviet Union as a Neutral, 1939–1941', *Soviet Studies*, July 1958; 'The Breach Between Germany and the Soviet Union' in *Survey of International Affairs 1939–1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 375, and for comparison with Italy see M. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) chap. 2.
3. *Nazi Soviet Relations* (hereafter NSR) p. 101.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 101–9 and *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (hereafter DGFP) vol. 8, pp. 113–14, 123, 159–61 and 199.
5. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp. 377–9.
6. *ibid.*, pp. 379–80.
7. Bethell, *The War Hitler Won* p. 388. The peace offensive episode as a whole is also covered in this book, see chap. 9.
8. Molotov's speech is reproduced in his *Soviet Peace Policy* pp. 27–46.
9. See Volkogonov's interview in *Trud*, 19 June 1988 and his article in *Pravda*, 20 June 1988.
10. See DGFP, series D, vol. 8, pp. 106, 240, 246, 250, 267, 269, 469, 479, 485, 486, 501, 677 and 869.
11. On Hitler and Ribbentrop's changing view toward Soviet Russia see W. Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbour* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985) pp. 112–16.
12. F. Crémieux and J. Estager, *Sur Le Parti 1939-1940*, (Paris, 1983) pp. 111–16.
13. On the British CP's change of line see N. Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927–1941* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985) chap. 19 and J. Attfield and S. Williams (eds), *1939: The Communist Party and War* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984).
14. See J. Degras (ed.), *The Communist International 1919–1943*, vol. 3 (London: Frank Cass, 1971) pp. 439–48.
15. On Comintern policy in 1939–41 see P. Spriano, *Stalin and the European Communists* (London: Verso, 1985) chap. 10; F. Claudin *The Communist Movement* (London: Peregrine, 1975) pp. 294–304; and J. Haslam, 'The Policy of the Communist International from August 1939 – June 1941', Unpublished discussion paper, Birmingham University, no date. An extensive Soviet polemic against the enforced change of Comintern line in this period is M.I. Semiryaga, 'K Voprosu o Politicheskoi Kharaktere Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny', *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya*, No. 4, 1988.
16. NSR, pp. 83–5.
17. *ibid.*, pp. 108–9, 131–4. For the text of the agreement see DGFP, vol. 8, pp. 762–9. The course of the negotiations leading to the February agreement can also be followed in this volume *passim*. An analysis of the negotiations is contained in 'The Breach Between Germany and the Soviet Union', pp. 409–13.
18. *ibid.*, p. 413. A further agreement concerning scheduling of deliveries was concluded in March 1941.
19. Clarke, *Soviet Economic Facts 1917-1970*, p. 38.
20. Werth, *Russia at War*, p. 125.
21. See S.P. Turin, *The USSR: An Economic and Social Survey* (London: Methuen, 1944) pp. 210–11 and Clarke, *Soviet Economic Facts*, pp. 46–9.

22. Figures from *Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSSR za 1918–1940* (Moscow, 1960) pp. 558–62. The discrepancy between the figures and the total given in the text is due to differential ruble values.
23. See P. Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion* p. 262.
24. The first agreement on the transit of German imports across Soviet territory was concluded at the time of Ribbentrop's trip to Moscow in September 1939 (NSR, p. 109). This arrangement was confirmed by a secret protocol attached to the February 1940 trade agreement (DGFP vol. 8, p. 269). See also B. Newman, *The Captured Archives* (London: Latimer, 1948) chap. 7.
25. See 'The Breach Between Germany and the Soviet Union', pp. 410–11; Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 261–7 and NSR, pp. 339–41.
26. Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War*, p. 108.
27. H.E. Salisbury, *The 900 days: The Siege of Leningrad* (New York: Avon Books, 1970) p. 31.
28. See the excerpts from A.S. Yakovlev's memoirs reproduced in Bialer *Stalin and his Generals*, pp. 116–22.
29. See Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union 1939–1941* pp. 76–8.
30. Bethell, *The War Hitler Won*, p. 303.
31. *ibid.*, p. 328.
32. Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War*, p. 110.
33. *ibid.*; Newman, *Captured Archives*, pp. 135–6 and Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union*, pp. 78–85.

Chapter 11 To the Brink of War: Anglo-Soviet-French Relations 1939–40

1. Soviet foreign policy archives. The first sentence is cited by *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–1945* p. 381; the second by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion* p. 111.
2. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by *Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 382.
3. Cited by Koblyakov, *USSR: For Peace*, pp. 189–190.
4. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 51.
5. *Sotsialisticheskiye Revolutsii v Estonii 1917–1940: Dokumenty i Materialy* (Tallinn, 1987) doc. 94.
6. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 116–17.
7. See L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1970) vol. 1, pp. 11–12. In this chapter and other sections of the present book there are numerous references to Woodward's official history of British foreign policy. Readers should note that the present author has worked on the Foreign Office archives in the Public Record Office in London and that Woodward's summaries of all the Anglo-Soviet meetings referred to in the book have been checked, where possible, against the original documents.
8. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 109. See also Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 33.
9. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 109–10. See also Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 33–4.
10. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 113.
11. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Pered Velikim Ispytaniem*, pp. 128–9. See also Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 34–5.

12. See Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 114.
13. See Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 40–42.
14. See Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 117–23.
15. See Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 42 ff.
16. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Pered Velikim Ispytaniem*, p. 136.
17. See Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 31–2.
18. A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (London: Pelican, 1970) pp. 571–2, n. 3.
19. Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion* pp. 128–9 and Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 109–110 and pp. 454–61.
20. See M. Mourin, *Les Relations Franco-Soviétiques (1917–1967)* (Paris, 1967) p. 251.
21. See Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 110–13 and Sevostyanov, *Pered Velikim Ispytaniem*, pp. 126–7.

Chapter 12 Strategic Crisis: The Breakdown of the Alliance with Germany, 1940

1. Molotov, *Soviet Peace Policy*, p. 61.
2. On Soviet war preparations see J. Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) chap. 1; M. Harrison, *Soviet Planning in Peace and War 1938–1945* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985) pp. 28–37, 42–63 and appendices 1 and 2; J.M. Cooper, 'Defence Production and the Soviet Economy 1929–1941', unpublished discussion paper, Centre for Russian and East European Studies, Birmingham University, 1976; J.F. Hough, 'The Historical Legacy in Soviet Weapons Development' in J. Valenta and W.C. Potter (eds), *Soviet Decision-Making for National Security* (London: Allen & Unwin 1984); S.M. Tupper, 'Soviet Decision-Making for Defence, 1934–1941', unpublished discussion paper, Centre for Russian and East European Studies, Birmingham University, 1982; Werth, *Russia at War*, part two, chap.1; and Bialer, *Stalin and His Generals*.
3. V.D. Danilov, 'Sovetskoye Glavnoye Komandovaniye v Predverii Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny', *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoria*, No.6 1988 and G. Zhukov, *Memoirs and Reminiscences*, vol. 1 (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1985) pp.233–44.
4. On this issue of Soviet war doctrine and its political effects see Erickson, 'Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1930–1941' in May, *Knowing One's Enemies*, espec. pp.416–23.
5. See Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 101–6; Koblyakov, *USSR: For Peace*, pp. 194–8; *Istoriya Diplomatii*, vol.4 (Moscow. 1975) pp. 139–44; *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–1945*, pp. 385–91; and *Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny Sovetskogo Souza 1941–1945*, vol. 1, pp. 253–8.
6. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Koblyakov, *USSR: For Peace*, pp. 195–6. *Istoriya Diplomatii* also cites this report and gives the date (p. 140).
7. Molotov, *Soviet Peace Policy*, p. 64.
8. This description of events in the Baltic States is based on D. Kirby, 'The Baltic States', in McCauley, *Communist Power in Europe*; A. Shtromas, 'Soviet

- Occupation of the Baltic States and Their Incorporation into the USSR', *East European Quarterly*, September 1985; and *Survey of International Affairs 1939–1946*, pp. 52–8.
9. For example, Kirby, 'The Baltic States', p. 27 reports statements by Dekanozov, Vyshinsky and Zhdanov to the effect that Soviet military occupation might only be temporary.
 10. For indications in this respect see Kirby 'The Baltic States' pp. 28–30; the works cited in note 3; V. Raud, *Developments in Estonia 1939–1941* (Tallinn, 1987); and *Sotsialisticheskiye Revolutsii v Estonii 1917–1940*, (Tallinn, 1987).
 11. See *Nazi-Soviet Relations* (hereafter NSR), pp. 140–1 and M. Andreyeva and K. Dmitrieva, 'The Soviet Union and Swedish Neutrality in the Second World War', *International Affairs* (Moscow), September 1959.
 12. See Carlgren, *Swedish Foreign Policy*, pp. 77–81 and Krosby, *Finland, Germany and the Soviet Union* chap. 3.
 13. Soviet foreign archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 162. On Soviet-Rumanian relations in general see pp. 156–66.
 14. Molotov, *Soviet Peace Policy*, p. 65.
 15. NSR, pp. 155 and 160–2.
 16. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp. 458–61 and NSR, p. 163.
 17. NSR, pp. 144 and 148.
 18. M. Toscano, 'Italo-Soviet Relations 1940–1941: Failure of an Accord' in his *Designs in Diplomacy*, pp. 146–56.
 19. *ibid.*, p. 157.
 20. *ibid.*, p. 160.
 21. The Russians later claimed that they expected their statement to Rosso on 25 June to be transmitted to Berlin and that, in effect, it constituted a proposal to Germany as well as Italy, NSR, pp. 193–4. See also Molotov's complaints to Rosso on this score. Cited by Toscano, *Designs in Diplomacy* p. 203.
 22. See Yehuda Lahav, 'Soviet Policy and the Transylvanian Question (1940–1946)', Soviet and East European Research Centre (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Research Paper, No. 27 pp. 10–11; and Zapantis, *Greek-Soviet Relations*, p. 397, n.60.
 23. Toscano, *Designs in Diplomacy*, pp. 167–9.
 24. See Gafencu, *The Last Days of Europe* chap. 2.
 25. 'The Breach Between Germany and the Soviet Union', p. 372.
 26. NSR, pp. 180–3 and 190–6.
 27. Molotov, *Soviet Peace Policy*, p. 73.

Chapter 13 Unequal Contest: The Soviet-German Struggle in the Balkans 1940–41

1. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 169.
2. *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (hereafter DGFP) series D, vol. 11, pp. 296–7 and *Nazi-Soviet Relations* (hereafter NSR), p. 213.
3. See *Khrushchev Remembers*, p. 115.

4. DGFP, series D, vol. 11, pp. 353–4.
5. A.M. Vasilevsky, *Delo Vcei Zhizn* (Moscow, 1973) p. 113.
6. DGFP, series D, vol. 11, pp. 508–10 and 533–41. See also NSR pp. 255–8.
7. *ibid.*, pp. 541–9.
8. V.M. Berezhev, *S Diplomaticheskoi Missiei u Berlin 1940–1941* (Moscow, 1966) p. 33.
9. DGFP, series D, vol. 11, pp. 562–70.
10. NSR, pp. 258–9.
11. 'Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1930–1941' in May, *Knowing One's Enemies*, p.414.
12. *Documents on International Affairs*, (London: RIIA, 1954) pp. 68–72.
13. Soviet Foreign Policy archives. Cited by *Istoriya Diplomatii* vol. 4 (Moscow, 1975) pp. 150–1.
14. Soviet Foreign Policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Pered Velikim Ispytaniem*, pp. 210–11. Sevostyanov's reference in the text is to a history of the Bulgarian Communist Party, but the same statement is partially cited by *Istoriya Diplomatii* (pp. 153–4) and here the reference is to the Soviet archives.
15. *Istoriya Diplomatii* p. 158 and S. Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations During the Second World War* (Sofia, 1981) pp. 38–9.
16. *Istoriya Diplomatii*, p. 154.
17. See *Sovetsko-Bolgarskiye Otnosheniya*, vol. 1, docs. 567, 569 and 588.
18. A.L. Narochitskii, 'Sovetsko-Ugoslavskii Dogovor 5 Aprelya 1941g o Druzhbei 'Nenapadenii'', *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya*, No. 1, 1989, pp. 4–5.
19. Soviet Foreign Policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 190.
20. See J. Haslam, 'The Policy of the Communist International from August 1939 to June 1941' (unpublished paper, Centre for Russian and East European Studies, Birmingham University).
21. Soviet Foreign Policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 190–1.
22. Soviet Foreign Policy archives. Cited in *SSSR v Borbe Protiv Fashistskoi Agressii 1933–1945*, (Moscow, 1986) p.139.
23. *Sovetsko-Bolgarskiye Otnosheniya*, doc. 56.
24. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p. 482.
25. *ibid.* pp. 482–3.
26. *Sovetsko-Bolgarskiye Otnosheniya*, docs. 581 and 582.
27. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p. 483. See also NSR, pp. 277–9.
28. *Sovetsko-Bolgarskiye Otnosheniya*, doc. 583.
29. See W.P. and Z.K. Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1945) pp. 661–2 for a short description of the March events in Yugoslavia.
30. See A.L. Zapantis, *Hitler's Balkan Campaign and the Invasion of the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) pp. 60–61 n. 95.
31. Narochitskii, 'Sovetsko-Ugoslavskii Dogovor', p.13.
32. *ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
33. Degras, *Soviet Documents* pp. 484–5 for the text of the treaty and Narochitskii, p. 15 for the time of its signature. The date of the treaty was 5 April 1941.
34. *Foreign Relations of the United States 1941*, vol. 1 pp. 301–2 and 312–15. But see

Narochnitskii, pp. 18–19, who argues that any serious Soviet aid to Yugoslavia was ruled out by Stalin's determination to avoid provoking Hitler for as long as possible.

35. See Zapantis, *Hitler's Balkan Campaign*, pp. 70–1.

Chapter 14 Diplomacy on the Periphery: Soviet Policy Towards Turkey, Japan and Britain 1940–41

1. See Toscano 'Italo-Soviet Relations 1940–1941: Failure of an Accord' in his *Designs in Diplomacy*, pp. 155–6.
2. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* vol. 1 pp. 468–9.
3. *ibid.* pp. 505–7.
4. Soviet foreign policy archives. Cited by Sevostyanov, *Pered Velikim Ispytaniem*, p. 241.
5. *Nazi-Soviet Relations* (hereafter NSR) pp. 244–5 and 252.
6. *ibid.* p. 259.
7. On the Soviet promise to Bulgaria re. Eastern Thrace see Rachev, *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations During the Second World War*, p. 38 and Erkin, *Les Relations Turco-Sovietiques* p. 199.
8. Toscano, *Designs in Diplomacy*, pp. 201–9 and 229–33.
9. *ibid.*, p. 208.
10. *ibid.*, p. 243.
11. See G. Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps' Mission to Moscow, 1940–1942* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) pp. 104–5; and Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 204. For the text of the Soviet-Turkish declaration see Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p.484.
12. D. Bergamini, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy* (London: Panther, 1972) pp. 707–8.
13. See Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 227–34 and A.A. Arkadev, 'Politika Yaponii v Otnoshenii SSSR Posle Nachala Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny (1939–1941)' in *SSSR–Yaponiya* (Moscow, 1978) pp. 31–4.
14. Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 234–5; Arkadev, 'Politika Yaponii', p. 34; Kutakov, *Japanese Foreign Policy* pp. 170–71; and Lensen, *The Strange Neutrality*, pp.4–5.
15. See Molotov's comments in his report to the Supreme Soviet on 1 August 1940 (Molotov, *Soviet Peace Policy* p. 80) and Molotov's communication to the Soviet embassy in Washington on 31 July (cited by Sevostyanov *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 150). Moscow's view may also have been influenced by reports emanating from Sorge in Japan. See Prange et al., *Target Tokyo*, chap. 34 ff.
16. Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 235.
17. *ibid.* p. 237 and Arkadev, 'Politika Yaponii', p. 36.
18. See A. Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific* (London: Longman, 1987) pp. 128–30.
19. See Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbour*, pp. 147–8; Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 239–40; Arkadev, 'Politika Yaponii', p. 38; and Lensen *Strange Neutrality*, pp. 14–15. For the text of the Soviet-Japanese agreement see Degras *Soviet Documents*, pp. 486–7.
20. Prange et al., *Target Tokyo*, pp. 352 ff.

21. On Soviet aid to China in this period see Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 244–7.
22. See Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps' Mission*, pp. 34–6; Woodward *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 459–61; and Sevostyanov *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 136.
23. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 466–70.
24. NSR, pp. 166–8.
25. See Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 135–43.
26. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 479–80. See also Sevostyanov, *Pered Velikim Ispytaniem*, p. 161 for an excerpt from the Soviet report of the meeting.
27. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 492–4; Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 138; and *Istoriya Diplomatii*, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1975) p. 163.
28. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 494.
29. Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 139. Vyshinsky's 'indication' was, apparently, not very clear because Cripps took it as his personal opinion. But Molotov maintained, in a meeting with Cripps on February 1941, that Vyshinsky's statement constituted an official response. See *Istoriya Diplomatii*, pp. 164–5.
30. Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, p. 139.
31. *ibid.* p. 140; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 597–8; and *Istoriya Diplomatii*, p. 165.
32. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy* p. 604; and Sevostyanov, *Before the Nazi Invasion*, pp. 141–2.
33. F. Hinsley et al., *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1979) p. 453.
34. On this point see Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps' Mission*, pp. 126–7 and his article 'Churchill's Warning to Stalin: A Reappraisal', *The Historical Journal*, December 1986.

Chapter 15 The Road to Disaster: 22 June 1941

1. *Nazi-Soviet Relations* (hereafter NSR), p. 324.
2. *ibid.*, p. 336.
3. Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, pp. 378–9.
4. Zapantis, *Hitler's Balkan Campaign*, p.73.
5. NSR, pp. 339–41.
6. A. Nekrich, *June 22nd 1941* (V. Petrov (ed.), (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968) pp. 166–7.
7. NSR, p. 344.
8. Cited by A. Fontaine, *History of the Cold War* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968) p. 153.
9. Cited by V. Khvostov, 'The Origins of the Second World War', *Problems of the Contemporary World* (Moscow) n. 3(5), 1970, p. 20.
10. See V. Anfilov, 'Ot Otsstupleniya -K Pobede', *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 17 June 1987, and D. Volkogonov, 'Nakanune Voiny', *Pravda*, 20 June 1988. See also D. Ogden, 'Finding a Bitter Truth', 7 Days, 22 August 1987.
11. See Bialer *Stalin and His Generals*, p.145.
12. Zhukov, *Memoirs and Reminiscences*, vol. 1 p.250.
13. Stalin's speech has never been published. The points cited in the text derive from a version of the speech compiled by Alexander Werth from verbal sources in

Moscow after 22 June 1941. (*Russia at War*, pp. 132–3). Another version of Stalin's statement is given by Hilger and Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, p.330. According to them Stalin stated: 'The slogan "Long live the peace policy of the Soviet Union", is now outdated. It's about time to end this old nonsense. It is true that with our defensive policy we have succeeded in extending our border in the north and west and increasing Soviet population by 13 million. But this is now over. With this slogan we won't be able to win another foot of territory. Instead we'll have to get used to the idea that offensive action is necessary. The era of peaceful policies is over; the era of spreading the socialist front by arms has begun.' F.H. Hinsley et al. (*British Intelligence in the Second World War*, vol. 1, p. 466) cite a British intelligence report that Stalin stated on 5 May that Germany had embarked on an attempt to seize the whole of Europe and that the Soviet Union must be ready for any emergency. Soviet authors generally omit any reference to the speech. An exception is I.K. Koblyakov (*USSR: For Peace*, p. 230) according to whom 'Stalin described the international situation as extremely complex and stressed the danger of deterioration. He appealed for increased vigilance and also an increase in combat readiness of the troops. Stalin stated quite definitely that there was a possibility of war with Germany.' Koblyakov links Stalin's speech with a statement by Soviet President M.I. Kalinin on 5 June 1941 (at the Military-Political Academy) that 'we do not know when we will fight: tomorrow or the next day; and therefore in such a situation we must be ready to fight today' (*ibid.*). On this evidence it is reasonable to assume that Stalin said something like that reported by Werth. However, Werth's version has been challenged. See Haupt, 'Iconoclast Muzzled: The Nekrich Affair', pp. 10–11, and Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*, p. 82. See also P. Zhilin, *Kak Fashistskaya Germaniya Gotovila Napadeniye Na Sovetskii Souz* (Moscow, 1966) pp. 223–4 and Zhukov, *Memoirs*, pp. 268–9.

14. I. Deutscher, *Stalin*, (London: Penguin, 1966) p. 445.
15. Salisbury, *The 900 Days* p. 87.
16. See R.H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun* (London: Penguin, 1987) chaps. 5 and 20 for information on intelligence on Pearl Harbour. The point in the text about the difference between 22 June 1941 and Pearl Harbour was suggested by Zara Steiner, although the actual formulation is the present author's responsibility.
17. Whaley, *Codeword "Barbarossa"*, p. 227 and chap. 9 for his general thesis.
18. On this point see Erickson, 'Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1940–1941' in May, *Knowing One's Enemies* pp.417–23.
19. Nekrich, *June 22nd* pp. 174–7 and 192–3; Whaley, *Codeword "Barbarossa"*, p. 40; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 604, 609–10, 616–17 and 620–2; Berezhevskiy, *History in the Making*, pp. 57–9 and 72; I. Koblyakov, 'On the Way Home from Berlin, June 1941', *International Affairs* (Moscow) May 1972, p. 90; and Maisky, *Memoirs*, pp. 148–9. Maisky misdates this meeting as 10 June. For a discussion of the reasons for this 'slip' see note 38 below.
20. 'Sovetskiye Organy Gosudarstvennoi Besopasnosti v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voyny', *Voprosy Istorii*, May 1965, p. 27. This article is based on Soviet military and intelligence archives; Nekrich, *June 22nd* pp. 164–73 and 195–200; Sandor Rado, *Codename Dora* (London: Abelard, 1977) chap. 10; A. Foote, *Handbook for Spies*, (London: Museum Press, 1964) pp. 76–7 and 114; Prange et al., *Target Tokyo*, chaps. 46–7; Salisbury, *900 Days* pp. 84–6 and 94;

- M. Kolesnikov and M. Kolesnikova, *Rikhard Zorge*, (Moscow, 1975) chap. 7; Berezhkov, *History in the Making*, pp. 70–71; and Erickson, *Road to Stalingrad*, pp. 88–9.
21. Erickson, *Road to Stalingrad*, p. 77.
22. Whaley, *Codename "Barbarossa"*, p. 195.
23. Zhukov, *Memoirs*, pp. 272–3.
24. *ibid.*, p. 274.
25. Berezhkov, *History in the Making*, p. 72.
26. A. Read and D. Fisher, *Operation Lucy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980) espec. pp. 94–104.
27. P. Knightley, *The Second Oldest Profession* (London: Pan Books, 1988) pp. 202–4.
28. Prange et al., *Target Tokyo*, pp. 339–41, 347–8 and 351–5 and Whaley, *Codename "Barbarossa"*, pp. 71–4.
29. The quote is from C. Cruickshank, *Deception in World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 208. On the German deception programme see also Hinsley et al., *British Intelligence*, chap. 14 and Whaley, *Codename "Barbarossa"*, pp. 170–87 and Appendix A. For a Soviet study see V.T. Fomin, 'Iz Istorii Podgotovki Nemetsko-Fashistskoi Agressii protiv SSSR', *Voprosy Istorii*, August 1966.
30. See Whaley, *Codename "Barbarossa"*, chap. 9 and Cruickshank, *Deception*, chap. 14.
31. *Sovetsko-Angliiskie Otnosheniya vo Vremya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny 1941–1945* (Moscow, 1985) doc. 147.
32. Maisky, *Memoirs* pp. 145–7.
33. Woodward *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 616–17 and 620–22.
34. Foreign Office Archives. FO/371/29465 File no. 3 1941 (Anglo-Soviet Relations), p. 136a.
35. For the text of the Tass statement see Degras, *Soviet Documents*, p. 489.
36. NSR, pp. 345–6.
37. This point is argued in detail by Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps Mission to Moscow*, pp. 156–8.
38. Maisky, *Memoirs* pp. 147–8. Maisky dates the meeting 10 June, but it actually took place on 16 June. As Gorodetsky argues (*Stafford Cripps' Mission*, pp. 156–60) the source of Maisky's 'error' was an endeavour to gloss over his role in the publication of the Tass statement on 14 June.
39. See A. Sella, "'Barbarossa': Surprise Attack and Communication', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 13 1978.
40. On this meeting see Read and Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace*, pp. 622–3.
41. D. Volkogonov, 'Nakanune Voiny', *Pravda*, 20 June 1988.
42. *Istoriya Diplomatii*, vol. 4 p. 179.
43. Koblyakov 'On the Way Home', pp. 90–91 and NSR, pp. 353–4.
44. NSR, pp. 355–6 and *Istoriya Diplomatii* pp. 179–80.
45. *ibid.*, p. 180; Berezhkov, *History in the Making*, p. 76; and Koblyakov 'On the Way Home', p. 91.
46. NSR pp. 356–7; Koblyakov, 'On the Way Home', p. 91 and Berezhkov, *History in the Making*, pp. 76–9.
47. Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp. 490–91.

Chapter 16 Conclusion

1. See A.A. Grechko, *The Armed Forces of the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) pp.64–70 and P. Zhilin, *The Second World War and Our Time* (Moscow, 1978) pp.56–81.
2. See N. Voznesensky, *War Economy of the USSR in the Period of the Patriotic War* (Moscow, 1948) pp.126–33 and A. Werth, *Russia: Hopes and Fears* (London: Penguin, 1969) p.43.
3. *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960) pp.546–7.
4. See D.C. Watt, 'Britain and Russia in 1939', *Britain-USSR*, nos. 57 and 58, 1980.
5. In connection with this point see e.g. Sidney Aster's comment on Maisky's role in Britain: 'if an ambassador's duty is. . .to interpret for his government the nature of inner government thinking, as opposed to the whim of public opinion, then Maisky's achievement must be questioned. For it is clear that at many crucial points he based his analysis on what. . . his parliamentary contacts interpreted foreign office thinking to be, rather than what it really was.' ('Ivan Maisky and Parliamentary Anti-Appeasement 1938-1939' in A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: Twelve Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), p.355.
6. On British and French policy see Watt, 'Britain and Russia', who summarizes Western research on it.
7. For example, in relation to Polish and Rumanian consent to Soviet rights of passage. At no time during the triple alliance negotiations did Moscow suggest to London and Paris a joint approach to the Poles and Rumanians. The Soviets stuck adamantly to the position that gaining the requisite consent was a British and French responsibility. There is also a case to be made that throughout the 1930s the USSR failed to make the most of its opportunities to break down the antagonism between itself and Rumania and Poland. This is one of the themes of Hochman's *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security*. Hochman, however, fails to make an equivalent critique of Polish and Rumanian policy.

APPENDIX

1 *Soviet Politburo Proposals on Collective Security*

1. The USSR agrees on certain conditions to join the League of Nations.
2. The USSR does not object to the conclusion within the framework of the League of Nations of a regional agreement about mutual defence from aggression on the part of Germany.
3. The USSR agrees to the participation in this agreement of Belgium, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia or some of these countries but with the compulsory participation of France and Poland.
4. Negotiations about the precise commitments of a future convention on mutual defence can begin on the presentation by France, as the initiator of the whole process, of a draft agreement.
5. Independently of the commitments under an agreement on mutual defence, 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.
6. The USSR will join the League of Nations only on fulfilment of the following conditions:
 - (a) The USSR has serious objections to articles 112 and 113 of the League which provide for compulsory arbitration. However, to meet the proposal of France, the USSR agrees to withdraw these objections if on joining the League it is permitted to make the reservation that arbitration for it will be compulsory only for disputes which arise from conflicts, events and actions which take place after the entry of the Union into the League.
 - (b) Exclusion of the second part of point 1 of article 12 sanctioning war for the settlement of international disputes, thus bringing this article into line with the Kellogg-Briand pact.

(c) Exclusion of article 22 giving the right of mandatory control of foreign territories, but not insisting on retroactively excluding this point i.e. on the return of the existing mandates.

(d) Inclusion in article 23 of a point about the responsibility of all members of the League for racial and national equality.

(e) The USSR will insist on the establishment of normal relations with other League members or, in the last resort, the inclusion in the League Covenant, or passed at a League assembly, of a resolution that all members of the League consider normal diplomatic relations restored between themselves and mutually recognize each other.

Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR, vol. 16, Moscow 1970.

APPENDIX

2 Soviet Proposals to Britain and France for a Triple Alliance, April 1939

1. That England, France and the USSR conclude with one another an agreement for a period of five to ten years, by which they would oblige themselves to render mutually forthwith all manner of assistance, including that of a military nature, in case of aggression in Europe against any one of the contracting Powers.
2. That England, France and the USSR undertake to render all manner of assistance, including that of a military nature, to the East European States situated between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea and bordering the USSR, in case of aggression against these states.
3. That England, France and the USSR undertake to discuss and to settle within the shortest possible period of time the extent and forms of military assistance to be rendered by each of these States in fulfilment of paragraphs 1 and 2.
4. That the English Government announces that the assistance promised by it to Poland concerns exclusively aggression on the part of Germany.
5. That the treaty of alliance which exists between Poland and Rumania be declared operative in case of aggression of any nature against Poland and Rumania, or else be revoked altogether as one directed against the USSR.
6. That England, France and the USSR undertake, following the outbreak of hostilities, not to enter into negotiations of any kind whatsoever and not to conclude peace with the aggressors separately from one another and without the common consent of all three Powers.
7. That an agreement on the above lines be signed simultaneously with the convention to be elaborated in accordance with paragraph 3.
8. That the necessity be recognized for England, France and the

USSR to enter into joint negotiations with Turkey for a special agreement on mutual assistance.

Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976.)

APPENDIX

3 *Secret Additional Protocol to the Treaty of Non-Agression Between Germany and the USSR, August 1939*

On the occasion of the Non-aggression Pact between the German Reich and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics the undersigned plenipotentiaries of each of the two parties discussed in strictly confidential conversations the question of the boundary of their respective spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. These conversations led to the following conclusion:

1. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the area belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilno area is recognized by each party.

2. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the area belonging to the Polish state the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San.

The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish state and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.

In any event both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement.

3. With regard to Southeastern Europe attention is called by the Soviet side to its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterestedness in these areas.

4. This protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret.

Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941 (New York: Didier, 1948).

APPENDIX

4 *Secret Supplementary Protocol to the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty, September 1939*

The undersigned Plenipotentiaries declare the agreement of the Government of the German Reich and the Government of the USSR upon the following:

The Secret Supplementary Protocol signed on August 23, 1939, shall be amended in item 1 to the effect that the territory of the Lithuanian state falls to the sphere of influence of the USSR, while, on the other hand, the province of Lublin and parts of the province of Warsaw fall to the sphere of influence of Germany. . .As soon as the Government of the USSR shall take special measures on Lithuanian territory to protect its interests, the present German-Lithuanian border, for the purpose of a natural and simple boundary delineation, shall be rectified in such a way that the Lithuanian territory situated to the southwest of the line marked on the attached map should fall to Germany.

Further it is declared that the economic agreements now in force between Germany and Lithuania shall not be affected by the measures of the Soviet Union referred to above.

Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941 (New York: Didier, 1948).

APPENDIX

5 *Soviet Statement to Italy on South-Eastern Europe, June 1940*

The USSR has no claims with regard to Hungary. Our relations with Hungary are normal. The USSR considers that there is a basis for Hungary's claims against Rumania.

With Bulgaria the USSR's relations are those of good neighbourliness. The basis exists for them to become closer. There is a basis for Bulgaria's claims against Rumania, and also against Greece.

The fundamental claims of the USSR with respect to Rumania are known. The USSR would like to obtain from Rumania what belongs by right to the Soviet Union, without the application of force, but that will become necessary if Rumania proves intransigent.

Regarding other territories of Rumania, the USSR is mindful of the interests of Italy and Germany and is prepared to come to an understanding with them on this question.

Turkey arouses mistrust, given the unfriendly attitude she has displayed towards the USSR (and not the USSR alone) by the conclusion of a pact with Britain and France.

This mistrust is strengthened because of Turkey's tendency to dictate her own terms to the USSR about the Black Sea, claiming that she is the sole mistress of the Straits, and also because of the habit she has made of threatening the Soviet Union in the areas south-east of Batum.

As to the other regions of Turkey, the USSR takes account of the interests of Italy, and hence too of those of Germany, and is ready to come to an agreement with them on this question.

As to the Mediterranean, the USSR considers it entirely just that Italy should hold a position of pre-eminence in that sea. And here the USSR hopes that Italy will take account of the interests of the USSR as the principal Power in the Black Sea.

J. Degras (ed.) *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. 3 (1933-1941) (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).

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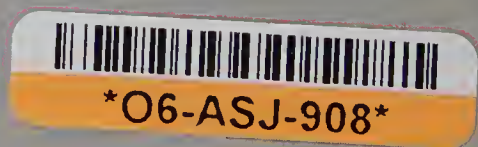
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